



COMMONALITY IN PRISONS

Hans Toch describes how commonality-centred programmes bring meaning to prisoners' lives and link people on either side of the prison wall

The citizens of Auburn, NY are used to the redoubtable walls in the centre of their town. They will stipulate that child-rapists and robbers and murderers live behind those walls, which are massive and reassuringly impermeable. Of course, the walls are not totally impermeable. Assorted factories in Auburn have been closing, one by one, and the prison stands as the town's dependable employer. Many of Auburn's men, and some of its women, work behind the walls. There are other exceptions to the wall's impermeability. Last December, for example, Auburn's newspaper carried a story about a meeting of Vietnam War veterans in the prison, and fellow veterans in town. "When the incarcerated Vietnam veterans entered the visiting room" the paper wrote, "they immediately moved to embrace the other vets gathered to meet them. Smiling ear to ear, embracing and clapping each other on the back, the incarcerated veterans looked 'touched' to see their brothers on the outside."

This reunion was not a purely social occasion. The groups of veterans had been collaborating for years in efforts to assist the town's poor and needy. The prisoners had gathered food and other donations, which the extramural veterans distributed. In another project, according to the newspaper story, "Inmates spend time knitting scarves and hats, and sewing moccasins, which are donated to...elementary schools." The town veterans garnered the raw material, "collect donated yarn and send it to the inmates so they can knit the scarves and hats for needy children." Needless to say, knitting, for grizzled veterans, was mostly a newly acquired skill. One prisoner serving 33 to life for a murder "had to learn how to knit, and now is the instructor." Another lifer had become champion moccasin-sewer, "having to punch 1,000 holes per pair to sew them."

"Prisons are ill equipped to serve long-term inmates; at best offering a regime of eventlessness and a life that is redundant, monotonous, and stultifying."

attribute of a significant relationship. The attribute is defined as "that condition in a relationship involving common purpose." Commonality derives from experiences we have in common, such as manning the same trenches in the same war. Highlighting the commonality of one's experience is an invitation to relatedness.

As far as criminal justice is concerned, the Auburn story provides an exception to a rule. When citizens of a community such as Auburn think of prison inmates, they accentuate the differences between themselves and the inmates. They conceive of themselves and of prisoners as having irreconcilable goals and conflicting interests. They think of themselves (law-abiding) and the prisoners (violent offenders) as being persons who are different in kind rather than in degree. There is no provision in this sort of perspective for overlapping goals or interests, which could allow for bridging or relatedness.

The inmates, of necessity, evolve a counterpart view. As Gresham Sykes put it, "the prisoner is never allowed to forget that...he has foregone his claim to the status of a full-fledged trusted member of society." To salvage residual self-esteem, the

prisoner buys into the conception of non-commonality. As Sykes put it, "somehow the imprisoned criminal must find a device for rejecting his rejectors, if he is to endure psychologically." Whatever results from the juxtaposition of such perspectives, it is not a recipe for the resocialisation of imprisoned offenders, nor a prescription for humane incarceration.

INTRODUCING COMMONALITY IN PRISONS

Fortunately, if one wants to introduce an element of commonality into a prison this does not require a wholesale change of our paradigm. We can continue to stress the criminal propensities of offenders and our presumed incapacity for delinquent involvements. The offenders in turn can continue to cultivate, as much as they like, a refined sense of the injustice of the system. Commonality in the prison can accommodate what we do not have in common with prisoners, as long as we centre on shared interests in subservience of shared goals. All that is required is to suspend the accentuation of differences.

It helps if shared interests are important to us, as was the case with the Vietnam-era veterans. The war these men had fought was a messy war and a bloody

THE CONCEPT OF COMMONALITY

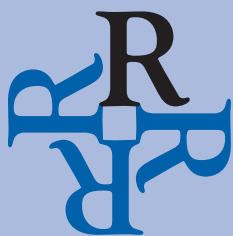
Why sew the multi-punched moccasins and knit the hats and scarves? A member of the prisoner group considered the question, and explained, "we are not on the battlefield anymore, but we are fighting a different fight." The "we" in this statement presumptively encompasses the men both inside and outside the walls. It is a declaration of commonality relating to shared concerns leading to shared involvement. According to Schluter and Lee (*The R Factor*, 1993), commonality can be regarded as a component or an

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Published by the
Relationships Foundation
Registered Charity No. 327610

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and traumatising experience. The war was wildly unpopular at home, and those who fought it felt rejected and unappreciated. Many of the veterans had experienced reintegration problems. Some landed in prisons. In 1998, an estimated 56,500 Vietnam-era veterans were serving time in American state and federal prisons. About 35% of the incarcerated veterans had been convicted of violent offences, and two thirds were serving sentences of ten years or more. One of ten Vietnam veterans was facing a life sentence, or capital punishment. Veterans were much older than other prisoners. The average veteran was a man in his forties, spending his adult life in the prison.

Prisons are ill equipped to serve long-term inmates; at best offering a regime of eventlessness and a life that is redundant, monotonous, and stultifying. Programmes that offer substance and meaning are hard to come by; programmes that offer an opportunity to contribute to the world are virtually non-existent.

COMMUNITY-CENTRED PROGRAMMES

Where commonality-centred programmes exist, they tend to have two key attributes that are virtually indispensable. First, there must be personal sponsorship within the prison itself. There must be members of the staff who feel that what the prisoners do is important, and who facilitate and legitimise their work. At best, these staff members are idealistic men or women who have been dedicated to a cause. A parallel to the Auburn venture, for example, started with an officer at another prison (Arthur Kill) whose service in Vietnam had included experience in a village (Con Thien) that he wanted to memorialise. The officer encountered veterans among the prisoners who had had similarly significant experiences. The result of the encounter was the establishment of a 60-bed

veterans' unit at the prison named after the officer's village. The unit has been chartered as a Memorial Post by the American Legion. The prison officer is now retired but continues to serve as a staff advisor. Unit activities include "therapeutic meetings addressing...difficulties veterans tend to share."

The second requisite of a commonality-centred programme is the involvement of persons outside the prison who are interested in the goals of the programme. These outsiders may be private citizens, or groups, or specialised organisations. The Department of Veterans Affairs is an agency that is supporting the Arthur Kill program. The relationship between prisoners and their sponsors tends to be symbiotic, in that the activities of the prisoners furthers a cause to which the sponsors are dedicated. Activities are also collaborative, and partnership inevitably breeds friendships.

COMMONALITY IN WOMEN'S PRISONS

Women's prisons tend to be hospitable to commonality-centred programmes. In part this hospitality has to do with the fact that many women prisoners prize personal relatedness, and this includes relatedness with staff. Female inmates are apt to complain about staff members who they feel are cold, distant, or uncommunicative. They are apt to prize those staff members who enjoy personal involvement and lively give and take. The response of the latter sort of staff subsumes the sponsorship of programmes the prisoners feel are meaningful. One staff member, the governor of a women's prison, has written that, "women focus a lot of energy on personal relationships and the way they

relate to others...it is a strength that makes an important difference in developing programmes and in the way institutions are run."

Women's prisons also traditionally benefit from constituencies among women in the free world. These constituencies resonate to problems unique to women in prison, such as the pains of separation of incarcerated mothers from their children. This concern has found expression

in activities such as visiting arrangements for the children of prisoners, ranging from elaborate play rooms in prisons staffed by prisoners and volunteers, to longer-term visitation provisions that are facilitated by members of the community.

The sponsorship of reform in women's prisons enjoys a long and distinguished historical tradition.

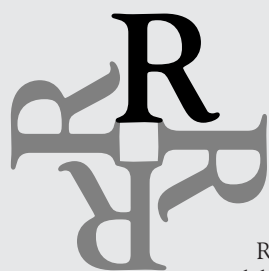
A continuing theme has been the premise that women in prison have special needs to which other women (such as empathetic matrons and feminist reformers) can appropriately respond. Only recently have prisoners themselves been afforded the opportunity to evolve their own program objectives.

THE ACE PROGRAMME

By 1985, the prevalence of AIDS in prisons had reached crisis proportions. The infection rate was especially high in women's prisons, since female drug addicts had been disproportionately incarcerated. The prison at Bedford Hills in New York State had a particularly serious AIDS problem. It was estimated that one in five of the prisoners was HIV-positive. The number of terminally ill patients in the prison had escalated, and this generated confusion, fear, and anxiety in the population.

A group of Bedford Hills prisoners discussed the problem one day in the early autumn of

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Views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policies of the Relationships Foundation.

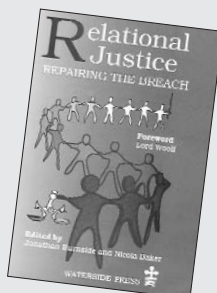
WHO WE ARE

The **Relational Justice Bulletin** is a quarterly publication by the **Relationships Foundation**, a Cambridge-based charity, as part of its **Relational Justice** initiative.

Relational Justice is a fresh approach to crime and punishment.

Rather than looking at crime solely as an offence against the state, it sees it as a breakdown of relationships between offenders, victims, families and the community.

The concept was developed by the **Relationships Foundation** in the early nineties. It first gained public exposure with the publication of the book '**Relational Justice: Repairing the Breach**' (Waterside Press, 1994), which was welcomed by Lord Woolf as 'a radical new approach which anyone with any concern about the criminal justice system needs to be aware'. Since then, it has been shown to have wide implications for policy and practice.



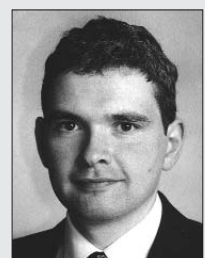
The **Relational Justice Bulletin** has been launched as a platform for discussion of the ideas at the heart of **Relational Justice** as well as exchange of good practice across the system.

You are warmly invited to join the growing number of professionals and practitioners who are already receiving it (see subscription form on the back page) and to contribute your own ideas and experience.

The **Relationships Foundation** is a registered charity dedicated to developing new 'relationships-based' approaches to social, economic and political issues.

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Dr Jonathan Burnside is Editor of the **Relational Justice Bulletin**



1985. They later recalled in a book that they published in 1998¹ that “we decided to write a letter to the superintendent (the governor) saying that there was a need for more education about AIDS. Some [of us] also wanted to give support to those who had AIDS and to protect the well being of those who didn’t. We wanted to begin a dialogue with the administration about those issues.”

The governor of the prison, Elaine Lord, who is a widely respected innovator, confessed that she too was concerned and invited the prisoners to a meeting in her office. Among other things, she announced – according to the prisoners –

“Key attributes of commonality-centred programmes are personal sponsorship within the prison itself and the involvement of persons outside the prison who are interested in the goals of the programme.”

that she would try to bring in outside experts, such as doctors and AIDS educators, to educate them about AIDS, and she gave everyone at the meeting permission to visit the

women who were sick in the prison infirmary. In retrospect, the women defined this meeting as seminal. They said they “no longer felt isolated and alone.” They “felt that someone cared.”

OUR COMMON HUMANITY

When the experts arrived in the prison, that meeting was held in the gym, because it was big enough to hold several hundred people. But the prisoner-activists felt “we needed a smaller, more personal and informal setting where people’s own experiences could be talked about.” To highlight the need, a church service was conducted for two prisoners who had died of AIDS. At this stage, the inmate group decided to develop a proposal for a peer-education and peer-counselling program about AIDS. The group reported that “we met in the yard, which was a common meeting place, and talked and wrote. We presented our proposal to the superintendent, and waited for a response.” In the interim, the women continued to meet, mostly in the library under the auspices of the prison librarian. They recalled that:

“One woman in our group took on the responsibility of writing letters to outside AIDS groups, agencies, and hospitals asking for information. This work put us in touch with the outside world – helped break our isolation – and soon our consciousness about being part of a larger struggle increased... [A] social worker...wrote back and expressed a willingness to help us. Within a few months they would come in and train us. Finally, we talked about organisational details such as a name. One woman came up with the idea of ACE. It stood for AIDS Counselling and Education, but it was also a good luck symbol, the ace card, an ace in the hole, and a person who is your number-one friend...[D]uring a February school break we set up tables, each covered with a six-foot-by-three-foot piece of cloth for quilts. We tried to remember all the names of the women who had died of AIDS during the past several years. We

were finally paying tribute to the many women who died, and from this moment on, we as a community would no longer hide from AIDS.”

From these beginnings, a major communal enterprise was born in the prison, which eventually garnered appreciable support from public agencies and concerned interest groups. The prisoners by this time had been trained in health-related matters and in counselling. They had been awarded a generous government grant to support their work. This grant furnished a drop-in centre, and supplemented volunteer efforts with professional counsellors. The prisoners had carefully developed a curriculum after much research, planning, and deliberation. This training package was redolent with interesting skits and other lively illustrative material. The prisoners also wrote a theme song for their meetings and public presentations. The song proclaims:

“And you can count on me to share the load.
And I will always help you hold your burdens.
And I will be the one to help you ease your pain.
Lean on me, I am your sister.
Believe in me, I am your friend.”

“The ACE programme puts prisoners in touch with the outside world and helps to break their isolation.”

The ACE program has by now won a number of awards, has run a successful conference and has sparked variegated activities (from walkathons and quilting sessions to support groups for ailing parolees) that are being emulated elsewhere. The core group has mushroomed into a much larger group that involves many people inside and outside the prison whose goal it is to ameliorate the suffering of AIDS patients and survivors.

Obviously, communal activities – such as those of the veterans’ units and the founders of ACE – serve to introduce purpose and meaning into the lives of the participating prisoners. More importantly, however, they link persons on both sides of the walls who are interested in improving the world, and they serve to highlight the common basic humanity of us all.

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¹ Breaking the Walls of Silence: AIDS and Women in a New York State Maximum-Security Prison.



Hamid Gholi

IN THE COMPANY OF ANIMALS?

Mike Pengelley and Bruce Smith consider the relational benefits of prisoners working with animals

“Animals’ capacity for relieving loneliness gives them a healing power, especially in a custodial setting.”

The beneficial role that animals play in human development has long been recognised. Animals have been used as a deliberate form of therapy in institutions such as hospitals and nursing homes where people are necessarily separated from the support of relatives and friends. The Prison Service has 42 prison farms in England and Wales and this provides many opportunities for prisoners to work with animals. Although this work is primarily of a functional nature – ninety per cent of the fresh dietary requirements for the total prison population is provided by these farms – there are a number of therapeutic benefits to prisoners from working with animals and these can usefully be explored in relational terms.

In describing these benefits, we shall be drawing on our collective experience of nearly 43 years working on prison farms. Mike Pengelley is farm manager at Hewell Grange where one quarter of the prison’s 200 inmates are employed on the prison farm and garden. Here, the livestock consists of 150 Jersey cows, as well as Kerry cows, Tamworth pigs; Wensleydale sheep and free range chickens. Bruce Smith is stud groom of Hollesley Bay Colony which is the biggest prison farm in the UK and is able to employ a maximum of 80 people.

BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS

Both of us have found that withdrawn prisoners who have serious difficulty relating to or communicating with other people are able to establish a rapport with animals. Animals are a good catalyst to bring prisoners ‘out of themselves’ and to get them talking. Animals act as an ‘ice-breaker’ first, by helping to soften the prisoner’s initial hostility and reserve and then by providing a focus of communication between staff and prisoner. Relationships with animals are able to break down the barriers of despair and disillusionment that not only isolate prisoners from staff and other prisoners but also render them less accessible to more conventional forms of treatment. In this way, we have found that working with animals facilitates the resocialisation process.

Prisoners look after the animals, cleaning them and feeding them. Oddly enough, it is a way of taking responsibility for themselves. The experience of caring for an animal inculcates tolerance, self-acceptance and patience and can also make the prisoner more sensitive to the feelings and attitudes of others. And for people whose lives are dominated by routine, from what time you get up to when you change your clothes, the routine of caring for animals is of special value to prisoners. Caring for animals also meets the basic human need, especially

pronounced among prisoners, to feel valued and needed by others. Animals are also non-threatening to prisoners in the sense that they are not there to be looked up to. There is thus a sense of parity, or equality, in the relationship that is rare in the prison environment.

Animals may also enhance prisoners’ empathy. Bruce Smith recalls the time when he had a sick horse suffering from colic. Help was needed during the night to look after the horse and there was no shortage of volunteers although, sadly, the horse died. The prisoners were entitled to put a claim on their pay sheets for extra money for looking after the horse but they did not want the money; their only concern was for the horse. Many retain their interest in the animals they looked after and check the local papers to see how ‘their’ horses are doing at

shows in Norfolk and Suffolk. Ex-offenders still get in touch now whom the stud groom first knew 20 years ago.

NORMALISING INFLUENCE

Animals also encourage prisoners to learn self-control because prisoners have dependent upon them creatures that are weaker than they are. It is almost unheard of for prisoners to take advantage of this weakness. In all our 43 years of experience, only one of us has had a single case of malicious cruelty. Animals also have a normalising influence and can make the prison environment less threatening and alarming. A number of experiments have demonstrated that animals have a calming effect. Watching tropical fish makes people’s blood

pressure drop to lower levels than when they are just looking at a blank wall.¹ We find that the men who come and work on the farm are of a totally different character when they are with us than when they are inside. Aggression and cases of assault on the farm are minimal. We quite often find ourselves submitting a fairly good work report on somebody who has a bad reputation among officers in the main prison building for being disruptive.

Working with animals can also be a social catalyst that helps prisoners to grow in self-respect and self-confidence. At Hollesley Bay we have a stud farm of 22 horses and some prisoners

can spend up to a year working with the stallions. The experience is character-building because the men are quite frightened to begin with but they end up taking part in agricultural shows, which can mean being away for three or four days. The men find that working with the animals gives them a new purpose. Outsiders say of such and such a prisoner ‘He’s a very useful lad’ and this boosts their self-confidence.

NON-JUDGMENTAL SUPPORT

Working with animals can enhance prisoner’s emotional development by acting as constant sources of companionship, comfort and security during periods of alienation, rejection or crisis. Animals have a unique capacity to offer unconditional and non-judgemental affection and support. They provide prisoners with a special kind of non-threatening, non-judgemental relationship that helps to break the vicious cycle of loneliness, helplessness and social withdrawal. This may be key to the positive changes they induce. Animals’ capacity for relieving loneliness gives them a healing power, especially in a custodial setting. The men talk to the animals and this helps them to reflect on things in their lives.

To sum up, our experience suggests that animals somehow have the capacity to reconnect prisoners with the outside world by breaking down the vicious circle of rejection that

surrounds them. They provide prisoners with a special kind of emotional support or relationship that is lacking in the world of the prison. Whilst of course it might be better if prisoners satisfied all of their social needs with

other prisoners and with staff, it seems that prisoners can do a great deal worse than to seek the partial fulfilment of their relational needs in the company of animals. For many prisoners, working with animals adds a further dimension to human social life and helps to buffer prisoners from the potentially numbing and debilitating effects of loneliness and social isolation.

Mike Pengelley is farm manager at HMP Hewell Grange and Bruce Smith is stud groom at HMP Hollesley Bay.

¹ James Serpell. 1986. *In the Company of Animals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 100.

“Looking after the animals is a way of taking responsibility for themselves.”



Prisoner holding lamb in arms

STORIES FROM MA CELL

Billy Tripney describes Polmont's Positive Parenting scheme



"Who's doing the time here, me or my children?" It was comments like these from inmates in Polmont Young Offenders Institution (YOI) that made a colleague and I think of starting a 'parenting group'. Andy Mazs and I wanted to devise a programme that could encourage offenders who were fathers to become more involved with their partners and, even more importantly, with their children. As Programme Facilitators with responsibility for delivering Anger Management groups, we had the opportunity to turn this idea into reality.

We were surprised to find that almost 15% of Polmont's population, which normally runs at between 450 – 500 young offenders, were fathers. An earlier study, conducted in 1997, found that one in five were parents. These figures may well fall short of the truth, not least because many offenders might not even know or want to admit that they are fathers.

EFFECTIVE FATHERS

We interviewed some of the fathers to find out what they hoped to gain from the programme and visited other institutions that already had parenting groups. This gave us ideas on how to organise our group and provided insight into the complexity and enormity of the task that lay ahead.

We decided that our main objective should be to devise and encourage good communication between offenders and their families; a skill that is sadly lacking among many of our young offenders. Our next objective is to instil in the young men a sense of their responsibilities as fathers. In doing so, we try to introduce them to the skills that would result in them becoming more effective fathers in the future. In designing the course we took advice from a range of quarters, including prison management, the local health board, social workers and Polmont's own prison chaplains and psychologists. We also took into account the recommendations of the recent *Social Inclusion Report*, which suggested that all YOIs should be presenting 'Parenting Courses' before April 2002.

Polmont's Positive Parenting scheme began by targeting those offenders who were most likely to benefit from it; namely fathers who had maintained contact both with their children and with partners who were the mothers of those children. Our programme runs for a total of forty-two hours over six weeks and involves working with young offenders in small groups of six. This includes a two-hour bonding visit with partners and their children.

HOW THE PROGRAMME WORKS

The introductory sessions outline the aims and objectives of the course and lay down the group

rules. Each member of the group describes their family of origin that gives them and us the opportunity to examine the variations that exist in family life. We discuss with the fathers the aspects of their children that they miss the most. We also discuss their responsibilities as fathers, which they frankly accept they could well do without. In this way, we identify just what being a father entails. This helps the group to bond quickly and lets members know that they are not alone in their thoughts and feelings. Two sessions are subsequently spent discussing the pros and cons of verbal and non-verbal forms of communication. Fathers are taught how to communicate with children using open questions rather than those that elicit only 'yes' and 'no' answers. These sessions stress the importance of maintaining good communications within the family unit and point out the value of maintaining positive family contact.

Following these discussions, we had originally intended to record fathers reading bedtime stories on audiotape. However, because video-recording facilities were available, we decided to film them reading the stories. This approach was a great

success because the children were able to see their fathers as well as hear him. Partners also gained from this approach insofar as they too could sit and view the recording with their children. It was decided to call this part of the

programme "Stories from ma cell". The play on the words 'ma cell' (short for 'myself') pleased the fathers greatly.

We collected a range of children's books for the story-telling and it was not long before two particular editions became firm favourites. One was a pop-up book about animals and the other was about farmyard tales. This had the added attraction of a small yellow duck hiding in each of its pages. All group members took part in the reading sessions and their value became patently obvious to all concerned.

RESPECT AND TRUST

We continued the video sessions by recording the families during the bonding visit, enabling the child to see Mum, Dad and themselves as a complete unit. This was also a great success. Each family had the opportunity to meet and play in a 'normal' way. For example, one father took the opportunity to push his baby son in his buggy around the visit area. While this may seem of little importance, it transpired that this was the first time he had ever done this.

Feedback from the pilot scheme, including self-reports from the men themselves, was very

positive. Polmont's Governor, Dan Gunn, receives letters from fathers and partners remarking on the changes in their children who are now able to relate to their fathers in a much more positive way when visiting. One father wrote as follows: *"The group is the best thing that has happened to me as a prisoner... We were given the respect and trust to sit at a visit and play with the kids... I enjoyed doing what a father should be doing."* In similar vein a partner wrote: *"The group gave us a chance to be together as a family..."*



At the time of writing a third group is up and running, with a fourth planned in the very near future. We have applied for national accreditation as an 'approved activity.' Although sessions on first aid, health and safety, relationships and responsibilities were included, the story telling and videoing aspects were by far the most popular. Media interest has taken us completely by surprise, with coverage in the national press, television and radio. One shot shown on TV, of a child watching the video of her father reading a story and shouting out with great excitement, *"That's my Daddy"*, made our hard work truly worthwhile.

Billy Tripney is a Programme Officer at Polmont Young Offenders Institution near Falkirk, Scotland. He also co-facilitates and helped to pilot Anger Management Programmes for the Scottish Prison Service.

FROM NURSERY RHYMES TO HORRIFIC CRIMES

Camila Batmanghelidjh explores the relational dysfunction at the heart of emotional coldness



Today I sat in court with a slight 13-year-old boy. Last year his pockets had been full of crack cocaine, heroin and money. He was arrested for possession with intent to supply. The judge explained to the jury that no one would be wearing a robe or wig as the defendant was very young and they did not want to intimidate him. It was an extraordinary paradox. Here was a boy who had been involved with drug trafficking for the last two years; who carried a knife around with him and who attacked other people whilst travelling between one crazed dealer and another.

Why should wigs and robes intimidate him? On the one hand it was heart-warming to think that the judge could maintain sensitivity towards the child. On the other hand, what sat before him was a

perversion of childhood. I wish I could say that the boy I sat with is an exception; a freak accident of psychology. But the reality is that the psychological profile he represents is steadily advancing within our society. The reasons for this are complex. But in my experience the causes can often be traced to a breakdown of relationships in the home environment. The result is emotional coldness on the part of a growing number of children.

I am a psychotherapist working with profoundly vulnerable children who have referred themselves to our services at Kids Company. These children come from exceptionally challenging home environments. Almost nine in ten (87%) of them do not have a father figure living at home. From a young age they have been exposed to relentless neglect and violence. They have witnessed all manner of horrors; skulls cracking, blood from syringes shot over walls, the mindless destruction of furniture, crazed sexual behaviours and frequent criminal activity. One of our children as a three-year-old had swallowed her mother's methadone. As a seven-year-old the mother took her to a dealer's house to collect her fix whereupon a man burst in with a gun and threw the dealer out of a multi-storey window. The older sister of this child, aged 12 years, was already bringing home money from prostitution.

EMOTIONAL COLDNESS

Unprotected children have no choice but to protect themselves. They cannot walk away from their carers

but they can 'absent themselves' by shutting down their capacities to feel. Emotional numbness becomes a useful tool in protecting against the pain of trauma. The downside is that it also closes the door to a range of positive feelings. Without appropriate help, emotionally numb children soon grow into coldness. Removed from the capacity to experience emotions, they lose their emotional thermostats and can no longer hold on to the memory of feelings.

Criminological studies confirm what common sense has always taught us, namely

that our sense of moral right and wrong develops in the context of parental vigilance and the modelling of pro-social behaviour. But this form of moral education is only

effective if we are able to distinguish between pleasure and pain in our lives and in the lives of others. Fractured and chaotic homes are void of positive modelling of ethical behaviours. The paucity of tenderness and morality results in an emotionally vacuous environment.

"When young offenders value their own future they think twice about compromising their freedom."



"The sustained absence of feelings nurtures dangerous human beings that believe they are pain free and that others are equally emotionally void."

David Kidd-Hewitt

The sustained absence of feelings nurtures dangerous human beings that believe they are pain free and that others are equally emotionally void. On a milder level their capacity to form meaningful relationships is impaired. Believing there is no genuine love for them, they behave as consumers in personal relationships; getting what they practically need and giving what they think the other wants. The relationship functions merely as a cold contract in an emotionally deserted landscape.

THE ABSENCE OF FEELINGS

The more dangerous end of the spectrum presents itself in the absence of any capacity to experience empathy or remorse. It goes without saying that compassion can only exist in the context of empathy. You have to be able to recognise pain in yourself and then to be able to imagine it in others. Remorse follows the same principle. You can only regret causing another person pain if you are capable, empathetically, of feeling the pain you have caused to your victim. The child who repeatedly digs a knife into his robbery victim despite the victim's cries and

pleadings shocks us with its violence. Such crimes are often described, particularly in the tabloid press, as a freak instance of evil. Much more alarming may be the logical normality of such actions that grow out of perverted emotional states.

Why did the victim's pleadings not register with the offender? In large measure it is because, from the offender's point of view, the act of violence was emotionally void. Its sole purpose was the acquisition of goods. If emotionally void crimes are one end of the spectrum, the other end of the spectrum is crimes of extreme violence and hate. These are crimes where the purpose is solely to hurt the victim. The violence is opportunist in the sense that the victim just happens to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Yet such crimes are typically not the product of a loss of control. On the contrary, once begun they are conducted very methodically and they are sadistically completed. In my view, these crimes happen because the perpetrator has grown to despise vulnerability.

DESPISING VULNERABILITY

As powerless and vulnerable children, these perpetrators had little resources to flee or fight. They may have deep-seated memories of themselves as crying children begging a powerful

adult not to hurt them. Yet despite the pleading, the adult continued to inflict pain. This reinforced the child's sense of powerlessness, plunging them into humiliation. Children who have been humiliated rarely hate their oppressor. This is because their survival on an everyday basis is dependent on keeping the relationship positive. Instead they often turn the hate in on themselves, despising their own childlike vulnerability. They nurture a cold sarcasm towards the fragile in themselves and in others and they feel deeply ashamed of having been so powerless.

When such a perpetrator attacks a vulnerable victim the perpetrator does not recognise that, deep down, it is himself that he is hating – not the victim. The perpetrator simply sees a disgusting vulnerability and wants to eliminate it. Sadistic attacks upon the victim are a misdirected attempt to destroy a displaced image of a powerless child within the perpetrator. Something in the victim reminds the perpetrator of their own vulnerability and they hate it. For this reason it is pointless for a victim to plead with this sort of perpetrator. The perpetrator has no compassion for the victim because, fundamentally, he has no compassion for the child within himself. Pleadings simply fuel the hatred that the perpetrator has towards the vulnerable. The same psychology operates when groups of children are found tormenting their prisoner. They laugh in manic recognition that, instead of being oppressed, they are now the ones with the power to oppress.

THE HEALING PROCESS

In the context of such profound perversions of feeling, how do we operate a system of justice and reparation? Imprisoning emotionally cold individuals only reinforces their sense of detachment. Sending perpetrators to diversion

"The most powerful deterrent is risking the loss of esteem and love."

programmes or moralistic meetings where they are educated about their negative behaviours is equally redundant.

You have to help perpetrators to regain emotional health before they can genuinely make amends. Melting the hardness within them is vital, otherwise they are simply going through the motions of making amends to the victim.

Prevention has to focus on children who are living in extreme stress. We need to set up systems in primary schools where children can be identified and offered immediate support. To make the delivery of help a practical reality there needs to be a rethink of how we organise child mental health services. Across social work, special educational provisions and psychiatric health there is a need for extra resources and much more child centred delivery. Professionals may reassure themselves that they are doing the job by making lots of appointments at their offices. However for relentlessly distressed children these appointments are redundant because they do little to address the level of

chaos in the children's lives. There is a danger in appointments being experienced as tokens by clients who have multiple problems.

At Kids Company we have tried to provide a more comprehensive response to the problems faced by vulnerable adolescents. We have

developed an innovative model of care which is delivered in a 'club-style' structure. Children are offered help either in their school or from our children's centre (which is called 'The Arches'). Our strategy assumes

that the healing process is only made possible in the context of sustained relationships where practical and emotional needs are addressed. We are open six days a week. Children can access our leisure facilities and receive three meals a day as well as clothes and basic necessities. They can make use of our social work, special educational support, medical and psychiatric interventions under one roof.

THE RETURN TO FEELINGS

As a service we have taken on board the reality of children who are not being parented as well as children whose carers actively traumatise them. The consistency of the programme facilitates an opportunity for children to form relationships. Many children initially respond to our service with disbelief and our staff are supported to withstand the period of testing that often follows. Yet over time, emotionally cold children regain their capacities to feel.

The return to feelings is a painful journey. Along the way, many traumas are often relived. Once a child has regained their capacity to safely experience emotions it becomes possible to help them imagine the pain of others and, in doing so, to make reparation to their victims or to refrain from crimes of violence.

To encourage care for others there needs first to be care for oneself. Children need to be able to imagine themselves as adults before they can have the motivation to study or train for a career. When they value their own future they think twice about compromising their freedom. Without the capacity to experience feelings and without an appetite for freedom or a future, our children are

powerfully suicidal. They have nothing to lose.

Our current penal system assumes there is a criminal who would be upset at losing their freedom and being prevented from enjoying life. These emotionally cold children live in prisons of their own making and as such they feel no fear or loss. For this reason, governments must create policies that are informed by a need for relational strategies. The most powerful deterrent is risking the loss of esteem and love. It works better than any surveillance camera provided people have held on to their humanity, the essence of which is a capacity to feel for ourselves and, in doing so, to care for others.

Camila Batmanghelidjh is a psychotherapist and Director of Kid's Company which she founded in 1996. Kid's Company works in 15 primary schools across London as well as from a children's centre in Camberwell and is currently being evaluated by the Special Needs Department of the Institute of Education. The author is keen to disseminate her model of intervention (0171 703 1808), but funding is needed to develop the work. Her previous work includes setting up the therapeutic project "The Place To Be" which was commended by the Department of Health and has since been widely replicated.

"Emotionally cold children live in prisons of their own making and as such they feel no fear or loss. This is why relational strategies are needed."



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POLICING IN FAITH

Alan Stuart describes a faith-based policing strategy that has brought together police and churches



A couple of years ago I noticed that suspected juvenile crime in the Arnold area of Nottingham was always lower on Wednesday evenings than other days in the week. The reason for this appeared to be that one small, independent church was running a 'Free Pizza' night at a local community centre with no strings attached. On talking to the church leader it transpired that some of the young people we suspected of committing crime were at the community centre for their free pizza. This got me thinking. If one small church could do this then what could all nineteen churches in the Arnold area do? And how could the police and the church work together to address juvenile crime and disorder?

Other police officers had similar ideas and so, in November 1997, we invited the Arnold churches for an initial discussion. Representatives from all 19 churches turned up and the first decision we had to make was to move the meeting to a larger room! Given the level of interest, we ran a workshop in February 1998 that led to some firm ideas as to what we could achieve.

EMPOWERING YOUTH

First, we decided that the youth work of the various churches needed to be better co-ordinated. No one outside the churches, or even between the different churches, knew what was going on. To this end we organised a monthly Co-ordination Group and published a youth work catalogue of all youth activities in the area. All were surprised to find 57 activities and clubs running at the moment (22 of them mid-week), especially in view of the complaint among Arnold youth that there is nothing to do, particularly if they have no money.

Second, we started a project aimed at empowering local youth. It is essential that we plan *with* the youth and not *for* them because any project that does not involve them at every stage is bound to fail. To this end, a Christian youth worker has been in contact with the young people of the area and finding out their views by means of questionnaires, group meetings and youth forums. We needed to raise £1,000 to fund this work and we were mightily encouraged when a £1,000 grant was given to us without our even asking for it!

Third, our most ambitious project is the provision of a Youth Drop-in Centre for the town. We are currently looking for suitable premises and, once found, the young people will work with others in providing the facilities they would like, not what we think they would like. Voluntary workers are needed to keep this project on the right track and here too the Arnold churches have a vital part to play.

A CRIME PRAYER-VENTION STRATEGY?

We are also recruiting 'Appropriate Adults' through the churches. 'Appropriate Adults' are people who are willing to act in the place of a parent in those cases where children are detained and where the natural parents are not available. Formerly, we had only one person in the Arnold area who was willing to take on this role. Now, thanks to the churches' involvement

we have over twelve. This has made a huge difference to police operations as considerable time is saved when making our enquiries.

The churches are also playing a vital role, as one might expect, when it comes to prayer. I provide information to churches about crime trends and crime problems by letter. This enables the churches to pray about specific issues. I can also give feedback as to the effects prayer has had. Some might think this an unusual crime prevention (prayer-vention?) strategy. But the results speak for themselves. Since targeted prayer began, disorder on one particular estate stopped virtually overnight and car crime in another area decreased from about 35 incidents per week to 1 or 2 per week. In addition, the 20 Arnold schools experienced only four criminal acts against them in August 1999, which is a very low figure. This is consistent with the Biblical belief

that God answers prayer that is in accordance with His will.

This aspect of our strategy was perhaps predictably criticised by the well-known scientist and Christian sceptic, Richard Dawkins who remarked in *The Guardian* "If God is capable of bringing down crime rates when you ask him to, why doesn't he just do it anyway, without waiting to be asked?" This is obviously a very

complex theological question and so for me to try and do it justice in a few lines is almost impossible. But in general terms the Bible teaches that although God may work independently of prayer, God is also pleased to work through the prayers of believers. Such prayers reveal a dependence on God and show that he is a living God who listens and acts when asked.

CUTTING EDGE

Looking to the future, our goal is to equip volunteers with the skills they need to make an effective contribution in their area. A good example is the need for parenting courses as a result of the provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (see *Relational Justice Bulletin* Issue 6). No one is running these locally at the moment, but again it is an area where the churches could and should be involved. Marriage, the family and human relationships generally are an important aspect of Biblical teaching.

Recent crime statistics for the Arnold area have been a great encouragement. We have a falling juvenile offender rate that is going against the local trend. In the past two years the number of juveniles dealt with by the police for crime and disorder has fallen from 130 in 1997 to 110 in 1998 and 80 in 1999. In the United States, Vice-President Gore and Governor Bush have advocated partnerships with faith-based organisations to deal with social problems. Both Tony Blair and William Hague have endorsed this position in recent weeks. In this sense, our initiative with the churches is on the cutting edge of this policy debate and our success to date might be taken as a demonstration that this faith is not misplaced.

Inspector Alan Stuart has been with the police force since 1972 and is Commander for the Arnold and Sherwood area of Nottingham.

