

Prisoners as citizens, big society and the rehabilitation revolution : truly revolutionary?

BIRD, Hayden and ALBERTSON, Katherine <<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7708-1775>>

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PRISONERS AS CITIZENS: 'BIG SOCIETY' AND THE 'REHABILITATION REVOLUTION' - TRULY REVOLUTIONARY?

Dr Hayden Bird, formerly Hallam Centre for Community Justice, Sheffield Hallam University; and Dr Katherine E. Albertson (nee Wilkinson), Hallam Centre for Community Justice, Sheffield Hallam University.¹

Abstract *Given the government's commitment to localism, social inclusion and transfer of power from politicians to communities embodied by the Big Society agenda, we question whether these principles have been adequately translated within 'Payments by Results' and the supposed 'Rehabilitation Revolution' Green Paper. Of all the communities in our diverse society, offenders should specifically be included to encourage them to become more responsible citizens and, therefore, participate fully in creating a more responsible society? However, accessing offender voices in the prison setting can often prove challenging, as will be discussed. The authors have been involved in using qualitative methodologies in evaluations of predominately voluntary sector arts and media projects with prison communities since 2005. With these data, this article explores opportunities for encouraging citizenship status in the prison community. Prisoners engaging with these projects report significant impacts of their engagement, including increases in their feelings of self worth, hope and belief in their own personal capacity to alter the way they behave.*

Keywords *Prisoners, citizenship, Big Society, rehabilitation revolution, social inclusion, arts in prison.*

Introduction

In 2002, the British Journal of Community Justice published the paper 'Prisoners as Citizens' by David Faulkner. The article appeared against conditions of heightened interest in the right of prisoners to vote, which took place within the political context(s) of a New Labour government drawing on conceptualisations of rights and responsibilities of society and 'communities' embodied in 'Third Way' ideology (see Giddens, 1998; Crawford, 1999; 2001; and on responsabilisation see Garland, 2002). Nearly a decade on and against the backdrop of 'Big Society' and the proclaimed 'Rehabilitation Revolution', the coalition government has seen a re-opening of the debate regarding the rights of prisoners. Once

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again, consideration of the legal and, moreover, civic status of prisoners echoes a continuation of the rights and responsibilities agenda associated with 'modernisation' and the previous 'New Labour' government (for a prediction of this see Senior, Crowther-Dowey & Long, 2007; also Newman, Raine & Skelcher, 2001; Newman, 2002; Newman & McKee, 2005, Newman, 2007).

The aim of this article is to demonstrate the extent to which prisoners have a (political) 'voice', which may be used as an indicator of citizen status. Furthermore, to demonstrate the extent to which prisoners can influence the shaping of services and provision they receive. The complex and negotiated terrain of imprisonment which is reflected on in the writings of Ben Crewe (2005; 2006; 2007) and Bosworth & Carrabine (2001) highlights a prison's social anatomy as a place where, in certain places and spaces, prisoners may not feel 'safe'. Thus, possibilities for self-expression may be limited. We posit that if a prisoner does not feel able to voice their opinions and views, how far can the rhetoric of citizenship, responsibility and, indeed, the reducing re-offending agenda go?

This article builds principally on the work of Faulkner & Crewe to provide a framework for our understanding of prisoner citizenship. We draw predominantly on our experiences of empirical contract research to explore the potential of the arts, media and innovative projects in prison to enable collective or an individual mediated 'voice' for prisoner engagement in debates about rehabilitation. A central tenet of the Green Paper is a government commitment to adopting new and innovative approaches to improve opportunities for rehabilitation by making punishments more effective to reduce re-offending (Ministry of Justice, 2011). Minister Crispin Blunt has claimed that by addressing this overriding objective, 'a safer, more responsible society' (Blunt, 2011) will result. He also highlighted past failures in this regard, underlining the commitment to it being 'time for a new direction to be taken' (*ibid*). Chapters Two and Six of the Green Paper are particularly pertinent with regard to the discussions set out in this paper as they outline the current government's plans to rehabilitate 'offenders' and work with communities to address crime reduction.

This is not to say that there is not a continuation of some of the rhetoric and practice associated with prior governments. We have indeed seen attempted reform of the management of offenders, stemming from Lord Carter's review (Carter, 2003; the government's response, Blunkett, 2004), which called for a more holistic approach based on individual need and resulted in the creation of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) as a 'strategic integrator' (Williams, 2010: 10). The coalition government has introduced a new Chief Executive of NOMS and a new leadership team, whose key aim is to achieve a 'Rehabilitation Revolution' utilising a mixed economy model to address its main principles of reducing re-offending and providing value for money (*ibid*; Ministry of Justice, 2011). In the custodial sector, we have seen the introduction of individually tailored sentence plans, viewed as the beginning of a more 'offender centric' system (Williams, 2010: 31).

Indeed, one could argue that including prisoner's views, or at least consulting with them on the development of the 'Rehabilitation Revolution,' is in line with the government aim

of placing service users at the heart of public service commissioning and delivery (House of Commons, 2011; Turner & Beresford, 2005; McGowan, 2010). However, it remains to be seen as to how Social Impact Bonds (SIBs), such as the St Giles Trust pre and post release work at Peterborough Prison, will embrace service user perceptions of preferred 'outputs' and 'outcomes' (on the definitions of the two see Crawford, 1999; on HMP Peterborough see Ministry of Justice, 2010).

A number of commentators and practitioners argue that much could be gained from including the views of offenders in service planning. To paraphrase Martin (2008), they will tell you that a primary issue for them in reducing re-offending is to change their attitude towards crime, offending and themselves - give them hope that is achievable - for them to believe in their own ability to lead a different life and see their own potential for doing things differently and interacting with the world in a different way than they did before. This concept is not too far removed from that of the Big Society and Rehabilitation Revolution idiom. Yet certain aspects of reforms and innovation pointed to in the Green Paper, namely the role of Social Impact Bonds and the introduction of a 'working week' in prisons, have roots that penetrate deeper than the policies of the current administration (Barclay, 2010; also Mulgan, Reeder, Aylott & Bo'sher, 2010; Regeneration and Renewal, 2010; see also House of Commons Home Affairs Select committee on the rehabilitation of offenders, 2005). This paper highlights potential benefits of supporting prisoners' participation in civic society, engages with the implications for the 'types' of intervention that could support offender engagement in civic society and highlights potential barriers to the inclusive impulse at the centre of this approach.

Defining the 'prisoner as citizen': towards the inclusion of prisoner voices in civic society

Let us begin with a set of 'truisms' concerning the general prison population. The Social Exclusion Unit's ageing but nonetheless still relevant report, 'Reducing Re-offending by Ex-Prisoners' (2002), with its gamut of statistical information on prisoner needs in comparison to the 'general' population, painted a picture of the prison population being predominantly from socially excluded sections of society. It describes a population characterised by a lack of participation in economic opportunities, disproportionate levels of mental and physical ill health and substance abuse, with experiences of barriers to educational achievement, employment, housing, and a general marginalisation from 'mainstream' society (as literature on the resettlement of prisoners identifies, including BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) populations, Hucklesby & Hagle-Dickinson, 2007; and Crow, 2006; on older prisoners see Crawley, 2004; 2005; Crawley & Sparks, 2005; 2006). In the Green Paper (Chapter Two) there is an assurance that 'offenders' will face a coordinated response requiring them to tackle the problems which cause their offending. However, the author's posit that, given the truisms noted above, this proposed increase in social responsibility (also enshrined the government's Big Society agenda) should therefore reopen a debate concerning the potential of including the prisoner 'voice', as service users in this consultation.

Briefly, we now return to some of the themes of David Faulkner's (2002) 'Prisoners as Citizens' publication. Faulkner's vision of citizenship seemed to mirror social contract theory with its emphasis on rights and responsibilities, which in turn was congruent with the New Labour government's rhetoric of reaffirming citizenship values. For Faulkner:

A citizen is more than a bearer of rights. Citizens also have duties and responsibilities - obviously to obey the law, but to also play a part in society, to support themselves and their dependants, to show consideration for others, to be a good neighbour, and to have some concern for those who are vulnerable or disadvantaged, to support the institutions and legitimate authority of the state and to hold those institutions to account. These are responsibilities from which prisoners are largely absolved - sometimes necessarily, but often not. (ibid: 13)

Whilst it is recognised that the definition might be challenged it is not the purpose or scope of this paper to undertake such an investigation. Instead, we explore the potential for facilitating prisoner citizenship in line with Faulkner's definition, which can be seen as being partly supported by the then Labour government and subsequent administrations, including the current Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition.

Although Faulkner acknowledges prisoners' status as citizens can be diminished as a result of their rights and liberty being restricted, he also more positively identified some real opportunities where prisoners' citizenship might be encouraged. At the time of Faulkner's original article, the right of prisoners to vote in the UK had created much interest, due to the integration of the European Convention on Human Rights into domestic law, as a result of the Human Rights Act 1998 (*ibid*). However, nearly a decade on from his publication, this issue remains contentious. Indeed, this issue became reinvigorated to a certain extent with the recent change of government (see Stratton, 2011). However, it is questionable as to what degree the 'Big Society' vision is in synch with advancing prisoner rights, and how far this might extend within and across the prisoner population. Arguments ranged from providing the right to vote for prisoners serving sentences of less than four years, to questions over politicians' motivations for 'giv[ing] muggers and sex offenders the vote' (*ibid*, news article). This latter view predominated, resulting in a cross party motion from the House of Commons for a blanket ban on any prisoners having the right to vote (see Watt & Travis, 2011).

However, human rights, and the right to vote specifically, are not the only area identified by Faulkner where citizen status can be realised. Agendas such as that of 'decency' under the leadership of Martin Narey, former Director General of the Prison Service, and likewise the role of 'legitimacy' explored by commentators such as Sparks, Bottoms and Hay (see Faulkner, 2002) are given. To this it is possible to add that ideas of 'humane containment' and 'positive custody' as also providing opportunities to decrease the gap between the prison/prisoners and society/citizens dichotomy (see Stone, 1985; on 'humane containment' see Morgan, 2002).

A number of these opportunities, such as the latter two, however, lost their potential impact during the 1980s, 'as a result of subsequent managerialist initiatives' (Morgan, 2002: 1124). Indeed, it is stated that the 'humane containment' agenda barely attracted fleeting attention from the then Director General (Stone, 1985). Nonetheless, they collectively show that at a policy and strategic level there has been, and still are, avenues in which prisoner's rights and status as citizens can be pursued. For Faulkner this lies in two main aspects. First, the responsibility to aid reform and resettlement, in a way that supports personal responsibility in engagement in reducing re-offending initiatives. Second, is to see such aims as a matter of civic duty towards increasing social inclusion.

The underpinning ideology of the current administration's idea(s) of 'Big Society' and some of the policies for criminal justice reform included in the recent Green Paper are in line with such thinking. Hence, to say ideas such as 'humane containment' and 'positive custody' have had fleeting attention might be an overstatement (on the 'decency' agenda see Liebling, 2004). Potential variables which might be used to measure or indicate prisons, and/or society in general, treating prisoners as citizens have been contentious, but include: the ability of prisoners to make choices on how they spend their time in prison (e.g. education, training and employment and offending-behaviour programs); the ability to retain personal identity (such as prisoners being able to wear their own clothes); and the way prisoners and staff talk to each other (see Faulkner, 2002).

The ways in which disputes are resolved are also referenced as an indicator. Although the problematic nature of measuring citizenship does not seem to hold as much precedence in this work as one might have expected. Liebling (2004) has shown that 'hard to measure' variables reflecting life in prisons can be challenging but are achievable. We might learn from Measuring the Quality of Prisoner Life (MQPL) work that we can and, perhaps, should look at capturing prisoner's experiences more qualitatively. Work that has been undertaken in the women's prison estate also seems to support this assertion through innovative work employing 'peer researchers' (O'Keeffe, 2003; 2004). The example of 'peer researchers'; where prisoners themselves are recruited as researchers who engage with their counterparts and collect data, conducting interviews or focus groups for example, link effectively to the following sections of this article.

Situating citizen status - power, resistance and identity

Aside from reaffirming that negotiations of power in prison are complex the quote also points to a need to contextualise such relations. Crewe (2005; 2006; 2007) notes that in particular places and with particular people within prison environments different representations of power, and therefore citizen status, may be elicited:

While Liebling has charted the last 20 years of UK prison policy and organization, and others have theorized the reconfigurations of penal power entailed by managerialism and associated changes in techniques of governance (e.g. Garland 1997), we have little empirical evidence of how power is manifested and reconstituted on the prison landings. (Crewe, 2007: 256)

The first example is that of the 'space' and context of prison visits. In a medium security prison, Crewe observed that prisoners were able to show more open displays of affection towards their visitors, which were comparatively rare on the wings of the prison. Pottery and art classes were often used to make goods 'often depicting romantic scenes or conveying emotion openly' (2006: 402). Similarly, there were different relations observed with male prisoner interaction with female prison officers. The impact of these and many other factors can be important influences which may affect how prisoners (re)present their ideas of being a citizen (Crewe, 2005) and encounter and engage 'power' whilst imprisoned. Building on these observations it is possible to surmise the conceptualisation of the 'citizen' may be contested and, hence, more fluid akin to others commentary on 'resistance' and 'power' relations in prisons (Bosworth & Carrabine, 2001).

Bosworth & Carrabine's use of 'resistance' is purposeful yet, at the same time, it incorporates a variety of actions from 'riots' to more individualised, localised, interactions where constructions of identity around gender, 'race' and sexuality issues take place. The main implication of the work of Crewe (2005; 2006; 2007) and Bosworth & Carrabine (2001) to our debate is how they contribute to how we think about the 'micro politics' of prison life and in turn situate these within the larger, although not uncontested, political landscape of central government criminal justice policy (and broader policy for that matter). Bearing this in mind, we move to reflect on our experiences of researching a variety of rehabilitation and 'resettlement' activities and services in prisons.

Setting the scene: evaluation work in prisons

The subsequent section in this article draws on the experiences of the authors in work undertaken by the Hallam Centre for Community Justice, a comparatively small research centre based in Sheffield Hallam University in the United Kingdom. The Centre client base ranges from government departments, such as the Department for Work and Pensions and the Ministry of Justice, through to private sector agencies, national organisations and small local voluntary sector agencies. One author was employed as a Researcher in the Centre and formerly as a research student funded by the Centre and HM Prison Service: Yorkshire and Humberside, the focus of his work being partnership activity in four male prisons in the area of 'resettlement' (Bird, 2007). The other is a Research Fellow with extensive experience of undertaking research in prisons generally, but who has specifically worked on evaluations of voluntary and community sector (VCS) led services and activities in the fields of the arts and media in prison.

Collectively, we posit that there are common themes that emanate from these strands of work, especially those that engage or are led by the VCS. It is no coincidence that the projects here happen to be led by, and involve stakeholders, in the VCS sector. Overall, the projects that have been the subject of the aforementioned research activity are not necessarily concordant to, or part of, some prison's 'core' regime activity.

Commentators have noted the appeal of VCS agencies and their ability to develop specialist, service-user-focussed and 'community-based' work (Senior, 2004). Our research is concordant with these findings and it is partly because of these reasons that such work – be they taking the forms of nurturing creative writing prisoners participation

in media production, such as that experienced by the Prison Radio Association, or 'peer-inspired' learning, such as the Toe-By-Toe scheme - reaffirms the importance of what we term relative safety. Preference for this term takes account of the observations made by Crewe which we have already touched upon in this paper. Certain prison contexts – meaning space and people as well as place – and forms of engagement facilitate prisoner confidence to express their 'self'; be this in the forms of resistance which Bosworth & Carrabine (2001) point to, or shows of emotion or constructions and appropriations of rights and responsibilities (see on the former Crewe 2006; 2007). Emphasising the relative character of 'safety' negates ideas of fixed, absolute, states and total 'actual safety'. Before going into depth about the facets of these activities and how they relate to prisoners status as citizens, a summary of the projects is provided below to provide the overall context of our findings.

Evaluated projects: an overview

The Inside Job at HMP Downview

The Inside Job at HMP Downview is a Media for Development (MFD) Project, based in a multi-media centre within the prison walls, set up an offender-led TV station, delivering accredited television and radio production training courses. Now re-named, the Media House at HMP Downview opened in April 2006 and provides both training and work experience to the women serving their sentences within the prison. Trainees at the House produce a bi-weekly TV show covering all aspects of prison life. Women serving sentences up to two years or less are taken on as BTEC students, successful graduates are offered a Broadcast Unit Graduate post to produce the ongoing media content for the prison and those whose Prison Licence allows for it can apply for a traineeship at MFD offices in London (for further details see Wilkinson & Nandi, 2009).

The activities of the Prison Radio Association

Over a three year period, the activities of the Prison Radio Association (PRA) evolved through delivering a two week taster course in radio production in prisons across the West Midlands, to providing prisons with a support package to set up their own radio stations and rolling out the National Prison Radio service in partnership with NOMS as well as hosting an Annual National Prison Radio Conference. The PRA is an educational charity for 'offenders' set up to contribute to the reduction of re-offending by capitalising on the opportunity prison radio provides for a unique and innovative vehicle to engage offenders in education; particularly those hard to reach 'offenders' disenfranchised by 'traditional' or 'mainstream' forms of education.

The evaluation methodologies employed were diverse in order to reflect the changing activities of the PRA, however a key component throughout the three years was to ensure prisoner's views on the development of these prison radio projects were collated. This aim was met through interviews with Prison Radio Learners, Graduates and Radio Listeners over the three year timescale of this evaluation (see Wilkinson & Davidson, 2008; 2009; 2010a).

The DoVeS Counselling Service at HMP Doncaster

In 2005, as a result of a partnership between Doncaster Domestic Violence Working Party, Doncaster Rape and Sexual Assault Counselling Centre and HMP Doncaster, with set up funding provided by the Tudor Trust and Lloyds TSB, a two year counselling service pilot was established to work with men who had experience of domestic violence. In reality, the service users were men who had been affected by their exposure to acts of domestic violence as young children. Prisoners with domestic violence as an index offence were excluded from the service. The Person Centred Approach focuses on facilitating, strengthening and expanding the client's identity, whilst ensuring independent thinking and acting. A person centred counselling environment is characterised by trust, confidentiality and safety, where clients encounter themselves. Clients are treated as expert in their own lives and are supported to take responsibility for themselves and their actions. A key aspect of this service provision aimed to improve the quality of life of prisoner service users, ultimately leading to a positive impact on their re-offending.

The evaluation team interviewed over 40 service users over a two year period (Wilkinson & O'Keeffe, 2006; also see Wilkinson & Flintoff, 2008), once on beginning the counselling sessions and again on completion. In 2009, five men who had accessed the service in 2006 agreed to follow up interviews with research staff in the community. This follow-up Doncaster Desistance Study used a Life History Interview² approach to examining trajectories of desistance in this small sample (Wilkinson, 2009).

The Breakthrough BME Prison In-Reach Project

The Breakthrough Prison In-Reach service, provided by the community-based Breakthrough-Sheffield Multi-Ethnic Drugs Service, was initiated in HMP/YOI Doncaster in August 2008 to provide a BME specific pathway to offenders in custody through to aftercare release. This project was launched in response to increasing concerns throughout the Criminal Justice sector that despite the continuing over-representation of BME offenders in the Criminal Justice System (CJS) (Race for Justice, 2008), the system still fails to meet their needs, both while in custody and once released (Commission for Racial Equality, 2003; Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010; Department of Health, 2009). The Senior Management team at HMP/YOI Doncaster were aware of the lack of uptake of prison-based services from BME offenders at their establishment. The Breakthrough Prison In-Reach Service is a needs-led drugs service which was introduced as a holistic signposting service which operates to support continued service engagement and pre-release support. The evaluation fieldwork consisted of two focus groups with BME service users, strategic interviews with key stakeholders and an analysis of the Breakthrough Prison In-Reach contact database (Wilkinson & Davidson, 2010b).

² The Life History Interview approach involves supporting offenders to tell the stories of their own lives and allowing them to situate their interpretations of significant events. This approach is based on McAdams, 1997, Life Story Narrative Framework. Shadd Maruna also based his methodological framework on McAdams ideas in his Liverpool Desistance Study (2001) Making Good: How Ex-Convicts Reform and Rebuild Their Lives. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association Books.

The Shannon Trust West Midlands Reading Network

The West Midlands Reading Network was initiated in January 2008 with funding provided by The Paul Hamlyn Foundation, to support the delivery of the peer-mentor Toe-By-Toe reading scheme in Youth Offending Institutions (YOIs). A system is devised that fits in with the regime of the establishment whereby Mentors can be unlocked from their cells to spend 20 minutes a day with a Learner. With the support of a Mentor, the Learner works through the Toe-by-Toe Reading Manual. This three year pilot project was designed to engage more young offenders by offering them the opportunity to improve their skills throughout their time in custody and immediately on their release into the community.

The evaluation focus was on the performance of the network; however views on the scheme were elicited from Toe-By-Toe Mentors and Learners across five YOIs in the West Midlands through a Questionnaire Feedback Form. The aim of this activity was to ensure that beneficiaries of the Toe-By-Toe initiative were able to feed into the evaluation process. Returns, however, were low; of the aimed-for total of 25 completed questionnaires from Mentors and 25 completed questionnaires from Learners across the five YOIs, the evaluation team received 27 from Learners and four Mentor feedback questionnaires. For further details see Wilkinson & Davidson (2010c).

The Writers in Prison Network

The Writers in Prison Network (WiPN) was appointed by the Arts Council in April 1998 to administer the Writers in Residence in Prison Scheme, where a Creative Writer is hosted by a prison and their remit is to facilitate offender's engagement with creative writing in many diverse ways. WiPN is designed to be a comprehensive administration and support agency set up to support the needs of hosting prisons, the Writers in Residence and offenders. This evaluation is ongoing, however, one of the authors has conducted evaluation visits to three different prison sites capturing the impacts of three WiPN Special Projects (projects developed by a Writer in Residency and continued post Residency, and/or rolled out to other sites), from which rich qualitative data has been collected from serving offenders engaging with these Special Projects. The final report is scheduled for December 2011.

Drawing the threads together:

What can we gain by conducting a kind of 'proxy meta-analysis' of these diverse projects in prisons which are led by the VCS? The following section of this paper highlights what these seemingly diverse projects have in common in terms of how they endorse the notion of prisoners as citizens. We present three key themes which we see as emanating from all of the projects which have just been summarised. These projects have all provided new, non-traditional and often innovative ways to 'hook in' prisoners to engage with educational experiences. These projects have, by and large, offered a different but broadly educationally based experience for prisoners who can be described as hard-to-reach in terms of their general lack of engagement in wider services provided by the prison. We posit that the themes we identify are in accordance with characteristics of some of the values which are constitutive of the definition of a citizen which this paper has drawn on. In turn we now seek to highlight these themes.

Theme one: increasing self - confidence and a sense of self worth

Prisoners accessing these projects reported a sense of pride in their efforts being acknowledged by prison staff. These feelings were also reflected as it was felt that other prisoners gave them respect for their successful engagement. Prisoners engaging in prison radio projects reported being inundated by questions from their peers regarding what they had been up to during their sessions. The female prisoners engaging with the Media House reported their delight when treated with increasing interest and respect by staff and their peers when developing shows, like the prison-version of the popular televised talent show, 'X factor'.

Prisoners who had accessed some of the projects evaluated reported finding having the opportunity to feed into the developments of these projects as extremely rewarding. Prisoner feedback was sought through a variety of means in each project, such as formal consultation meetings, from being part of the team that develops and designs audio and visual material and from being included in the more formal and external evaluations of the projects they were involved in. Prisoners reported to the authors that they found that being asked their opinion was a genuinely powerful experience, particularly when their views were being sought out by members of staff. One specific example that comes to mind is the significant impact prisoners reported when they were exposed to being in the interviewer's chair when recording interviews with those perceived as more 'powerful' people, like the Senior Management Staff at their prison. Prisoners reflected that as long as they spoke respectfully to their interviewees, they knew their questions would be answered and reported coming away from the whole experience as being more sympathetic to the restraints under which Senior Management Teams (SMT) operate. Further, when a member of the SMT was interviewed, each prison wing was canvassed to collate other prisoner's questions. The prisoner interviewers reported that they felt a sense of obligation and responsibility for representing their peers in this situation.

Prisoners studying the radio production course began to think about the prison radio as operating in many important areas involving the welfare of those in custody. First, that prison radio was cited as an opportunity to communicate information to the whole of the prison population. Second, that being able to listen to radio programmes produced by prisoners would ease the often isolating experience of a custodial sentence. Third, prison radio had the capacity to provide audio to inspire changes in behaviour through slots, like 'True Stories', where (ex)offenders who have gone on and made a success of their lives were interviewed. This showed that for their peer-group, change was possible. Indeed, the overriding view reported by prisoners was that the development of the National Prison Radio Scheme was important for all prisoners, simply because it gave them a voice.

Theme two: engaging communitarian responsibility

Engagement in these projects resulted in prisoners, to greater or lesser a degree, reporting that they had gained in confidence and self-esteem and they felt that their skills-base had improved along with their communication and social skills. Most significantly, they reported the whole experience as being a positive instructive experience that each was keen to repeat, thus often facilitating their increasing engagement with other, often

more traditional educational experiences and services offered within the prison education, post project engagement.

The evaluation team observed some of the audio planning and design meetings the Radio Learners engaged with. Topics for these sessions were varied, however, during one victim-focussed session; one prisoner commented that as a drug dealer, he 'had no victims'. His peers in the group vigorously engaged with this, politely but forcefully explaining the vacuous nature of that comment. The facilitator stood by and did not intervene, as the prisoner peer group challenged their counterpart's belief. This transformative potential of focus group settings has also been documented by Fong Chui (2003).

Prisoners accessing the services described here also reflected on their increasing sense of responsibility towards others during their engagement with these projects. For Toe-by-Toe Mentors, Media House Broadcast Unit Graduates and Radio Production Graduates, motives for continued engagement were primarily focussed on a desire to help other prisoners and to give something back. For Prison Radio Learners, this sense of responsibility for others took the form of ensuring that their radio production was informative and factually correct for those entering prison for the first time. Even with regard to accessing the one-to-one person-centred counselling service, which was confidential, the prisoners accessing it often self-disclosed to fellow prisoners who they felt could benefit from accessing the service, by telling them how much the service had helped them. Similarly one of the authors has recently been involved in a research project looking into diversity in a high security prison which has a focus on those who have committed sex offences. During the research prisoners were extremely proactive in helping senior researchers create and develop a survey which would try and capture the views of prisoners on a particular wing of the prison. Amongst focus group activity prisoners also enthusiastically took part in tasks, and completed 'home work' (see Cowburn & Lavis with Bird, 2010).

Theme three: holistic importance

The projects described here share a clear person-centred approach to prisoners' social reintegration and desistance from crime. On the latter, The Doncaster Desistance Study (Wilkinson, 2009) particularly has highlighted this complex journey and process of reframing the concept of the self as one not engaging in criminal activity which is highlighted in the broader desistance literature (for example, Maruna, 2001). This contrasts to some degree with the offence and behaviour focussed prison regimes and programmes. The more holistic approach epitomised by the projects evaluated here could be contrasted as treating the person, not the offending behaviour. Indeed, the researchers were left with the impression that offending behaviour was addressed almost as an inevitable bi-product of the prisoner's engagement with these projects.

A powerful example of this was observed during a focus group with prisoners who had engaged with a Writer in Prison Talking Shop project. The prisoners were provided with reading material and met once a week for a session where their thoughts on the literature, speech or poem were sought. Basically, to paraphrase the offender's

description of the impact on themselves of attending this group, they felt they had learned more about themselves and their offending behaviour from attending this group in comparison to their Offending Behaviour Programmes at the prison. The men attending the sessions described how they had historically found it difficult to express emotion, and they talked about the different side to their character they felt they had to show in the exercise yard for example, in contrast to the group where they felt they could discuss and engage with issues, such as how it feels to be men, in an open and honest way and felt safe enough to be vulnerable. They also felt the experience had provided them with the opportunity to practice their social skills, including learning to listen to different and often opposing views, learning to settle disputes and diffuse conflict through listening to other people, the men describing this as being the best way to go.

Despite this apparent contrast with the offence and behaviour focussed prison regimes and programmes, it is possible for the two to coexist. Simultaneously providing rehabilitation treatment along with providing individuals with a developing sense of reintegration into society - that increasing opportunities for citizenship can offer - can help to support and sustain desistance from criminal behaviour (see, Haggard, Gumpert & Gann, 2001; Maruna, 2001).

Conclusion

Our argument posits that prisoners could be included in the Big Society vision and treated as citizens, as part of our Big Society where, although they have had their liberty removed, opportunities for (re)acquisition of their responsibilities and rights can remain integral to their reintegration into society (on the 'symbolic' nature of re-entry see Maruna, 2011; and also on the kindness of prisoners and voluntary work, Burnett & Maruna, 2006). In this way, the community of prisoners can become part of and, in some part, responsible for being part of defining the 'solution' as much as the 'problem'. If we accept the truism that the majority of prisoners are socially excluded, we believe that during imprisonment there are, nonetheless, opportunities to bring them into civic society, rather than reinforce and indeed extend their exclusion from it.

At the crux of our suggestion is that person-centred, holistic activity can engage prisoners in challenging 'offending behaviour' to which focussed activity would initially be resisted. Moreover, within the brief thematic narrative of some key findings from small-scale evaluation work, we have sought to show how such activities can, potentially, contribute to facilitating behavioural and personal-change conducive to reductions in re-offending. Here, the VCS have a role in providing such opportunities that is of importance when considering a potentially mixed economy of providers like that envisaged in the Green Paper. The concern of both of the authors is that 'Payment by Results approaches', such as that currently being explored in Peterborough prison with the St Giles Trust and short-term prisoners, will be overly restrictive in how they conceptualise 'results' – the example used here would be the emphasis on one-year reconviction rates. It is of concern that the 'Rehabilitation Revolution', with its focus on a working week in prisons and pseudo-medico efforts at prisoner rehabilitation, combined with constrictive 'Payment by Results' will effectively undermine the examples of meaningful work with prisoners mentioned

here (and see creative arts projects contributions to reductions in re-offending, James, 2010).

This article has shown that certain agencies, activities, spaces and individuals can have wider implications for the prison environment. These variables are of importance for informing how prisoners may feel safer in emphasising their citizen status and adopt 'pro-social' characteristics. For example, during the Breakthrough Prison In-Reach project evaluation, through utilising a tailored sign posting service, the numbers of prisoners from BME communities engaging with mainstream drugs services rose (Wilkinson & Davidson, 2010b). If we are serious about changing offenders' attitudes towards crime, we could choose to be truly revolutionary by providing opportunities for them which offer hope and belief in their own ability to lead a different life. We believe that it is here that the real opportunities to assist their journey towards tackling the problems which cause their offending lie (paraphrasing the Green Paper, Chapter Two). Indeed, by providing innovative and holistic creative experiences alongside offending focussed activities, we are addressing offenders who have offended, but that do not have to have to be defined solely by their offending behaviour. We need to open the debate regarding providing innovative, person-centred opportunities for offenders to experience themselves and their own lives in a way which enhances social inclusion and supports ownership and responsibility for their own pathway to rehabilitation.

Drawing on the work of others, such as Crewe and Bosworth & Carrabine, we have shown the highly complex ways in which 'citizen' status may be manifested, moulded and expressed in particular settings. Against the 'Rehabilitative Revolution' is a degree of resistance to the idea of prisoners as citizens, and despite there still being opportunities for self expression, there is cross-party and front bench cabinet reluctance to give prisoners the right to vote. This might be symbolic of a deeper reticence to consider opportunities for prisoner reintegration (Lyon, 2011). These issues are particularly significant given that three of the voluntary and community sector projects mentioned here have had their funding cut in the early summer of 2011 and are no longer operating. It is here were we levy the charge that the truly 'revolutionary' capability of the government's proposals is undermined.

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