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# Engaging offenders in positive change through accredited rehabilitation programmes

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This paper will not present any new empirical data on engaging offenders in positive change but rather seeks to describe how a commitment to the empirical, to evidence led practice, has translated into a programme of work that has seen the development, accreditation, delivery, and, most recently, a refinement of interventions designed to effectively engage offenders in addressing their offending behaviour. There is a wealth of evidence that interventions such as these, grounded in Andrews and Bonta's Risk, Need, Responsivity model (Andrews and Bonta, 2010), can bring reduced reoffending when they succeed in responsively engaging offenders who present with the appropriate levels of risk and dynamic criminogenic need. The work I describe here is not mine but that of a formidable collection of creative, clever, committed correctional practitioners who have contributed to this body of work over the past twenty years and continue to commit to evidence lead practice in this field.

For nearly twenty years now, the Prison and Probation Services in England and Wales, now merged to form the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), have significantly invested in the

delivery of offending behaviour programmes (OBPs) designed to reduce reoffending. Programmes are accredited by the Correctional Services Accreditation Panel (CSAP; Maguire, Grubin, Lösel, and Raynor, 2010) and are routinely monitored and audited. Training for facilitators, the provision of manuals, supervision, and support for programme teams are common features designed to maintain the integrity of delivery. Over 40 programmes and services have now been accredited by CSAP and tens of thousands of offenders are participating every year in a variety of programmes targeting both more general criminogenic needs and more specific sexual, violent or domestic violence offending. The scale and pace of this initiative have at times presented significant challenges to the success of the enterprise (Goggin and Gendreau, 2006) but the impetus continues to systematically apply what is known about intervening effectively with offenders to encourage desistance.

It is worth reflecting a moment on the weight of evidence that gives this initiative its credence. Review after review, meta-analysis after meta-analysis, have confirmed a pattern which still holds ten years after it was described by Lösel (2001), "Theoretically

and empirically well-founded, multimodal, cognitive-behavioural and skill-oriented programs that address the offenders' risk, need and responsivity had substantially larger effects than the overall mean" (p. 68), (Andrews and Bonta, 2010; Aos et al., 2006; Gendreau, French, and Taylor, 2002; Hanson et al., 2009; Jolliffe and Farrington, 2007; Landenberger and Lipsey, 2005; Lipsey and Cullen, 2007; Lipsey, 2009; Lösel and Schmucker, 2005; McGuire, 2001; MacKenzie, 2006; Sherman et al., 1998).

There has been a recent initiative to refresh NOMS accredited OBPs to rationalise the interventions portfolio and refresh it with the latest evidence on effective practice. The first domain to experience this overhaul was the suite of cognitive skills programmes (Hollin and Palmer, 2009). The resulting, new Thinking Skills Programme (TSP; Harris and Riddy, 2010) included a real change in focus with the facilitator's role more explicitly described as coach and mentor in the offender's journey with the offender as the expert in his or her own life. Where previously cognitive skills delivery was sometimes perceived as so highly structured as to restrict responsive practice, with TSP came a recognition that a more sophisticated, responsive, collaborative and engaging style is what will work to encourage offenders contemplate and practice change. Such redesign work is continuing on interventions for substance misuse, domestic violence, violent and sexual offending.

A clearer explication of an effective therapeutic style has also received attention in the redesign of the sex offender treatment programme (SOTP). Here, following Marshall (2005), key therapist skills are identified as empathy, warmth, providing reward for progress and directiveness. In addition to these core facilitation skills, the SOTP redesign has made several other adaptations (Carter, 2011) to encourage offender engagement including the introduction of a rolling format which allows for real flexibility in what to address when for each offender. The new programmes are positioned to allow full access by offenders who may present with neurological deficits, (following childhood experience of trauma, perhaps), and express a more explicit engagement with the whole person including biological influences along with the psychological

and the social. Offenders are presented with lots of options around how to participate (between session work might use visual material rather than a written diary, for instance) and how to manage the pace of their progress. In-group challenges are designed to encourage an immediate application and rehearsal of learning with lots of variety in programme materials and auditory, visual and kinaesthetic learning opportunities. Transparency, collaboration and building hope are key guiding principles for the new SOTP (Carter, 2011).

Accredited offending behaviour programmes have been characterised by some critics as mechanistic or 'one size fits all', being unresponsive to the needs of the individual. While responsivity has always been a core principle of the accredited programme approach the new generation of OBPs seek more explicitly to focus on a personalised delivery of the programme curriculum in a richer, more sophisticated manner than may always have been achieved in the past.

While the outlook is positive then, it is important and helpful to recognise the challenges we face in engaging offenders with the process of change via structured OBPs. Maruna (2011) has described the damage to therapeutic relationships when staff (forensic psychologists in this instance) are associated mainly with risk assessment and 'bad news' and describes the challenge we face in rebuilding our reputation and therapeutic stance on that front. We have taken some steps to address these constraints on effective working relationships in revised training for and supervision of staff involved with accredited OBPs. Clearly, genuine, transparent relationships will be at the core of effective practice.

The work of Day et al. (2010) on treatment readiness encourages us to consider whether the wider organisational and social context of the intervention and offender's circumstance are conducive to positive change and we already know that the wider context in custody or the community will not always support the therapeutic effort (Crewe, 2009; Hollin and Palmer, 2006). We know, too, that attrition from programmes is associated with the worst outcomes (McGuire et al., 2008; McMurrin and Theodosi, 2007) and there is a

pressing need to better understand and promote engagement in order to address this phenomenon. A more explicit focus on personalising treatment presents a challenge to the integrity of individual programme approaches and that will be an exacting balance to maintain - a balance far easier to maintain if we continue with our commitment to both heed and contribute to the evidence base on reducing reoffending.

There will be real benefit to the offender rehabilitation agenda in a bringing together of the advances brought by the work on desistance (Maruna, 2001; McNeill, 2006), treatment readiness (Day et al., 2010) and the Good Lives Model (Ward and Stewart, 2003) with the established evidence for the Risk, Need, and Responsivity model. The central challenge for practitioners and policy makers is to integrate the evidence on what is effective practice from these different strands to most effectively reduce crime through engaging offenders in positive change. There remains a lot we do not know – but there is a good deal that we do – and the evidence tells us that a well designed and well delivered rehabilitative intervention can play an important role in engaging and supporting offenders on their desistance journey.

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