

## **THE REHABILITATION OF PRISONERS – THE ROLE OF THE CUSTODIAL INSTITUTION**

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1. In England and Wales 59% of all prisoners, 74% of 18 to 20 year olds and 845 of juveniles are currently reconvicted within two years of release. Released prisoners are estimated to commit at least one million offences a year, which represents 18% of recorded crime.
2. The weight of international research demonstrates that effective approaches to reducing reoffending involve focused work to change attitudes to offending; to increase empathy with victims; to restrain impulsive and aggressive behaviour; and to resist peer pressure and trigger situations. Work of this kind can reduce the likelihood of reoffending by between 10 and 20%. Sex offender treatment programmes reduce the likelihood of sexual offending by up to 50%. Drug rehabilitation programmes can reduce the volume of crimes committed by drug dependent offenders by up to 70%.
3. However, the success of such programmes is significantly less likely if attention is not also paid to the practical resettlement needs of prisoners. In England and Wales over two-thirds of prisoners were unemployed before going to prison. Of those who had jobs, two-thirds lost them as a result of serving a sentence. One-third of prisoners had no permanent accommodation before entering prison, while one-third lost homes as a result of their imprisonment. Over 40% of prisoners lose contact with families or friends in the course of a prison sentence. Two-thirds of sentenced prisoners entering prison each year are sentenced to under 12 months – a long enough period to disrupt employment and accommodation but too short for many educational or rehabilitative courses to be completed while in custody.
4. Addressing these issues is important not only for humanitarian reasons, but also because its impact on crime. Ex-prisoners with jobs are (depending on which research study you look at) between one-third and one-half less likely to reoffend. Ex-

prisoners with accommodation are between one-fifth and a half less likely to reoffend than homeless ex-prisoners. Offenders without basic skills education and training are up to three times as likely to reoffend as those with basic skills deficits who do not receive such help. Prisoners without family support are between twice and six times as likely to be reconvicted as those with support from a family. These effects are inter-related. Practical assistance with accommodation, employment, education, training and benefits should therefore be provided alongside programmes to tackle offending behaviour and provide help with drug and alcohol problems.

5. Women prisoners face a number of additional problems. For example:

- Because two-thirds of women prisoners are primary carers for children, their imprisonment has a particularly acute impact on young children. Regaining care or custody of children can be difficult for women in the absence of suitable accommodation on release
- Women prisoners are placed in prisons which are on average even further away from their home areas than male prisoners, which creates additional obstacles to the maintenance of family relationships

### **What should be done?**

6. Drawing on experience and best practice, in the authors' view the range of measures set out below is likely to optimise the prospects for prisoners' rehabilitation.

7. All prisons which release prisoners to the community should have a housing advice centre or service. Such a service can take immediate steps to try to keep existing accommodation open for prisoners to return to on release. It can negotiate prompt surrenders of tenancies to reduce the risk of a build-up of rent arrears. Where arrears already exist, it can agree on repayment terms in return for willingness by a housing provider to rehouse the prisoner. It can persuade housing providers to designate particular staff to liaise with prisons and can work to secure accommodation for prisoners on release. To improve prisoners' accommodation prospects further, there should be an extensive use of temporary release towards the end of a sentence for housing interviews.

8. To improve prisoners' employment prospects, prisons should engage in systematic "employment protection" work, contacting employers to arrange for prisoners' jobs to be held open for them. They should provide a range of education and employment-related programmes and services geared to the acquisition of practical skills which relate to local employment patterns and skill shortages. Alongside this, establishments should take systematic steps to educate and involve employers. There should be extensive use of temporary release for prisoners to engage in employment placements with local employers and community groups and, towards the end of sentences, for job interviews.

9. In addition:

- Resettlement plans should be drawn up for all prisoners on arrival in prison covering accommodation, education, employment, health needs, addictions, family work and community engagement.
- The level of the discharge grant for released prisoners should be at least equivalent to two weeks' social security benefit
- Systematic steps should be taken to ensure that all prisoners have recognised identification documents on release which will enable them to claim benefits and open bank accounts.
- Mentoring should be arranged to provide support for prisoners while in custody and on release.

10. To improve the maintenance of prisoners' family ties:

- Visiting opportunities should be provided at flexible times (eg evening visits)
- A high priority in allocation decisions should be given to allocation to prisons near prisoners' home areas
- Access to telephones should be maximised
- All prisons should nominate a member of staff as family liaison officer
- There should be extensive use of temporary release from an early point in the sentences of low security prisoners for the purpose of maintaining family ties
- Where temporary release is not practicable prison systems should develop arrangements for private family visits.

11. Every prison should have a dedicated resettlement team responsible for:

- Interviewing all prisoners on reception and assessing their resettlement needs
- Carrying out immediate housing and employment protection work
- Drawing up individual practical resettlement plans
- Carrying out housing advice work
- Carrying out job preparation and search work
- Making links with community projects and services
- Co-ordinating input to the prison's resettlement activity from outside agencies
- Running resettlement courses for prisoners

12. Outside prison, every area should have a community based resettlement team with responsibility for:

- Identifying job and training opportunities for released prisoners
- Providing "floating support" for ex-offenders placed in housing and employment
- Providing a source of advice and help for housing providers, employers and training providers who have agreed to accommodate, employ or train ex-prisoners

Wherever possible membership of resettlement teams inside and outside prisons should have an overlapping membership, so that some members work with the same prisoners before and after release.

13. For such teams to be able to function effectively, compacts should be negotiated with local housing authorities regarding the housing of ex-offenders; with central and local government education and training departments and agencies regarding training opportunities for ex-offenders; and with health and social services authorities regarding access to mental health services and programmes to combat addictions.

### **The involvement of NGOs**

14. The involvement of non-government organisations is crucial to the delivery of effective resettlement services. A review of the English sentencing framework entitled "Making Punishments

Work” (2001), commissioned by a recent Home Secretary from John Halliday, a senior civil servant, observed:

“Involving voluntary organisations in areas like employment, housing and mentoring will be essential to reduce risks of reoffending ..... it would be desirable to have a substantial component earmarked for funded partnerships with voluntary organisations”.

15. In England and Wales non-government agencies have developed extensive experience and expertise in areas such as housing, education, employment, mentoring, addictions, mental health, family services and community engagement. Maximising resettlement opportunities for prisoners requires the properly planned involvement of the non-government sector including consultation with the sector when designing plans and programmes for prisoners’ rehabilitation. Contracts for the delivery of services must be for reasonable lengths of time and afford non-government organisations the recovery of their full costs.

### **The resettlement of Black and minority ethnic prisoners**

16. In many correctional systems – including those of the United Kingdom – Black and minority ethnic offenders are imprisoned in disproportionate numbers and express greater dissatisfaction with their access to rehabilitative opportunities. In order to ensure that resettlement services meet the needs of Black and minority ethnic offenders, agencies involved in resettlement work should:

- Monitor access to all programmes by prisoners of different ethnic groups.
- Monitor the content of all resettlement programmes to ensure that they are meeting diverse needs
- Monitor their staff composition at all levels and take positive action to recruit Black and minority ethnic staff and volunteers
- Increase their links with Black and minority ethnic organisations, voluntary agencies and faith groups
- Provide race equality training for all those working in the resettlement process.

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