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THE PRISONER'S BEATITUDE

Shadd Maruna, with Thomas P. LeBel, & Charles S. Lanier, explains why it is more blessed for ex-offenders to give than to receive



"One of the remarkable phenomena of our time is the persistence of the belief among those in power that we can coerce people into decent behaviour if only we make the punishment tough enough. We keep imagining that the problem is that young people aren't frightened enough, so we keep toughening criminal sanctions. The real problem is that our young people aren't hopeful enough. They don't see that they have it within their means to transform not merely their own lives but the society. They have the power."¹

Prisons cage millions of young parents around the world. Prisons also warehouse mentors, teachers, leaders and potential role models for the next generation. Whilst the 8½ million persons imprisoned around the globe cannot change the past, they have the power to change the future (whether they know it or not).

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

At least, this was the message Rev. Jesse Jackson recently gave to a group of prisoners. One journalist in attendance wrote:

"It was not, of course, what inmates are accustomed to hearing. Generally they are excoriated as social vermin, fit only for being caged or exterminated, or else pitied as victims of social forces over which they have little control. There's truth in both versions. But there is greater truth – redemptive truth – in what Jackson preached."²

Those of us in academia are also unaccustomed to hearing this "redemptive truth". Yet, indeed, one of the best known facts in criminology is that nearly all offenders eventually "grow out" of crime. This has led more than a few to suggest that the best strategy for corrections would be to "just leave the kids alone" and let criminality run its course. Others have advocated in favour of interventions that "work in partnership with self-restorative forces where these exist".³

One such force, we argue, is the normative developmental challenge that Erik Erikson refers to as generativity.⁴ Generativity has been defined as the concern for and commitment to promoting the next generation, whether through parenting, teaching or mentoring. Generativity is other-centred. Its aim is to 'generate' outcomes that will benefit others and outlive the self. Generativity is a product not only of inner desire, but also cultural demands. This means that social institutions can both foster and impede its

development. According to Erikson, generativity emerges for most individuals at approximately the same time that delinquent and criminal and deviant behaviours typically dissipate – around mid-adulthood. We argue that this correlation is not coincidental.

MATURATIONAL REFORM

The study of the process of personal reform (or desistance from crime) is relatively new. But emerging evidence suggests a potential link between the development of generative concerns and 'growing out' of criminal behaviour. In the best known study

of desistance, for instance, Sampson and Laub empirically demonstrated the role of steady employment, marriage and family creation in providing young people with a route out of criminal behaviour.⁵ They found that former offenders who assume the responsibility of providing for their spouses and children are significantly more likely to successfully desist from crime than

those who make no such social commitments.

Interestingly, they also found that desistance from crime is correlated with assuming social and financial responsibility for one's ageing parents or one's siblings in need as well.⁶

Finally, Maruna's (2001) study of reformed ex-convicts in Liverpool provides additional hints at the possible relationship between generativity and desistance.⁷ Comparing the autobiographical narratives of successfully and unsuccessfully reformed ex-convicts, Maruna found that the self-narratives of ex-convicts who were able to "go straight" (and stay that way) were significantly more care-oriented and other-centered. In contrast with active offenders in the sample, the reformed interviewees

expressed a desire for lasting accomplishments or "something to show" for one's life. They described newfound pleasures in creative and productive pursuits, and often expressed a special attachment or duty to some particular community, group or cause.

MAKING GOOD

Frequently, the ex-convicts in the study based their self-conceptions on identities as "wounded healers". They tried to find some meaning in their shame-

"Strength and power come from being on the giving end"



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filled life histories by turning their experiences into cautionary tales or hopeful stories of redemption, which they share with younger offenders in similar situations. One described this as a desire to "give people my life – you know, experiences – what I been through". The stories that these ex-convicts develop out of their life histories are frequently intended, in particular, to be gifts for the next generation.

This can help facilitate the difficult process of identity change involved in desisting from crime, by helping ex-convicts "make sense" of their past lives in crime.

FILLING THE VOID

Generative commitments seem to fill a particular void in the lives of former offenders, providing a sense of purpose and meaning. It allows them to redeem themselves from their past mistakes, and legitimises their claim to have changed.

Instead of "nothing works," therefore, we believe there is emerging evidence that "generativity works" – a theme that is well known to supporters of Relational Justice! As such, we believe that the development, encouragement and facilitation of generativity should be at the centre of the correctional enterprise.

Generativity is, on some level, an "acquired taste." In the same way that one learns to enjoy drug use and find this a pleasurable experience through an interactive, subcultural process, one conceivably learns generativity by *doing* generative things in a setting or niche in which such behaviour is defined as rewarding and good. This is critical because there may not be anything inherent about parenting, productivity or mentoring the next generation that makes these behaviours appealing. Frankly, generativity can be awfully hard work. When it is modelled and appreciated by significant others, however,

"Ex-convicts frequently tried to find some meaning in their shame-filled life histories".

one learns to intrinsically enjoy and even to "need" or crave the feelings one gets when doing this work. We argue that when these generative motivations become internalised through such social interactions, "rehabilitation" (or more aptly, moral reintegration) begins to happen.

LOCKING UP HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Unfortunately, no institution does a better job of *hindering* generativity than prisons and jails.

Indeed, this obstruction of normative development may be undermining the correctional system's ability to reduce crime. According to Erikson's developmental model, the opposite of generativity is "stagnation," and there could be no better word for describing life in the contemporary prison where almost everything about the process of imprisonment

seems designed to cause the "arrested development" of normative maturational processes among its residents. While ostensibly aimed at holding prisoners accountable for their actions, imprisonment, by its nature, promotes a sort of "learned dependency" antithetical to success in the real world.

According to Hans Toch, most prisoners face a "regime of eventlessness and a life that is redundant, monotonous, and stultifying".⁸ Prison programs that offer substance and meaning are hard to come by, Toch writes, yet "programs that offer an opportunity to contribute to the world are virtually non-existent".⁹ This absence of opportunities for growth and "career" progression is especially troubling for the growing proportion of prisoners in the United States who are serving sentences of 10 years or longer.¹⁰ For

these individuals the only "real world" they may ever know is the prison. As such, they can find themselves confined to a permanent state of adolescence.

Moreover, the inherent structure of the prison environment creates disincentives and barriers to those trying to contribute to their families or achieve personal goals. Not surprisingly, convicts have little opportunity to make financial contributions to their families, and instead become a significant financial burden both to their families and society in general. Parenting from prison in general is made enormously difficult by the emotional and psychological issues involved with bringing children into a correctional facility, the outrageously high cost of making telephone calls from a prison, and the sheer distances most families have to travel to stay in physical contact.

STRENGTHS-BASED CORRECTIONS

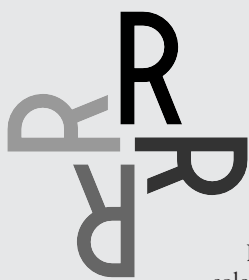
We need an alternative vision of "corrections" that places the encouragement and development of generativity at the heart of the correctional

enterprise. We refer to this as a "strengths-based" paradigm.¹¹ The strengths approach asks not what a person's deficits are, but rather what positive contribution the person can make. How can their lives become useful and purposeful? The strengths paradigm calls for opportunities for convicts and ex-convicts to make amends, demonstrate their

value and potential, and experience success in support and leadership roles.

At the heart of the strengths approach is the so-called "helper principle" of the 1960's New Careers Movement: it is better (that is, more reintegrative) to give help than to receive it.

"Whether they know it or not, the 8½ million persons imprisoned around the globe have the power to change the future."



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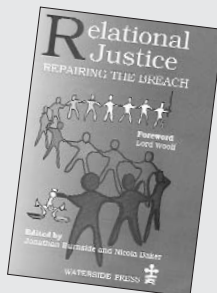
WHO WE ARE

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.



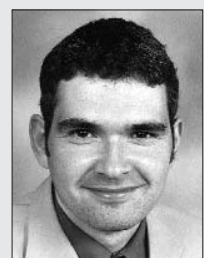
The **Relational Justice Bulletin** has been launched as a platform for discussion of the ideas at the heart of **Relational Justice** as well as exchange of good practice across the system.

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



The idea is to transform receivers of help (such as welfare recipients) into dispensers of help (e.g. the community volunteer, the “wounded healer” and, of course, the parent or guardian).

Community service and restitution projects that capitalise on the talents of the participants epitomise the strengths approach. Such volunteer activities could be encouraged even in cases in which incarceration is deemed necessary. With the support of the Inside-Out Trust, British prisoners volunteer to repair wheelchairs, furniture, and bicycles, audiotape information for blind listeners, and other good deeds.

WOUNDED HEALERS

Generative activities have long been at the centre of mutual help societies made up of prisoners, released prisoners, and recovering addicts. For instance, the “twelve steps” of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA), explicitly allow for the transformation of identity from victim to survivor to helper. The demand for this sort of role modelling seems to be as strong for convicts while in prison as it is for ex-convicts and persons recovering from addiction. Prisoners frequently form informal mentoring systems, whereby older (and more experienced) convicts become parent-figures to newer, younger prisoners.

With little doubt, the best existing model for a strengths-based, mutual aid society for ex-convicts outside prison is the Delancey Street program based in San Francisco. Founded in 1971 by Mimi Silbert and ex-convict John Maher, Delancey Street has grown from an organisation consisting of ten recovering addicts (and one criminal psychologist) living in an apartment to a thriving organisation with 1,500 full-time residents in five self-run facilities, more than 20 businesses that double as training schools, and an annual operating budget of close to \$24 million. The program is self-supporting and has no professional staff. Instead, taking an “each one teach one” approach, older residents teach and train newer arrivals then utilise these new skills to sustain the organisation once the more senior residents “graduate” into private housing and independent careers. Silbert says residents “learn a fundamental lesson...that they have something to offer. These are people who have always been passive...But strength and power come from being on the giving end”.¹²

PARENTING FROM PRISON

Finally, research suggests that active engagement in parenting while incarcerated may provide a “stability zone” for convicts that softens the psychological impact of confinement. Prior research on institutional stability and parole success suggests that men who are tethered tightly to their families, and who are aware of their special responsibilities as parents, will act in a more pro-social manner both behind prison walls and in the free world.

What should we make of these examples of apparently generative activities among prisoners

and ex-prisoners? There are, of course, many possible explanations. Prisoners may think that participating in these sorts of activities “looks good” on their record and can help them with the parole board. Perhaps convicts line up to do such work because volunteers get better food or get to interact with female staff and volunteers. Simply put, the fact

that someone fights fires, attends AA meetings or takes a course on infant CPR is hardly evidence of generativity let alone rehabilitation.

Still, these strengths-based activities have the potential to serve several important functions. First of all, they provide persons with “something to do” – an opportunity to find meaning and purpose in the otherwise bleak circumstances of imprisonment. Second, there are the not insignificant benefits enjoyed by the recipients of these services. Finally, there is the utilitarian rationale for these sorts of activities. Almost every person in prison will eventually be released. As the superintendent at a prison with a strengths-based agenda (among other activities, prison volunteers sew clothing for premature babies) says, “They’re learning a skill, but more important, they’re learning what it feels like to be of value to society, to someone in need. Hopefully, they’ll carry that feeling with them when they get outside”.¹³ This is the central premise (and promise) of the strengths approach. Unfortunately, these sorts of opportunities, often part of a prison public relations effort, are seen as incidental to, rather than central to the mission of the correctional establishment.

PRISONS IN A GENERATIVE SOCIETY

In order to fully assess the strengths hypothesis, not only would the correctional system need to be reorganised, but society would also need to change. After all, providing opportunities for ex-convicts to “make good” is only the first step. Generativity – like reintegration or reciprocity – is a two-way process. The ex-convict must be willing to contribute, and society (or at least generative subcultures within society) must be willing to accept and recognise those contributions and consequently re-accept the ex-convict.

After all, corporations discovered long ago how useful prison labour could be for advancing their bottom lines. Prisoners can be found working as telemarketers, assemblypersons, and envelope-stuffers in every U.S. state. What if charities, community organisations, and social services were to similarly discover how useful prisoners could be – as coaches, organisers, mentors and teachers?



“No institution does a better job of hindering generativity than prisons.”

It may seem naïve to focus so heavily on utilising the generative “strengths” of a group that clearly has many deficits (risks, needs, etc), but the notion of having to do something to get something has intuitive appeal. Mimi Silbert, co-founder of Delancey Street in San Francisco, summarises the redemptive truth that has been guiding her organisation’s success for three decades: “Nobody makes the critical point: We need these people. The country is missing something because a huge bulk of its population is not a part of it. They have talents we need”.¹⁴

This article is an abbreviated version of the forthcoming chapter “Generativity Behind Bars: Some ‘Redemptive Truth’ about Prison Society”.¹⁵

Shadd Maruna is a lecturer at the Institute of Criminology at the University of Cambridge. His new book, *Making Good: How Ex-Convicts Reform and Rebuild Their Lives* was recently awarded the Michael J. Hindelang Award for Outstanding Contribution to Criminology. Thomas P. LeBel and Charles S. Lanier are both Ph.D. candidates at the State University of New York in Albany. Both are ex-convicts.

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CROSSING THE BOUNDARIES

Nancy Loucks explores the role of prison Visitors' Centres in preserving prisoners' relationships



According to Prison Service figures, the proportion of visits to prisons has dropped by up to 50% over the last three years.¹ While the actual number of visits has remained the same, the increase in the prison population means the proportion of visits to prisoners has dropped substantially. At a time when European and international borders are becoming easier to negotiate, it seems ironic that one of the most difficult boundaries to cross is within our own country, namely that between prisoners and their families.

Encouraging family ties through visits has much wider implications than simply easing the difficulties of the prison experience. Earlier research in the United States found that prisoners who were able to maintain good family ties were almost six times less likely to reoffend

"The proportion of visits to prisons has dropped by up to 50% over the last three years."

than those who did not.² A more recent review of the literature noted similar benefits,³ and services developed for offenders, their children, and families to enhance

integration into the community and build supports seemed to show particular promise.⁴ A study by Indiana University found that the benefits of enabling and encouraging ties between prisoners and their families decreased recidivism, improved mental health for both prisoners and family members, and increased the probability of prisoners being reunited with the family household after release.⁵

OUTSIDE CONTACTS

The Prison Service in England and Wales has long acknowledged the importance of helping prisoners maintain family ties and the likely benefit such ties have for successful reintegration and rehabilitation. Prison Service Standing order 5, for example, states:

"It is one of the roles of the Prison Service to ensure that the socially harmful effects of an inmate's removal from normal life are, so far as possible, minimised and that his contacts with the outside world are maintained. Outside contacts are therefore encouraged between an inmate and his family and friends."

Indeed Martin Narey, Director General of HM Prison Service, recently stated:

"A stable, supportive family throughout the sentence is a key factor in preventing re-offending on release...I firmly believe that we should do as much as possible to sustain family relationships at what for many will be an especially traumatic time in their lives" (ADFAM National and HM Prison Service Conference 2001).

Prison Visitors' Centres are one way of improving the visits experience and increasing the support available to prisoners' families, who have often been described as the 'forgotten victims' of imprisonment.

STRIKING

I recently conducted research on behalf of the Federation of Prisoners' Families Support Groups (FPFSG) and the Prison Reform Trust (PRT) which explored the role Centres play in maintaining family ties and the rehabilitation of offenders. It also sought to identify models of good practice and gaps in provision, with the overall aim of securing increased support and realistic funding for the work of Visitors' Centres.⁶

About 80 Prison Visitors' Centres currently exist in England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. The research was conducted primarily through a postal survey to managers of Visitors' Centres in these countries and to governing governors of all Prison Service and contracted out facilities in England and Wales, regardless of whether their prison had a Visitors' Centre. The rate of response in both cases was roughly 75%. Site visits and in-depth interviews with Centre managers were also conducted at six establishments.

One of the most striking findings of the research was the variation between Visitors' Centres. Much of this related to the type of prison the Centre served and, consequently, the number of visitors. Numbers of visitors passing through the Visitors' Centres of individual prisons per year ranged from 700 to 209,000. Funding was equally varied: Visitors' Centres' budgets ranged from expenses only to a projected expenditure of £185,000.

"Visitors often say that they wouldn't be able to cope without the staff at the Visitors' Centre."

TRAUMA

Most Centre managers, when asked to explain the main purpose of the Centre, responded in terms similar to the following:

"Hopefully by helping reduce the stress of visiting, we encourage family members to persevere with what can be a very difficult commitment. We therefore hope to contribute to the maintenance of relationships through the trauma of separation."

A less expected finding was that Centres run with uniformed staff were more likely to identify efficient management of visits as their main purpose, for example using the Visitors' Centre "To provide a muster point for visitors to assemble, in the hope that visitors can be processed in a quick and efficient manner", or "To process visitors through for visits with the

minimum time delay; to provide information to visitors if needed." They were less likely to collect feedback from visitors or to have management committees of any kind, or to use volunteers. They were also less likely to see any role for the Visitors' Centre in family ties or prisoner rehabilitation, or to say anything needed to be changed about the Centre or the way it was run. There were exceptions, but a trend was apparent.

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

Also clear from the responses was a debate whether uniformed or civilian staff were more appropriate for a Visitors' Centre. Some governors and managers commented that the independence of the Centre from the prison was "vital". In contrast, others commented that having uniformed staff in the Centre was an important means of breaking down barriers between visitors, Centre staff, and the prison:

"Because the Centre is not a completely separate entity we can present visitors with a welcome and support that they can see comes from the prison itself. This in turn increases their confidence in the rest of the prison. We represent the prison well and help foster good relationships."

Some findings suggested that uniformed staff in Visitors' Centres did not gain the depth of information and concerns from visitors that may

be shared with civilian staff. However, a strict or even an informal 'exclusion' of uniformed staff from Centres seemed to risk reinforcing or increasing a division between visitors, Visitors' Centres and prisons.

Regardless of philosophy, a risk is that strict adherence to

one side of the debate or the other clouds the purpose of a Visitors' Centre, namely to provide the best possible support to visitors. More than the existence or not of a uniform, the findings suggested that the important characteristics for staff in Visitors' Centres are a consistent and dedicated team of staff with a thorough understanding of the needs of visitors to prisons.

VALUABLE CONTRIBUTION

The research found that a constant source of frustration for visitors, and consequently for staff in Visitors' Centres, is the difficulty visitors have in making bookings for visits. Each prison had different opening hours for booking lines, different paperwork, and often different local rules and practices for visits. The potential difficulties for visitors in figuring out and successfully using the bookings system and processing procedures in different prisons appeared to create a source of stress above and

beyond the actual experience of visiting someone in prison. The stresses and delays in getting from the prison gate to the visits hall could also on occasion overshadow the benefits a Visitors' Centre was able to provide to visitors. Such problems were not, however, the experience at all establishments, nor were they insurmountable. The findings of the research suggest that an advocacy role for issues such as the booking and processing of visits could be useful, and indeed some Visitors' Centres were already working toward such improvements.

The overriding impression from the research was the valuable contribution Visitors' Centres make in easing the visits process for visitors and prison staff alike, and so improving visits for prisoners.

Almost all prison governors with Visitors' Centres at their establishments or with past experience of them were positive about the overall benefits of Centres for most prisons. Services did not necessarily need to be expensive or overly time-consuming, but the role of support for an otherwise neglected group appeared to be beyond value. A Governor of a rural establishment noted:

"To give the information or support required to families in a remote geographical area would be almost impossible without the Visitors' Centre."

The findings suggested that the contribution of Visitors' Centres, when backed up with sufficient and stable funding, recognition, and support, is one which is likely to be of great advantage to prisons as a whole and to the successful reintegration of prisoners into the community following release.

LOW PRIORITY FOR VISITING?

Visitors' Centres often have an extremely low profile. The efforts some Centre staff had to

make for prison staff and management to recognise the existence of the Visitors' Centre, let alone its work, were a great source of frustration. A likely contributor to this problem was the regular turnover of staff and governors with responsibility for visits, combined with the limited use of staff and prisoner induction to raise the profile of the Centre and establish good relations.

The low priority accorded to Visitors' Centres and to visits generally suggests a lack of recognition of the importance visits can play. Family and friends often have to overcome many difficulties to visit people in custody: long distances, short visit times, expense, an unfamiliar and daunting environment, stigma,

indignity and bureaucracy. They are likely to receive little encouragement to visit. Supporting visitors through providing a Visitors' Centre appears to be a useful means of maintaining a prisoner's family ties or other links with the outside world. Some

Centres had difficulty in communicating and liaising with prisons. Many had no input whatsoever into decisions which affected them, and those which had managed to establish lines of communication fought a constant battle to maintain them. Even basic communication such as keeping information for visitors up to date was not taking place effectively at many establishments.

UNABLE TO COPE

Less obvious but also evident from the findings was the low profile of visitors themselves and the importance of the attitudes of prison staff. This was apparent not only from respondents' comments that prison staff were generally unaware of the needs of prisoners' families, but also from the perceived lack of demand for Visitors' Centres in establishments which did not

have them. The review showed that visitors are unlikely to demand a service such as a Visitors' Centre, but lack of demand does not equate to lack of need. On the contrary, visitors to prisons are largely dependent on other people, such as Centre staff, to negotiate on their behalf and represent their concerns. As one Centre manager noted, "Visitors often comment that they wouldn't be able to cope without the staff at the Visitors' Centre. The Centre and crèche take some of the stress out of coming to the prison."

GREAT POTENTIAL

A wide variation in facilities, funding and practice is evident in Visitors' Centres across the UK. Centres ranged from unstaffed waiting areas to fully staffed and funded services for counselling, support and advocacy for visitors,

staff, and prisoners. The actual role of Centres may vary, but their potential was clearly very great. The support Visitors' Centres *would like* to provide or develop further was a continuing theme throughout the research. Many members of staff put in extra hours of their own time to attend meetings in the prison and improve the service they offered. Even with the devotion of extra time and energy, many felt they were not able to make the most of their role.

KEY BENEFITS

My report argues that if prisons want good quality service, value for money, and a genuine contribution from Visitors' Centres to the visits process and maintenance of prisoners' family ties, they must provide adequate, stable resources to enable the Centres to work effectively.

My research made a number of recommendations to increase the accessibility of prisons to prisoners' families, including recommendations about funding, standards and evaluation, recognition and support, liaison between Visitors' Centres and prisons, information for prisoners and their families, visits booking systems, record keeping, and further research. Not least, it recommended that every prison should have a properly resourced and managed Visitors' Centre or, in the case of some open prisons which do not have visitors, a formal means of liaising with families and for providing information and support to them. Ideally of course, prisons should be located in areas which are readily accessible to visitors and at the least possible distance from prisoners' homes.

Initiatives such as Family Contact Development Officers in Scotland and Family Officers in Northern Ireland also provide welcome efforts – currently the subject of another research project – to encourage contact between prisoners and their families and friends outside.

Families and friends of prisoners may indeed have boundaries to cross to maintain contact. These boundaries are not insurmountable, however, and the existence of an adequately resourced and respected Visitors' Centre seems to go a long way towards breaking down these barriers.

Dr. Nancy Loucks is an independent criminologist.

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"Family and friends often have to overcome many difficulties to visit people in custody."

"The low priority accorded to Visitors' Centres and to visits generally suggests a lack of recognition of the importance visits can play."



THE THICK BLUE LINE

Peter Neyroud argues that public participation in policing is crucial in bridging the gap between police performance and public confidence



The cover of the book on *Relational Justice* shows a chain of people holding the scales of justice and the sword of punishment. It is a picture of public participation within the rule of law. But the idea of involving the public in policing is not a new one. Public participation, like the notion of the police officer as a citizen in uniform, has a firm foundation in the

“As policing has been gradually nationalised, so the ability of local people to influence the agenda of policing has been eroded.”

British cultural psyche. Public policing cannot succeed without wide public involvement, whether as witnesses, members of police authorities, local consultation groups, volunteers keeping

open small rural police stations or assisting local beat officers as part of local crime prevention initiatives. Participation in policing, as in the wider criminal justice process, is particularly essential to develop public confidence (through knowledge of, and ownership in, policing); to enhance the legitimacy of the police and the inclusiveness of policing (by reaching all groups in society); and to increase effectiveness (by adding value and providing challenging voices). This article looks at several relational challenges facing the modern police force and how public participation in policing may assist in overcoming them.

Increasing public participation in policing is important. This is because the police have suffered a gradual erosion of public satisfaction and confidence¹ and national governments are increasingly questioning the traditional model of public policing.² The challenge of public participation is part of a wider challenge for the police today: how to adapt to a world where the official police are only a *part* of the overall policing of a modern society. In many areas, the police are no longer the only, or in some cases the main, policing agency. Several trends underlie this. Recent years have seen the development of a ‘diverse, loosely coupled network of public, commercial, voluntary policing agencies’³, including a number of local authority run patrolling schemes, neighbourhood wardens and private sector patrols. There is a problem in making the police *alone* accountable, in crucial areas such as crime and disorder, where so many other agencies and individuals play a role. In addition, the growth of national, transnational and international policing through national agencies, bilateral agreements and multi-national agencies has added several distinct and not altogether integrated elements.⁴ With so much policing outside the direct responsibility of the police and with relatively

weak mechanisms at the local level where the service is delivered, there appears to be a serious problem for police in explaining and justifying their performance.

THREE RELATIONAL ISSUES

There are three relational issues facing the police at present. These are public satisfaction with police patrols; the ability of local people to influence the policing agenda and the need for effective local consultation meetings.

Firstly, public satisfaction with police patrols. Although the focus on police performance has never been so strong (at the last count, despite recent attempts to rationalise them, the average force had over 130 centrally set key performance indicators), public confidence and satisfaction has continued to erode. This is particularly the case with the figures for satisfaction with ‘police patrol’. This is a relational issue because ‘police patrol’ is a crucial litmus test of safety and reassurance.⁵

Secondly, the ability of local people to influence the policing agenda. There is an unresolved tension between the mission that the government expects the police to pursue (as set out in the overarching objectives) and the rather simpler role – dealing with crime, providing reassurance and preventing disorder – which dominates the public agenda.⁶

As policing has been gradually nationalised, so the ability of local people to influence the agenda of policing has, little by little, been eroded. National objectives, the National Crime Reduction Strategy and the myriad of Best Value Performance Indicators have crowded out local objectives to the extent that local consultation forums are often dominated by police managers explaining what they cannot do because of the constraints of the national agenda.⁷ Yet, a strong message from the research evidence on effective policing and effective crime reduction highlights the importance of local ownership and participation.⁸

“The absence of substantial local content in policing plans may endanger relationships between the police and the citizen.”

DEMOCRATIC POLICING

A third relational issue is the need for effective local consultation meetings. Policing in a democratic society is crucially grounded in the concept of policing by consent, its legitimacy and public support dependent on broad consensus and a series of rites of renewal – such as local consultation meetings. The increasingly ritualistic nature of some of these local processes and the absence of substantial local content in policing plans may endanger relationships between the police and the citizen. It is now the case that the phrase ‘hard to reach’ groups in

police consultation which was originally code for the ‘ethnic minority community’ has expanded to include rural groups, the young, the elderly – in fact, quite a sizeable majority of many local populations.⁹

Public participation in policing, in a very broad sense, could be crucial in bridging the gap between performance and public confidence. Yet some people think that public participation is just something that is ‘nice to have’ rather than being an essential principle. Yet it is difficult to think of democratic policing without public participation. There is a strong connection between the empowerment of citizens and the levels of participation enjoyed.¹⁰ A disempowered public, like disempowered employees, is likely to be dissatisfied and may have a tendency to indulge in either passive resistance, organisational ‘terrorism’ or to vote with their feet.

ETHICAL POLICING

Lack of enthusiasm on the part of some towards public participation is related to complaints about ‘representativeness’. It is sometimes claimed that volunteers inevitably either become co-opted by the organisation and thus ‘tokenistic’¹¹ or, as a result of selection policies, represent only the respectable face of the

community.¹² Of course a measure of ‘representation’ is important. However, local elected members are neither wholly representative of the community nor able, because of low turnouts, to speak authoritatively for all. Nor would it be proper for police operations to become entangled with local politics beyond the very proper role of holding police leaders to

account. Elected representativeness should, therefore, be only one facet of participation.

There are many dimensions to democratic policing, which suggests that police forces (like other public bodies) need to search much more widely for legitimacy. Indeed, without moving beyond traditional models, it seems very unlikely that the police will succeed in accommodating the voices of the ethnic minorities, young people and the socially excluded. A further challenge is created by the plethora of plans and agencies that are required to involve the public in various aspects of policing. Community plans have just joined community safety plans, policing plans and more specialist plans dealing with drugs, youth offending, children and the elderly. With so much background ‘interference’, there is a major task to join them up so that the noise of consultation becomes some sort of recognisable tune to the citizen.

In spite of its importance, public participation in policing will neither ‘just

happen' nor will it add much value, unless it is carefully considered and made part of a thoughtful strategic approach. I should also emphasise that participation in policing, through enhancing transparency, accountability and the equity of service provision are a key part of 'ethical policing'.¹³

CONSULTATION OR RITUAL?

I now turn to existing modes of participation using examples drawn from my former police area (West Mercia). This analysis will identify some of the gaps in the current approaches and begin to suggest where new approaches need to be tried. There are four tracks of participation; consultation, oversight, active citizenship and complementary policing.

Consultation has been a key part of the local policing scene. Specific, targeted approaches appear to offer the best opportunity to reach a broad and representative sample of the community. One of the strongest methods of local consultation has been the local crime and disorder audit, the first round of which were completed in 1998, with a repeat run due in 2001. In West Mercia, these have come closest to identifying both local concerns and strategic issues on community safety. Even here, however, the government's national crime reduction strategy has cut across the local strategies by imposing a national framework of targets for forces. 'Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships' are required to meet 'upper quartile' performance in certain crime categories (such as vehicle crime) even where those categories were not identified by the local partnership as a priority from the audits.

As is the case in many other areas of the public sector, the government's desire for outcomes to be delivered within the electoral cycle has driven greater and greater centralisation¹⁴ and an increasing reliance on targets linked to audit.¹⁵ This has enhanced the trend towards the most powerful, subordinating processes being between central government and the local police force and its authority. Progressively, as we move to local and then very local levels, the processes become more and more explanatory. This begs the question whether the police are able to be 'responsive' to local needs or are left merely seeking to explain national priorities and the limits of their resources to tackle local problems.¹⁶ If local people cannot significantly influence the nature of local policing because the framework provided is a national 'given', then, unsurprisingly, the local consultation process is likely to be ritualistic, neither encouraging involvement nor enhancing accountability.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

To the problems already identified we must also add the fact, strongly demonstrated in our analysis, that none of the existing mechanisms at local level proved particularly effective at involving groups who are disaffected with their

policing, such as young people or the minority ethnic communities.¹⁷ I believe that this analysis argues strongly for a radical rethink of the local consultation arrangements in policing.

This means more involvement at beat level. The West Mercia model also relies on a level of very local consultation and involvement. Some of the most effective, very local PCCGs beat meetings – at small town or ward level rather than district or unitary authority level – have an important role in working alongside local officers to identify and assist in solving local problems. What beat meetings add to public confidence is the combination of the public getting to know an identified local officer and the local officer gaining knowledge of the community. It seems likely the public's satisfaction in public policing, and especially their reassurance, is significantly raised in areas where such identifiable officers with a credible knowledge of the community can be found.¹⁸

I am, therefore, beginning to sketch out a new landscape of local consultation on policing, which I believe needs to be given

"Beat meetings help the public to get to know an identified local officer and the local officer to gain knowledge of the community."

a fresh legal mandate. In place of a relatively weak mechanism at Basic Command or District level, I am suggesting a much more robust meeting linking the local commander with local elected members and independent members drawn from parish councils, local business and key organisations. Their remit would be more strategic – to hold the commander to

account and to contribute to the development of policing in their area. Their link to the Police Authority should be through a Police Authority chair. They should also be linked to a diverse range of beat meetings, which probably do not need a statutory basis and which would be aimed much more at supporting the operational officers in solving problems in their beat areas.

NO MORE 'DECIDE AND DEFEND'

But consultation alone is not enough. There are many groups in the community, particularly minority communities, whose confidence in the police will only be built by more radical means. There is a need, therefore, to move beyond consultation to the next aspect of participation, namely, oversight. Developing models of oversight involve the creation of a group of 'lay advisors'. This immediately leads to a shift away from the 'decide and defend' approach.

But lay oversight does not solve the problem of conflicting advice, restricted resources, plural communities and, therefore, plural priorities. For example, a large rural force with a small minority ethnic community will face the need to balance the numerically small needs of those minority communities alongside the very different needs of the rural areas. It is important to break 'lay', 'community' or 'independent' oversight into its component parts and, in doing so, to debate the role and potential conflicts in each.



ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

So far I have concentrated at either force or basic command unit level. I now turn more to the level of service delivery and the local town, ward or beat. It is here that we find the third aspect of participation – 'active citizenship'. This has been an important, but rather neglected, link between the police and the public, often taking the form of community forums or neighbourhood watch schemes. Neighbourhood Watch relies on the idea of an informed network of active citizens taking ownership of the crime and disorder problems in their area. Too often, however, it has been a passive network, with high expectations of police intervention and low commitment to active involvement. The challenge is to create informed and active networks and give them the tools to develop safer local parishes or wards themselves with the support of the police. Underlying this is a philosophical shift in the police role from leading or controlling towards 'enabling'¹⁹ or an acceptance that good policing is interdependent with the community and many other agencies.

The 'enabling' model of policing is also important for this fourth and final form of participation. No model of public participation can ignore the direct involvement of volunteers and paid employees of public and private agencies. At present many of these complementary policing schemes are not that complementary, because they are not effectively linked with the efforts of the police or, in some cases, even the community safety partnerships. The 1980s and 1990s era of privatisation stripped out many of the 'warden' roles – caretakers, park

"The government's desire for outcomes to be delivered within the electoral cycle has driven greater and greater centralisation."

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THE THICK BLUE LINE (Continued from page 7)

keepers and block and car park wardens – who provided a vital capable guardianship of public space. Such roles could add value as part of a local strategy, provided that capable guardianship is not confused with authoritative peacekeeping. That role is properly the role of the public police and cannot be capably discharged without the powers to intervene that the citizens should only grant to a highly accountable public body.

HOW TO DO IT

The current gap between policing plans and local expectations of policing needs to be filled by a body like the proposed Divisional Police Partnership Board that both develops the plan locally and holds local commanders to account for its delivery. At the very local level below this there need to put more emphasis on involvement – such as in ideas like the Rural Safety Team – and less on defensive explanation. Alongside this there is a

need for a more values based performance framework and one that emphasises the joining up of areas of social policy not its separation. For central government, the current approach has been too reliant on central prescription providing a beneficent remedy for the local confidence gap.

I do not believe that central government can or should do more than set the framework for local policing. The framework should be a combination of legislation governing the roles of key players such as Chief Officers and Police Authorities, standards (for areas such as training and the use of equipment and information technology), broad objectives and a

slimmer, more targeted audit process. In contrast, the detail of local policing would be better designed by the proposed Divisional Police Partnership Board and local people in partnership with their local

commander, within a new legal framework and supported by an effective corporate Headquarters.

NATIONAL TARGETS VERSUS LOCAL NEEDS

In the Cabinet Office agenda for 'Modernising Government', the government highlighted the need to deliver 'high quality public services' which are 'clearly focused on the results which matter to people' and which 'monitor and report their progress in achieving these results'. These are important objectives, not least for their reaffirmation of the centrality of public services. But there is a tension between the central government drive for effectiveness that can be audited and the 'results' in policing which 'matter to people'. The more flexible local model suggested above might help to square that circle by placing a greater emphasis on public involvement in the choices and in monitoring the results.

This leads directly to the benefits for the citizen. First and foremost, local people should have more influence on local policing policy, which should evolve to become more locally based and locally relevant. The inclusion of the 'community inspectorate' within the model should ensure that minority interests are actively represented and that issues like 'stop and search' that have dogged the relationship between police and minority communities are properly debated in a local context where they have most meaning. Wider public knowledge of local policing should also help to reduce some of the very real fears of crime and disorder which so harm our communities and add to the diminishing confidence in the criminal justice system as a whole.

LOCAL CONTACT

I began by arguing that the police face major relational challenges. I believe that the four aspects of public participation in policing that I have set out begin to offer a vision

of police service that is more in contact with local communities and, more importantly, is known by those communities to be so. At present, the thrust for more and better performance, defined by reference to more and more complicated measurement, is not creating greater confidence in the police. Indeed, the centralising influence of these measures is actually making it more difficult for the police to develop local confidence. Participation in policing by a wider group of local people at a number of different levels is, I believe, both a way out of this impasse and a means of instantiating the ideals of Relational Justice.

Peter Neyroud is Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police. This article draws on his lengthier paper "Public Participation in Policing", published by, and available from, the IPPR (ISBN 1-86030-149-5).

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