

Scottish Prison Service Purposeful Activity Review - Response by the Prison Reform Trust

The Prison Reform Trust is an independent UK charity working to create a just, humane and effective penal system. We do this by inquiring into the workings of the system; informing prisoners, staff and the wider public; and by influencing Parliament, Government and officials towards reform.

We warmly welcome the Scottish Prison Service's Purposeful Activity Review (PAR): time in prison is far too valuable to waste. The PAR presents the Scottish Prison Service Executive Board with a chance to shape purposeful activity so that it gives people in custody wide opportunities to contribute to society and grow in personal responsibility.

A man who had received a seven year sentence asked a prison officer this simple and profound question: "What can I do over the next few years to make my time in prison worthwhile to society?" Accepting that his punishment deprived him of his liberty, his question about how he should spend that time goes to the heart of what imprisonment is for. Purposeful activity should express the duty the Scottish Prison Service owes society to make every prisoner's sentence meaningful.

1. Definition

The Purposeful Activity Review proposes the following definition:

"Purposeful activity includes any activity or *constructive interaction* which promotes citizenship; develops learning and employability skills; builds life skills and resilience; addresses well-being; and motivates personal engagement with both prison and community based services."

Too often what is purposeful is defined by what is provided, rather than by what prisoners have a personal interest in and can do. Something that the prisoner thinks makes their time meaningful should be part of the mix of what makes activity purposeful.

The Prison Reform Trust report, *Time Well Spent* (2011), suggested that volunteering by prisoners is an under-used and under-rated form of purposeful activity. People who participated in active citizenship felt that they were performing useful roles and that,

through it, they had found a purpose to their time in prison. We are pleased to see active citizenship taken further in the PAR.

2. Restorative Justice

Javed Khan, then Chief Executive of Victim Support, told the All Party Parliamentary Penal Affairs Group:

“I believe restorative justice, when done well and with the needs of victims at its heart, is one of the most effective ways of helping offenders to face up to the impact of the crimes they have committed. That is what so many victims tell our volunteers, that they want to know that the ‘wrong done’ is recognised by the person who commits that ‘wrong’. And that’s common sense: we all know that we can’t begin to put anything right in our own lives unless and until we recognise what has gone wrong and why. To put it simply, it’s called taking responsibility.”

Javed Khan, 3 July 2012

The PAR suggests that this interpretation of taking responsibility could form part of the purpose of prison:

“There has to be some mechanism through which people can take responsibility to repair the damage caused as a result of their behaviour and which allows them to reintegrate and contribute as active citizens.”

PAR, page 117

However, the measures of purposeful activity, cited by the PAR, show that opportunities to take responsibility and make amends are rare (PAR, page 10). Of all the forms of purposeful activity currently available, citizenship, volunteering and reparation are the least well-developed.

The Prison Reform Trust, while welcoming the general direction proposed by the PAR, challenges the Scottish Prison Service Executive Board to be more pro-active and dynamic in promoting opportunities for prisoners to make amends.

The basic principle of restorative justice is that doing harm creates an obligation to make amends. To develop the ‘mechanisms through which people can take responsibility to repair the damage’, the strategy needs to provide more explicit guidance about how prison staff and allied agencies should facilitate restorative justice.

SACRO has well-developed initiatives in restorative justice for young people. The PAR is a unique opportunity to expand this work to adults in custody. While it is vital that offenders’ participation is voluntary, the research evidence shows clear benefits for the

individual and for the community when good quality restorative justice programmes enable people in prison to take part (see Edgar, K and Newell, T, 2006).

Making amends should also be seen as part of offenders' relationship to the wider community. In HMP Gloucester, a bicycle workshop took in unclaimed, damaged bicycles and repaired them, similar to the Bike Station in HMYOI Polmont. In Gloucester, the prisoners' time was logged as part of a Fair Shares scheme, whereby their time was matched by volunteers in the community (Prison Reform Trust, *Time Well Spent*). Although this project did not involve victims, it was restorative in the sense of enabling prisoners to give something back.

3. Support and Work with Families

The Prison Reform Trust welcomes the attention given to families in the PAR.

We note that the definition of purposeful activity does not explicitly include building family relationships. The measures of existing purposeful activities (holistic activities delivered, PAR, page 10) do not include family ties.

Families (and visits) should never be used as a pawn in trying to manage a prisoner's behaviour (e.g., reducing the number of visits for someone who is disruptive or at risk of self harm.)

We welcome the Family Help Hub concept. Families are central to resettlement, and they should be included in resettlement plans from an early stage in custody. Families can also play an important part in motivating prisoners to participate fully in drug treatment, vocational training, or offending behaviour programmes. Family Support Workers, through Families Outside, make vital links between resources in the community and prisons.

Family conflict is a common consequence of criminal activity; and hurting one's family often poses an urgent need for reparative work. Prisons could help by recognising that visits are often a very poor setting for families to try to resolve their differences.

4. Prisoner Representation

Prisons where managers consult prisoners regularly are those in which:

- Prisoners' needs are brought to the attention of managers, so that decisions about expenditure are applied in the most efficient way;
- Sources of conflict are made explicit so that they can be worked on and resolved; and

- Prisoners grow in trust that problems can be managed through dialogue; representing the needs of others increases their self-confidence.

User Voice organised the elections of the prison council on the Isle of Wight in 2009. In the first year after the council was set up, the prison realised a 37 per cent decrease in the number of complaints made by prisoners and the average time spent in the segregation units declined from 160 days to 47 (User Voice, 2010).

The Prison Reform Trust advocates a more developed commitment to prisoner representation:

- Data gathered by the Scottish Prison Service show that prisoner representation is lowest on a list of prisoner roles. (SPS, 2014, page 10)
- Increased consultation with prisoners will benefit management. Prisoners should be consulted on a wider range of regime and treatment areas, including the prevention of violence, the reduction of self harm, rehabilitation, equality, and responses to people with disabilities – in addition to the broader role of the prison council.
- There is a range of different, useful models of consultation, including User Voice, Debating for a Change – a consultation method pioneered by Andrew Fleming-Williams, Having Their Say (PRT), and A Fair Response (see references, below).
- The training needs of prisoner representatives should be met to assure quality.
- Consultation will grow via fruitful partnerships with community support (e.g., Positive Futures, Unlock, User Voice).

5. Building on Prisoners' Strengths

Assets-based work with offenders calls for a massive cultural and structural change in the SPS. The PAR states:

“Our vision is that each person leaving our custody will understand what citizenship means and will have a reintegration plan which recognises their individual assets and how these can be applied in a way which will help them to fulfil their potential and to become more engaged and responsible citizens.”

PAR, page 118

We recommend that the Scottish Prison Service:

- Start with recording people’s assets at every reasonable opportunity: e.g., First Morning Admission Checklists; Prisoner Supervision System Reviews; job applications.

- Train and instruct staff to ask about, validate and value the strengths of individual prisoners.
- Provide much wider opportunities for purposeful activity, such that there is a purposeful activity which has personal value and meaning for every prisoner.

6. Purposeful Activities for Women Who Offend

Sue Brooks has written:

“Women’s specific needs may be similar to, or the same as men’s, but their experience of these needs is different and their pathways into (and out of) offending differ from those of men. These differences should be reflected in how women are managed within the Scottish Prison Service (SPS). The SPS will actively support Criminal Justice partners in ensuring that potentially discriminatory practices resulting in the overuse of custody for women are eliminated.”

SWSCJA, 2009

The PAR states that offending by women has distinct roots:

“women, although citing a lack of employment and education as a feature of concern, reported that poor relationships, a lack of self-esteem, and socio-economic conditions in their local communities were of greater importance to them.”

PAR, page 82

PRT welcomes the commitment, made in the PAR, to develop a specific strategy for meeting the needs of women, and we hope that that strategy will consider purposeful activity. As a lack of self-esteem is often mentioned by women who have offended, the intention of the SPS to give greater attention to personal assets and strengths may have distinctive benefits for them.

7. Expand Links with the Voluntary Sector

Successful implementation of the PAR will depend on engaging the voluntary sector as a central stakeholder and partner in the development of purposeful activity. The SPS should:

- Try to engage voluntary sector partners who may not see prisons as part of their natural constituency.
- Allow for the fact that the voluntary sector includes expertise in areas in which the Prison Service needs practical knowledge; e.g. Samaritans.

- Promote social connectivity through the involvement of the local community in a positive and constructive spirit. Many people in prison have expressed a desire for a sense of belonging after release (PRT, *Out for Good*, 2011).

8. Next steps

The PAR states:

“Our vision is that each person leaving our custody will understand what citizenship means and will have a reintegration plan which recognises their individual assets and how these can be applied in a way which will help them to fulfil their potential and to become more engaged and responsible citizens.”

One of the strengths of the Prison Reform Trust’s most relevant reports – *Out for Good* and *Time Well Spent* – is that they draw upon existing schemes operating in prison. Forms of active citizenship such as prisoner representation, peer advice services, and restorative justice have been piloted, refined and embedded. The Prison Reform Trust would welcome opportunities to engage with the Scottish Prison Service, building on our research, to continue to develop, and implement, the purposeful activity strategy.

To maintain independence, the Prison Reform Trust neither seeks, nor accepts government funding. We are confident that, should the Scottish Prison Service wish to work with us to improve regimes, we could be supported by a charitable foundation or trust.

References

Definition

Prison Reform Trust (2011) *Time Well Spent: A practical guide to active citizenship and volunteering in prison*, by Edgar, K, Jacobson, J and Biggar, K

<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Time%20Well%20Spent%20Report%20lo.pdf>

Restorative Justice

Javed Khan, Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the All-Party Penal Affairs Parliamentary Group held on 3 July 2012 at 5.00 pm in Committee Room 6

<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/PressPolicy/Parliament/AllPartyParliamentaryPenalAffairsGroup/ThefutureplaceofrestorativejusticeintheCJS>

Purposeful Activity Review (PAR): Scottish Prison Service (2014) Delivering a Strategy for Purposeful Activity in the Scottish Prisoner Service:

Number of holistic activities delivered:

Wellbeing	30
Citizenship	9
Life Skills	24
Offending behaviour	60
Learning & employability	153

(PAR, page 10)

Edgar, K and Newell, T (2006) *Restorative Justice in Prisons: A Guide to Making It Happen*, Waterside Press.

Work with Families

Family Support Workers, Families Outside

<http://www.familiesoutside.org.uk/>

Prisoner Consultation

User Voice

The Power Inside: The Role of Prison Councils

<http://www.uservice.org/our-work/library/publications/the-power-inside/>

Debating for a Change

<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/DebatingforaChange.PDF>

Having Their Say: The work of prisoner councils (Prison Reform Trust, 2004)

<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/having%20their%20say%20the%20work%20of%20prisoner%20councils.pdf>

A Fair Response

http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/fair_response%20developing%20responses%20to%20racist%20incidents%20.pdf

Women Who Offend

SWSCJA (2009) Sue Brooks, "Community Facing Prisons" (Power Point presentation 02 – 12 - 09 to Area Plan 2011-2014 Consultation Workshop, Southwest Scotland Community Justice Authority)

Links with the Voluntary Sector

Prison Reform Trust (2011) *Out for Good: taking responsibility for resettlement*, by Edgar, K, Andreas, A, and Cornish, N

<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/OutforGood.pdf>