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Relational Justice BULLETIN

Issue 0 May 1998

Relational Justice: A Framework for Reform of the Criminal Justice Process

Michael Schluter, Director of the Relationships Foundation,
discusses how relationships are crucial for criminal justice.

"There is a serious void at the heart of the criminal justice process. There is no clearly understood set of purposes which it is meant to achieve or principles which it is meant to observe"

(David Faulkner)

WHY WE NEED A NEW FRAMEWORK

Although David Faulkner wrote these words during the last government, the question he raises is still pertinent.

Many aspects of new Labour's policies for reform of the criminal justice process are encouraging. In a speech in October 1997, Jack Straw laid emphasis on finding alternatives to prison for offenders who did not pose a danger to the public; on the need for research into making community sentences more effective; on the need for closer collaboration between prison and probation; on involving offenders, victims and their parents in sorting out youth crime. On the other hand, the Home Office is pursuing 'targeted policing' which risks harming the process of reintegration into the community for previous offenders. There is also the danger that parenting orders, drug treatment and testing orders and anti-social behaviour orders, with their severe penal sanctions for failure to comply, will be used routinely and oppressively rather than as a last resort.

The danger facing Jack Straw is that his reform agenda will be perceived as internally inconsistent. If the underlying rationale is not spelt out, the enthusiasm to carry them through will be easily dissipated. And most serious of all, the aggregate impact of the changes which are made will not be sufficient for anyone to notice the difference. As Jack Straw realises, to succeed in lowering recidivism and reducing crime it is not enough to tinker with the edges of the process. A systematic overview of the way the process operates is required with a clearly-defined set of objectives and guidelines.

Relational Justice is an attempt to set out such a consistent set of objectives and guidelines. It aims to view the entire criminal justice process from the



MICHAEL
SCHLUTER

perspective of right relationships. Crime is characterised as a breakdown of relationships between offender and victim, or offender and society. Crime prevention is best pursued by building relationships in local communities. The purpose of punishment is recast in terms not just of punishment but of putting things right in the relationships broken by crime, with special concern for the relationship between offender and victim where it is possible to address it. The success of the whole process is measured not just by its effectiveness in administering retribution but by its capacity to reintegrate offenders back into the communities from which they came.

Relational Justice is accused by some of being 'hard' and by others of being 'soft': however, its merit is that the underlying consistency of its approach can be demonstrated to anyone with the patience to examine its presuppositions and method.

WHY RELATIONSHIPS ARE THE KEY

Relational Justice appeals to a fundamental instinct in all of us which recognises that the most important thing in our lives is not our material prosperity, but the quality of our relationships with other people. It is in and through our relationships that we find our deepest contentment and most lasting fulfilment. It is only through sustained relationships with other people that we can come to know and understand ourselves. It is increasingly recognised that right relationships are the key to health and happiness.

If this rings true for most people, it is also applicable when we consider the goals of the criminal justice

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 3)

Relational Justice

BULLETIN



If you are involved or interested in the criminal justice process then this new quarterly Relational Justice Bulletin is intended for you. It invites you to take a fresh look at the criminal justice system, help develop creative ways of responding to crime and punishment, and join us in becoming a powerful force for change within the system.

Four years ago the Relationships Foundation published with Waterside Press *Relational Justice: Repairing the breach*. The book was the culmination of several years of careful research into alternative responses to crime and punishment. The work in this area was fuelled by the idea of looking at crime not simply as an offence against the State, but as a breakdown of relationships between offenders, victims, families and the community. The implications were shown to be far reaching, and the approach widely applicable across the system. Lord Woolf described it in his foreword to the book as "A radical new approach which anyone with any concern about criminal justice system needs to be aware of."

Since then, the ideas have started to take root, and Relational Justice is now being talked about in academic textbooks and parliamentary debates. As interest continues to grow, we felt the time was right to set up a forum to think through the implications and applications of a relational approach to crime and punishment, with the input and expertise of others.

Hence the Relational Justice Bulletin. We want it to be informative, eye-opening and challenging. And we need your help to achieve this. The ideas set out within the bulletin are open for comment and reaction, and we would value your contributions. So please respond to the views expressed in this initial issue, or share with us your insights about how a focus on relationships can make a difference.

Judge Stephen Tumim, (when he retired as Chief Inspector of Prisons), said in an interview that "the thing which excites me most is Relational Justice." My hope is that you too will come to share in this excitement through this bulletin.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Phillipa Gritton



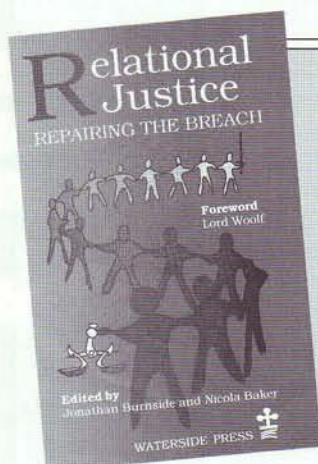
The Relationships Foundation aims to meet the challenge of our times by radically changing the way we approach social, economic and political issues.

Its work is based on the core belief that well being - for individuals and for society as a whole - is primarily achieved through *good human relationships*. The approach it promotes is therefore, one which aims to integrate hard economic realities with 'relational' priorities. This ethos applies to issues in personal life and the public arena in a national and international context.

The goals of the Foundation are summed up in its statement of purpose: **building relationships in public and private life**. In practice, this is achieved through:

- ◆ PIONEERING RESEARCH
assessing where the social fabric is breaking down and developing creative responses for positive change
- ◆ INNOVATIVE INITIATIVES
setting in motion workable solutions that can make a genuine difference
- ◆ INFLUENCE
in the key arenas of public life, including Parliament, the media and the business sector
- ◆ DISSEMINATION
getting the message across through publications, networking and briefings
- ◆ PARTNERSHIP
working in coalition with others to achieve common goals

The Relationships Foundation is a registered charity. Its current areas of concern include Criminal Justice, Unemployment, Healthcare and relationships in business.



The principles of Relational Justice are expounded further in the publication *Relational Justice: Repairing the Breach*. (Waterside Press, 1994).

In this book 13 authors apply the Relational Justice reform dynamic to today's penal practice and theory, and challenge all those concerned about penal issues to look again at our present system.

Contributors include: **Dr Andrew Coyle**, Director, International Centre for Prison Studies, **John Harding**, CPO, Inner London Probation Service, **David Faulkner**, Fellow St Johns College, Oxford and former Deputy Secretary, Home Office, **Dr Michael Schluter**, **Professor Tony Bottoms**, Institute of Criminology, Cambridge.

Copies are available from the Relationships Foundation priced £11 (including p&p).
Cheques made payable to the Relationships Foundation. See back page to order.

Relational Justice: A Framework for Reform of the Criminal Justice Process

(continued from page one)

process. Justitia at the top of the Old Bailey, with sword in one hand and scales in the other, speaks primarily about means and not ends. Amongst other things, the statue symbolises the importance of punishment in tackling crime and of fairness in its administration. Experts disagree about whether the goal of the process is simply to punish for punishment's sake, or whether it is the rehabilitation of the offender into society; a relational approach helps resolve this dilemma, for retribution is put in the context of restoration. Justice involves punishment because only through punishment is reconciliation between offender and society, and between offender and victim, made possible.

Restoring relationships broken by crime, then, should be the purpose of the criminal justice process. It should be the goal of the courts, the prison service, and the probation service. The theme of relationships is the key also to reform of the structures and working practices of those organisations which administer the justice process. As Thames Valley Police have shown, a focus on the relationships of young offenders can have a dramatic impact on their re-offending rates. Our work in the Scottish Prison Service has shown that evaluating the prisoner to prison officer relationship can have a dramatic impact on prison regimes, and improve the quality of life of both prison officer and inmate. Time alone will allow us to measure the impact on recidivism rates.

RELATIONSHIPS AND THE CAUSE OF CRIME

Empirical research highlights how weak relationships in the family and locality are a significant factor in seeking to understand the causes of crime. David Farrington¹ has traced a statistically significant link between 'cold' family relationships and anti-social behaviour, a rather wider term than crime. This is because poor parenting results in an absence of internalised norms and lack of understanding as to how other people feel and react. At the same time an absence of family and community bonding increases the likelihood that anti-social feelings in an individual will be translated into offending behaviour. This is because where concern for others is weak, there are increased opportunities to commit crime, also factors like drug addiction, unemployment and drinking which sometimes lead to crime are more likely to be present.

Of course, the immediate causes of crime in 'cold' family relationships or absence of neighbourhood community have to be put in the wider context of growing individualism. This highlights the lack of clarity in the vision of the new Labour Government. Without tackling the factors which are driving individualism, whether it

is the structure of financial services, town planning, high levels of mobility or overall fiscal policy, efforts to tackle the immediate causes of crime in relational dysfunction are doomed to disappoint over the long-term.

To be fair to New Labour, much is being done to tackle the causes of crime at a wider social level. The New Deal for the unemployed, the greater attention to sink estates, and higher levels of child benefit will all assist those struggling at the margins of society. However, in the field of welfare, means are as important as ends. If financial support comes through a process which undermines rather than underpins relational support, in the end it may do as much harm as good.

"Our ambition is to build a criminal justice process which translates a concern for people from rhetoric into practice"

RELATIONSHIPS AND THE WORKING PRACTICES OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROCESS

How, then, would a Relational Justice approach change the working practices of the Criminal Justice Process? Here are five key priorities as the basis of a reform agenda:

1. Affirm the role of the victim

The victim is central as one party to the relationship damaged by the offence. Victims and offenders should have the opportunity of mediation in cases where that is possible and appropriate. Greater account should also be taken of the victim's needs in choosing forms of punishment. Creative forms of reparation and restitution should be encouraged. The New Zealand process of Family Group Conferences is an attractive alternative approach for dealing with young offenders.

2. Maintain local justice

'Small is beautiful' in the administration of justice. Every effort should be made to keep courts local, rather than regional. We should retain and increase local courts, magistrates' courts, county courts, and Crown court centres to deal with the main burden of cases. This would foster a greater sense of access and accountability.

3. Revise sentencing criteria.

Relational Justice favours punishment in the community for 'less serious' offences owing to the impact of imprisonment of family ties. There is an urgent need to develop a wider and more appropriate range of penalties. If we are going to cut the prison population drastically, there needs to be much more public debate on this issue.

4. Transform prison regimes

Prison security is not simply physical (containment via bricks and mortar, locks, cameras and keys), but also relational. Regimes need to stretch the capacity of prisoners to develop and sustain relationships. It's not a question of making prisons nicer or nastier, but of making them more relational. This is no soft option for the prisoner who has to undergo the painful process of attitudinal change. Specific recommendations are given in the recent PGA report. Relational prison audits also show how a concern for relationships can generate new departures for prison reform. (See page 6.)

5. Reassess the role of the Probation Service

'Advise, assist and befriend' is fast becoming 'challenge, confront and control'. Relational Justice affirms the belief that the casework relationships between probation officer and client should aim to put right what other broken relationships have put wrong. Within inevitable resource constraints, the role of probation to provide relational support and teach relational skills should remain a priority.

A CALL TO SUPPORT RELATIONAL JUSTICE

Theories about crime and justice don't just sit around in unreadable journals! They wind up in people's heads and determine public policy. Policy is largely driven by consensus among politicians, professionals and the public. Relational Justice can play an important role in shaping the consensus. Our hope is that 'Relational Justice' may become a rallying cry for those who share the fundamental belief that a concern for relationships is the key to responding to crime, and to punishing offenders effectively so that they can be restored to life in society.

Specifically, we hope that you the reader will decide to explore the approach of Relational Justice by reading this bulletin regularly, by sharing your ideas, and by giving your practical support to the ideas and initiatives it proposes. As we understand relationships better, and build relationships with one another, we can become a powerful force for change. Our ambition is to build a criminal justice process which translates a concern for people from rhetoric into practice and which balances retribution with restoration. Will you join us in this endeavour?

¹Farrington DP (1993) *The Challenge of Teenage Antisocial Behaviour*. Unpublished paper prepared for Marbach Castle conference on youth in the year 2000.

Redefining Relationships: THE STATE AND THE CITIZEN

David Faulkner discusses the relationship between the citizen and the state and its relevance to the Crime and Disorder Bill

The relationship between the State and the citizen has for many years been a subject for political philosophers, but one which for most people was remote from ordinary life. It is now changing rapidly, with important practical consequences.

For several years after the second world war - when the welfare state was more or less taken for granted - the State was seen as being concerned not only with the defence of the realm and the preservation of the Queen's peace. It also provided essential services, protecting the weak and vulnerable, and guaranteeing the human rights which came to be enshrined in the United Nations Covenant of Civil Rights. Citizenship carried certain obligations - to pay taxes, to obey the law and for men, to perform military service - but citizens were also the bearers of rights which the state had a duty to protect.

More recently the emphasis has been on reducing the role of the State. As a provider of services, the State has been seen as wasteful and inefficient: The "market", rather than regulation by the State, provided a more effective method of managing the country's affairs. The citizen came to be regarded as consumer or customer, whose "rights" should be those of freedom of choice and opportunities to complain.

More recently still, the focus has shifted to personal responsibility and social control. The State can no longer afford to support the weak and vulnerable through social welfare on its present scale. But social exclusion has become problematic to an extent which calls not only for social intervention but also for changes in the machinery of government. Crime and social disorder demand systematic programmes of prevention which have not previously been attempted. These and other problems of the transition to a modern, or post-modern, society involve a reappraisal of the relationships within it - between the State (and what is meant by the State) and the citizen, and between citizens themselves.

The situation is changing rapidly, in ways which are by no means generally recognised or understood as yet. Constitutional relationships are changing within and between the constituent parts of the United Kingdom and of the European Union. Mechanisms of accountability are becoming more systematic but also more complex and are often seen as less accessible and less effective. There is less confidence in the democratic political process.



"Crime and social disorder demand systematic programmes of prevention which have not been attempted"

The Human Rights Bill will, for the first time, enact a code of citizen's rights which can be enforced in the domestic courts, but concern is being expressed about the effect on the relationship - and the distribution of power - between the courts and Parliament. Its spirit contrasts with the emphasis on responsibilities which informs other aspects of Government policy.

The tensions came together in the Government's proposals on crime and criminal justice, and especially those in the Crime and Disorder Bill. The problems of crime and social disorder must clearly be addressed more imaginatively and effectively than by measures which rely exclusively on law enforcement.

THE CRIME AND DISORDER BILL

The Government's programme of preventive measures should be warmly welcomed, especially those which emphasise encouragement and support rather than punishment and deterrence, and which focus on restoring or creating relationships within communities and between individuals. Those relationships will often demand new professional skills, new working methods, new arrangements or funding and new structures of accountability.

The Government has rightly considered the action taken against those who persist in offending or who reject offers of encouragement and support. Their solution breaks new ground in the use it makes of the criminal law and the criminal justice process. It enables the courts, and in some instances public officials, to make orders on civil standards of evidence requiring those who may have behaved irresponsibly (but have not necessarily been convicted of an offence) to undertake programmes of treatment or training, or to comply with certain requirements. Failure to do so becomes an offence

punishable by a heavy fine or in some cases a severe sentence of imprisonment.

This apparatus causes concern to lawyers who dislike the combination - or confusion - of the civil and criminal process, and the danger that the new powers might be used oppressively or capriciously. They also fear that it may in some respects prove to be inconsistent with the European Convention on Human Rights and with the Government's own Human Rights Bill. Others see some of the new powers as an unwelcome extension of the role of the state into what have previously been regarded as private matters for individuals, especially the relationship between parents and their children. Others again see it as having an 'exclusionary' effect, intensifying the problems of social exclusion which the Government is in other respects trying to resolve.

However that may be, the immediate task - for the Government, for local authorities, statutory and voluntary services, practitioners and individuals as citizens - is to establish and maintain the relationships needed to sustain the systems and networks for prevention and support. These are the most important part of the Government's proposals and the part likely to be most effective. If they are successful, little need be made of the apparatus of enforcement and punishment over which the more serious doubts and inconsistencies are likely to be expressed. But success depends crucially on the quality of the relationships involved.

David Faulkner CB is a fellow of St John's College Oxford and a senior research associate at the Oxford Centre for Criminological Research. He served in the Home Office from 1959 until 1992, becoming Deputy Secretary in charge of the Criminal Research and Statistics Department in 1982 and Principal Establishments Officer in 1990.

Building Relationships into the System

Tim Newell, Governor of Grendon and Spring Hill Prisons explains how effective prison regimes depend on effective relationships.

The prison setting is one of psychological deprivation. Therefore inmates are often emotionally and physically dependent on prison staff for issues regarding their quality of life. Unless attention is given to the purpose and quality of relationships within a prison, there is a risk that the atmosphere and the experience of prisoners will deteriorate to the extent of breakdown.

DYNAMIC SECURITY

'Dynamic Security' was developed as a concept for modelling staff behaviour in the 1980s by Ian Dunbar when he was Regional Director in the South West of the Prison Service. The premise which many staff were pleased to work on was that good security and healthy prisons depended on a consideration for the individual (staff and prisoner), on purposeful activity, and on good working relationships between staff and prisoners. Unless all these components were in balance, and being developed by managers and staff, there was the possibility that staff would not be in control of most of the activities of the prison, they would not sufficiently have their fingers on the pulse to ensure the safety of prisoners, staff or the public. Much of this concept was developed further in the Woolf report (1990) following the Strangeways disturbance which pointed the way ahead for prisons as places of justice, care and control.

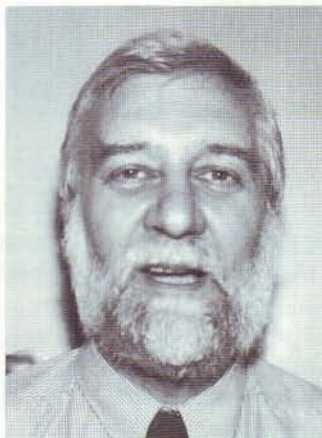
The view that those who relate well with prisoners on a day to day basis make effective prison officers is currently reflected in the profile for the selection of new staff. However, Ian Dunbar's model prescribes that this behaviour is at its most effective when it is set in a prison with a range of purposeful and relevant activity. In such an environment both staff and prisoners feel that they have a contribution to make to the life of the prison and that they are taken seriously. This undoubtedly remains the case in our current experience. There must, therefore, be concern at this time of increasing populations and reducing resources that sustaining the balance between the individual, activity and relationships is under strain. Maintaining the balance must be a continuing focus for those working in prisons.

Within the therapeutic community prison setting of Grendon, relationships between staff and prisoners are central to the way the prison can run.

THE THERAPEUTIC ENVIRONMENT

Grendon operates as a therapeutic community based on three characteristics:

- ◆ the continuous focus placed on the development of trust and openness within its six wings
- ◆ the emphasis placed upon prisoners accepting responsibility for their present and past behaviour
- ◆ and the accountability of both staff and prisoners to relate to each other in ensuring that the work of the prison is sustained and promoted.



Values which work at HMP Grendon are;

1. *Everyone has the right to be treated with dignity and respect*

The implications for daily contact are considerable, from how staff treat and regard prisoners, and their families, to how prisoners regard staff.

2. *Everyone has the right to be listened to and have opinions and feelings considered*

Taking this belief seriously means providing for all to have a say about issues and their progress. Meetings and communication channels have to be able to manage the expectation that prisoners and staff will listen to each other in forming the community.

3. *Everyone has the potential to develop and change*

This is the main reason that men come to the prison and helps most contact between staff and

prisoners to focus on that purpose and to have the expectation for the change to happen. This basic optimism is an important element in sustaining positive relationships.

4. *Everyone is responsible for their actions*

The concept of living with responsibility for the present and past actions is crucial for helping all to relate in an adult way. This confirms that each person can take some control, of their future - they do not have to be dominated by the past or by previous relationships, they can try out new ways of behaving within a safe environment.

5. *Behaviour has meaning and consequences*

People and their behaviour are taken seriously. There should be no stereotyping or dismissing of actions without serious questioning of the significance of it within the network of links. The consequences of behaviour form an important element of taking matters seriously and not trivialising issues.

6. *To challenge behaviour there must be a safe environment*

The ultimate test of the effectiveness of relationships is whether the environment is experienced by members of the community as being safe for them to live and work in, despite the revelations they make about their offences and their past vulnerabilities. The context of the prison provides the most challenging task for any community to face and is particularly testing of the sensitivity of staff in setting the standards of tolerance and respect.

All these beliefs and values confirm the centrality of relationships in any prison setting and particularly in a setting where change and the protection of the public is the main aim. All prisons hope to encourage prisoners to improve their behaviour on release. It is through the experience of relationships which encourage growth and self respect that this change occurs.

MEASURING RELATIONSHIPS; Assessing Justice

Libby Tomey, Relational Auditor, explains how a profiling tool can get to the heart of problems in our prisons

I "The real atmosphere in any prison is determined by the relationship between prisoners and prison officers"¹

So says Andrew Coyle, former Governor of Brixton Prison. Taking this truth to heart, the Scottish Prison Service invited the Relationships Foundation to create and pilot a tool especially designed to assess the state of this relationship. The tool was first used at Greenock Prison in 1994. After audits have taken off in the Social Services, the NHS and the Commercial Sector, they have come a full circle back to where they began - the Prison Service. Having just completed a piece of work for Prison Headquarters, we are about to undertake our biggest audit yet, in a large high security prison. Something which started off so small in one wing of a prison in Scotland in 1994 with the officer / prisoner relationship, is being tested for its adaptability to all kinds of relationships within the prison service itself, and has the potential to reach out from behind the bars to the wider world of criminal justice.

WHAT IS A RELATIONAL AUDIT?

Audits are normally associated with the financial health of an organisation and with the processes and inputs into the provision of whatever service is under examination. Audits also suggest the ability to measure success. So does the term really imply that success in relationships can be measured and quantified?

The premise of a Relational Audit is that there are some fundamental, yet simple preconditions which underlie effective relationships. As the saying goes, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and it is fair to say that where strong relationships have been in evidence the preconditions are indeed in place, and where problems are found weaknesses in one or more of the preconditions, are also reported. One of the strengths of the audits approach, therefore, is that having identified the problem area something can then be done to change things. This demands on motivation and co-operation of all individuals involved in the relationship, and so the success of the audit depends ultimately on the participants - although the ability of the audit team to command their interest and ownership of the project is also vital.

This process makes it all the more exciting. All the best ideas for change come from within the organisation. The Audit respects the views of those



"Even when management are totally 'on the ball' and think they have a good idea of what is going on, they learn something helpful"

involved in the relationship to the extent that the analysis is based on what people say about what is going on. Some of this is more 'touchy feel', some purely factual. The health of relationships is thus measured subtly on different levels, from the individual's feeling that others respect them, to factual data on how often they meet, to how the individual feels about the organisation as a whole (this can tell you a lot about individual relationships). There is nothing magic about a Relational Audit, but its beauty is in the delicate balance struck between the basic principles it rests upon, what people value as important in the relationship, and the actual dynamic of the relationship - what goes on on the shop floor.

The result is a quite unique and in-depth product which does not prejudice the solutions, but leaves the path open for discussion. The organisation is given huge insight to views on almost any aspect of the relationship at a given time. There are always a few surprises. Even when management are totally 'on the ball' and think they have a good idea of what is going on, they learn something helpful. Indeed, the process itself is as valuable as the tangible results. The culmination of the Audit in a seminar which brings all the participants together is an enormously challenging and inspiring exercise. Not only are staff or

prisoner, or whoever is involved, given a voice, but the management is committed to support action as a result of what people say about the way they relate to each other. Relationships within the Prison Service between staff and management have more than a trickle down effect on the prisoner - they are vital to effect change. This is why Relational Audits need to be applied at all levels in the Prison Service, and the principles of effective relationships need to be consciously practised through the policies and practices of the organisation. Getting relationships right is such a simple thing, yet so crucial for success.

So what does this have to do with Justice? Everything. As Andrew Coyle began, so I will appropriate his words to end with. They sum up the reason for doing Audits in prisons, reminding us of the purpose of imprisonment - to deprive an individual of their liberty **not** their humanity. If prison is to do any good, healthy relationships, with the prisoners, with prison staff, and ultimately with the community, are an essential part of a prisoner's progress.

"If we expect prisoners to behave decently and in accordance with the law once they have been released, they must be treated in a similar fashion while they are in prison. If we expect staff to treat prisoners humanely and with respect for their rights, they in turn must be treated in a similar manner by their own management and by society"².

¹ Andrew Coyle (1994) *The Prisons we Deserve*. Harper Collins

² *ibid*.

Libby Tomey is a Relational Auditor for the Relationships Foundation. She has also conducted audits in Homes for the Elderly, businesses and within the Health Service. For more information on Relational Audits, contact John Ashcroft at the Relationships Foundation.

The Challenge of the EXCLUDED

John Harding, Chief Probation Officer for the Inner London Probation Service, examines our response to young offenders

"He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being, a terrible thing is happening to him. Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person."

From *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller

Linda Loman's telling words about her husband, Willy, in Miller's epic play could so easily be transposed to young offenders who crowd our young offender institutions in increasing numbers. The uncomfortable facts about the characteristics of young people who end up in such institutions have been vividly portrayed by the Chief Inspector of Prisons recent thematic review of young prisoners. Sir David Ramsbotham reported the following:-

- ◆ Over 50% of under 18 year old males had a history of institutionalised care or social services.
- ◆ Over 50% had been excluded from school.
- ◆ Over 50% of remanded young males and over 30% of sentenced young have a diagnosable mental disorder.
- ◆ Two thirds were drug misusers.
- ◆ Two thirds were unemployed.

Of the young women, Ramsbotham added:-

- ◆ 49% had experienced sexual abuse.
- ◆ 37% had attempted suicide.
- ◆ 39% had children of their own.
- ◆ 27% had a history of care.

While statutory services endeavour to offer some basic response to the front line demands of young people returning to the community, the sheer turnover of numbers and the limited licence periods of approximately three months offers, at best, a patchy service.

In spite of this grim scenario it is heartening to hear of a story of how one individual citizen can make a difference.

CHALLENGE AND CHANGE

A Magistrate told me of her recent attempt to break through the system. Following the murder trial of the assailants of James Bulger, she contacted a Governor of a young offender institution and offered her home to a young inmate without any family support. The Governor rose to the request

and using powers of extended release, sent the young man to her home with the proviso that he returned to full time education in the community. The experiment was not without its difficulties as the young man took time to adjust to the new setting, and the expectations that the volunteer and her husband placed on their charge. However, he came through and three years later is out of trouble, living in independent accommodation and a regular visitor to his surrogate family.

THE WAY FORWARD

Need such good practice as this example be isolated? The proposed Crime and Disorder Bill, if properly implemented and resourced, does provide us with a fresh start when thinking about more creative responses to dysfunctional families and children who present themselves at the gateway of criminal justice. Local Authority Chief Executives will be charged with putting together multi-disciplinary teams of social workers, probation officers and the police together with representatives of education and the health authorities. While the team will be responsible for the introduction of new legislative requirements such as reprimands, final warnings, reparation to crime victims and action plan orders, there will also be a presumption in favour of early prevention, assisting even young children under the age of ten through child safety orders and child curfews.

The combined resourcefulness of the different yet complimentary disciplines involved in these new teams should provide targeted and timely intervention where it counts. We know that two thirds of school aged offenders sentenced in youth courts had either been excluded from school or had significant truancy records. Attention needs to be focused at the onset of behaviour disorder in schools by the youth offending teams so that an action plan is drawn up by the team, the school and the parents that ensures the pupil is still in receipt of full time education and the family supported through the crisis. For young people over the age of fourteen who appear permanently disaffected from secondary education, the experience of agencies like Cities in Schools offers another approach.



Here, specialist remedial education staff develop a personal programme for a pupil that embraces continuing education, work experience in industry and counselling. The outcomes in terms of vastly improved attendance rates testify the benefits of focused attention.

However, the youth offending teams with a start up launch in April 1999 need to develop a wider accountability to local communities beyond the calls of good inter-disciplinary practice and fulfilment of legal obligations to the youth courts. They need to enlist the help of local citizens in the challenge of crime reduction. The young people described by Ramsbotham represent, with their fragile families, the most excluded voices in our communities. Many of their lives could be transformed by the involvement of local people as volunteers, offering time to single parents struggling with a hyperactive adolescent or agreeing to befriend an isolated licensee on release from a young offender institution. Recent experiments involving mentors from blue chip companies with 'Welfare to Work' trainees or 'Youth at Risk' volunteers, who stay in weekly contact with young offenders for year long programmes, are beginning to show encouraging outcomes.

No responsible parent would turn away a child under 16 without emotional and financial support. Similarly we need to extend the range of options available to youth offending teams as they deal with the excluded children of our society.

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A Gift in Kind

Peter Walker, Executive Director of Prison Fellowship, tells how a small gift can make a big difference.

They are sometimes referred to as the 'forgotten victims'. In the court rooms day after day, dramas are played out. The words "take him down", spoken by the judge to the defendant, resound in the heads of the families of the newly made prisoner as they sit in the public gallery.

Where will he be taken? Can we see him before he goes? He's got the house keys, how will we get in? All these questions impact at the same time as they try to come to terms with the issues of separation.

Our legal system is carefully poised to balance the needs of the prosecution and defence in a criminal trial. But involved in the 'due process' are many people for whom the whole scenario is a whirl of incomprehension. Amongst these are the families of the offenders.

Prison Fellowship has long seen its ministry role not only to those who end up in prison, but to the families who are left on the outside. These partners, children and parents leave the court often bewildered and lacking any information as to where their loved one will be taken and how soon they can visit.

Many Prison Fellowship Volunteers who befriend prisoners on the inside, also take on a role of supporting the prisoner's family on the outside. This can be as little as the occasional visit to sit and listen, or perhaps offering help in transporting the family to and from the prison. As relationships develop, some volunteers have become friends with the family to the extent that they baby-sit when the inmate is on home-leave, giving the couple an opportunity to spend valuable time together.

For the prisoner, trying to maintain meaningful relationships with his family on the outside is a major trial. Over the past four

years Prison Fellowship has developed a project to help in this area. The project is called 'Angel Tree', and supplies Christmas gifts to the children of serving prisoners. For Christmas 1997 we supplied presents to over 3,000 children. This small act of kindness can have dramatic affects on both the inmates and their families.

The following story shows the power of building positive relationships both inside and beyond the prison walls.



Brenda had always been a troublesome prisoner. Verbally abusive to prison officers and anyone who came close to her, even the chaplain. Until one day in October last year. The prison chaplain offered Brenda a form on which she could name her children to receive a gift via the Prison Fellowship project 'Angel Tree'. Brenda's two children were both included in the distribution of Christmas presents and in December wrote to their Mum with obvious joy. Soon after, as the chaplain passed Brenda's half open cell door, she yelled out, "Hey Vicar, I want a word with you". Tentatively the Chaplain entered the cell, expecting the usual torrent of obscenities. Brenda got him to sit on the chair, and began to pour out her life story to him, explaining hurt and rejection, neglect and abuse. The simple act of giving a £7 gift to each of her children has proved to be a turning point in Brenda's life.