

Breaking Chains And Building Change



Perspectives on Justice, Punishment,
Trauma and Abolition from the Scottish
Quaker Community Justice Network

Contents

Introduction – Ren Clark ... 3-4

Alternatives to Violence Project – Martin Mansell ... 5-7

Restorative Justice – Katie Aspinwall and Jennifer Copsey ... 8-11

Trauma, Justice and Imprisonment in Scotland: A Long Story – Mike Nellis ... 12-17

Report on the March 2022 workshop Trauma, Justice and Imprisonment: A Day of Quaker Reflection – Ren Clark ... 18-21

Dovegate Therapeutic Community – a detailed contextualization of the presentation given at the Scottish Quaker Criminal Justice Network Event on one friend's experience of working in a Therapeutic Community. – Pete Clarke ... 22-30

Introduction - Ren Clark

The Scottish Quaker Community Justice Network are an open group of Quakers in Scotland who have been meeting regularly since 2020 (in the group's current incarnation) to discuss community justice. Although there is a range of opinions within the network, I believe we share a common belief that community justice is a growing point for building a more equal and humane society, that is worth Scottish Quakers' attention.

Obviously this is not a new Quaker concern, with Elizabeth Fry as a prominent example being an advocate for the rights of prisoners at the beginning of the prison's life as an institution in the early 1800s. In recent years, Quakers in Scotland have been advocating for Restorative Justice practices, and Katie Aspinwall and Jennifer Copsey give an overview of what that entails in their piece. The Alternatives to Violence Project have also been active since the 1990s working to give people tools to build better relationships, and Martin Mansell gives an overview of this in his article.

Community Justice is a huge issue, and it is easy to get overwhelmed with the scope and complexity of the problems, and the number of directions that attention and energy could be directed. In light of this, one of the questions that the network has been considering over the last couple of years is a need for a broader framework to work within and towards.

One of the ideas that we have kept coming back to is the idea of Quaker arguments for prison abolition, with reference to the Canadian Friends yearly meeting minute, that stated their intention of 'turning our efforts to reform prisons to

efforts to replace them with non-punitive, life-affirming and reconciling responses’.

Quakers in Canada produced this minute in 1981, and the evidence against prisons has only grown in the intervening years. My own impetus for joining the network was the murder of George Floyd by Minnesota police in 2020, and the increased visibility of long-standing police and prison abolitionist ideas in conversations around racial justice. In Mike Nellis’s article he writes about his journey to taking the stance of prison abolition, and in Pete Clarke’s he describes one of the potential ‘non-punitive, life-affirming and reconciling responses’ that he has experienced through his work with the Open University.

In the complex knot of justice issues, trauma is a constant thread, and with more institutions becoming, or at least declaring themselves ‘trauma aware’, some members of the Network wanted to put on a learning day for Scottish Friends around trauma, and how it might affect our approach to issues of justice. My article for this publication is a report from that day, and the thought-provoking ideas that were shared.

My hope with this publication was to bring some of the thinking that has been happening within the SQCJN to a wider audience, and that Scottish Friends will be as challenged and inspired by the perspectives within as I have been.

Alternatives to Violence Project – Martin Mansell

The Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) is an international movement that started in the 1970s in the American prison system. AVP Britain is one of multiple independent branches which operate around the globe. AVP first began working in the UK in 1988 and AVP Britain was formed in 1997 as a registered national charity (1085709).

AVP Britain is committed to working towards a resilient and non-violent society. About 1 in 50 people in Britain is the victim of a violent assault each year, which is approximately twice the average for the industrialised world. Besides violent assaults, threatening behaviour described as ‘really frightening’ affects 1 in 25 people in Britain each year.

Despite this, there are few organisations in Britain supporting adults to deal with conflict and reduce the violence in their lives. Where there are courses, they are often very expensive. AVP works with a wide spectrum of people; our emphasis is on working with individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds who have a history of using or suffering from violence.

Much more than an anger management course, AVP recognizes that a holistic approach is needed to address violence in our societies. Our courses therefore aim to provide participants with the necessary skills to handle conflict non-violently and to build better, healthier relationships. It does this through interactive workshops which combine experiential learning and self-awareness exercises with more practical skill development in conflict management.

The workshops draw on people's own experiences and definitions of violence and use group exercises, discussions, fun activities and role play to explore non-violent ways of working with conflict.

The workshops are facilitated by trained volunteers and aim to develop and strengthen:

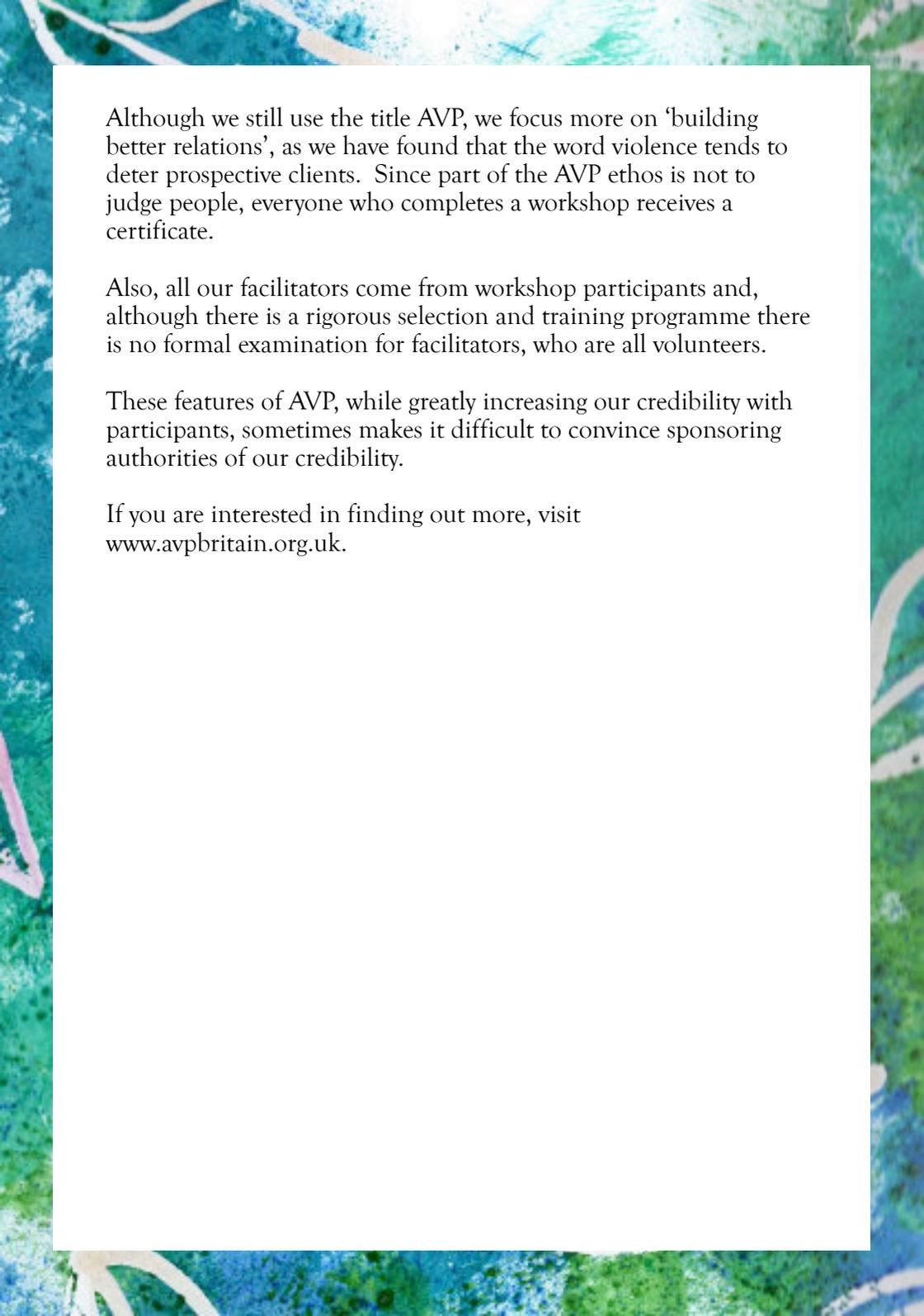
- Good listening and communication
- Self-esteem and affirmation of others
- Trust of self and others
- Self-awareness and empowerment
- Awareness of personal choice and responsibility
- Respect and empathy
- Cooperation and community building
- Problem solving and conflict resolution

AVP runs workshops in the community and in prisons to help people to face up to conflict in their lives. With the advent of Covid restrictions we developed an online version of our workshops and our course is now offered in three main formats:

- A 16-hour, in-person intensive course delivered over a weekend or in weekly sessions,
- A 16-hour, online course delivered in the evening over the course of six weeks,
- A self-paced, distance learning course which can be done online or via postal mail.

We are also currently developing a high accessibility version of our distance learning course which will increase participation potential among individuals who may experience difficulties reading or writing. The online version naturally has the problem of lack of physical contact, but does allow participants to attend from almost any location.

AVP has run workshops for diverse groups including prisoners, prison staff, the police, domestic violence workers, women's groups, homeless groups and many individuals in the community who want to address the violence in their own lives.



Although we still use the title AVP, we focus more on 'building better relations', as we have found that the word violence tends to deter prospective clients. Since part of the AVP ethos is not to judge people, everyone who completes a workshop receives a certificate.

Also, all our facilitators come from workshop participants and, although there is a rigorous selection and training programme there is no formal examination for facilitators, who are all volunteers.

These features of AVP, while greatly increasing our credibility with participants, sometimes makes it difficult to convince sponsoring authorities of our credibility.

If you are interested in finding out more, visit www.avpbritain.org.uk.

Restorative Justice – Katie Aspinwall and Jennifer Copsey

Restorative practices have been used for some time in Scotland by such organisations as schools, prisons and the police to address misbehaviour such as bullying and vandalism or as a possible diversion from the courts. Restorative Justice has been tried in a few geographic areas but mainly to address youth and low level crime. But there is considerable evidence that RJ is even more effective when dealing with adults and in more serious crime situations. Scotland has been slow compared to other nations in acting to introduce RJ, but the Scottish Government has produced legislation to allow the opportunity for RJ to be made available throughout Scotland by the end of 2023.

When a crime has been committed a victim, once statements have been made, may feel totally excluded from the judicial process even if called as a witness at trial. And yet there is a sense in which a crime belongs in a unique way to the victim and the offender. The victim may have suffered physical or mental injury, trauma, financial or employment problems and the extended results may have affected family members or even the community. The victim may feel there are questions needing to be answered - why did this happen to me, what did the offender think was the effect of the damage for which he was responsible, would it happen again etc.

So what is meant by RJ? It is a process and a means whereby those affected by an offence, both victim and offender can communicate in a safe way and resolve how to deal with the aftermath of the crime and its implications for the future. While the judicial system focuses on blame and retribution, the restorative approach focuses on removing conflict and repairing harm. It is victim centred but both parties must voluntarily agree to take part and responsibility for the crime acknowledged by the offender in advance. It involves the skills of a trained facilitator to interview the participants in advance, to discuss outcomes and expectations and allow each to feel they can say in safety what they wish to say to the other.

There are different models. Sometimes communication is only by correspondence (mediation) and involves discussion of the offence and its effects but without potential future action. Face to face (conferencing) however allows a dialogue between the participants and outcome agreements, and can include supporters and relatives of both families, key workers and representatives of the community to be present.

Research shows that many victims given time and consideration welcome the opportunity to meet with the person who has harmed them, to have questions answered and an apology offered, though there is no obligation to offer forgiveness. Many do not look for reparation for any damage done but wish the offender to take steps to turn their life around through education, anger management, substance control schemes or whatever is thought appropriate and also further desist from future crimes. They feel the process has lifted a load from their shoulders, has given them a sense of empowerment they feel they lacked before in the situation and they can now get on with their lives. Relatives of victims report the same sentiments of feeling a weight has been lifted and they can now move on.

And what of the offender? Public opinion often sees RJ as a soft option. However contrary to what they initially might expect offenders say that meeting their victim face to face is extremely difficult and a far worse experience than prison itself. In fact it takes great courage on the part of both victim and offender to agree to meet. Research also shows that the vast majority of prisoners come from a very few post code areas, suffering from multiple deprivation, inadequate social provision, poor housing, lack of education, unemployment etc. Many have suffered childhood trauma such as domestic violence, drug addiction and abuse - as indeed have some victims. As part of a good agreed rehabilitation programme they can come to understand why they have become involved in crime, come to take the difficult steps to address these issues and desist from further wrongdoing. Support for this may include their own families and community members also affected by the crime as well as external agencies.

In our “value for money” society many look for proof that RJ “works”. In an evaluation of over 800 cases in England, both victims and offenders stated they were really satisfied with the process and with outcome agreements in conferencing, although this is something which cannot be measured. However there is good evidence that both mediation and conferencing reduce further reoffending (College of Policing 2015). It is further in the interests of society at large to recognise our responsibility for the neglect and inequality of large sections of our communities and to engage in the rehabilitation and integration of those who have engaged in crime. RJ dialogue really requires exploration of questions of social in/justice as much as inter personal in/justice.

Moreover, RJ can be used to address many types of crime and in different situations. Initially it might be thought that RJ would have limited relevance to corporate crime. In major disasters such as Piper Alpha and Grenfell Tower no one person or group can be “blamed” though there are many victims. Members of Boards whose decisions may lead inadvertently to deaths, dangerous pollution, financial fraud etc. do not set out to deliberately harm their ultimate victims but can hide behind the corporate veil. It can be very difficult to bring such cases to court. But Boards can be held to account and conferences involving stakeholders such as prosecutors and regulators, employees and community representatives can agree remedial outcomes such as compensation, employment opportunities or funding for community amenities.

There is also a role for RJ in dealing with hate crime which has been on the increase in Scotland. Here the emphasis is on reduction and prevention. Research shows that emotional and psychological trauma caused by hate crime is more intense than for other crimes and many offenders are not fully aware of the harm caused by their actions and behaviour. RJ is well placed to address this. Victims are able to tell how the offence has affected them, ask why they were targeted and challenge the prejudices the offender may hold. Many of these incidents occur within broader conflicts in communities with underlying causes, and with further engagement disputes can be resolved and harms repaired.

Restorative Justice has also been used in instances of fatal accidents where the meeting of relatives of those who have died with those responsible has allowed feelings to be expressed and apologies made and has brought a measure of relief and closure to an unwanted tragedy. More controversial has been the use of RJ in cases of historic and sexual violence. But where deemed appropriate and with careful preparation with skilled and experienced facilitators and other professionals much can be achieved.

Recently the Scottish Government has produced a report on Restorative Justice and empathy based interventions on Animal Welfare and Wildlife Crimes. RJ procedures have been developed in Australia and New Zealand where perhaps no law has been broken but significant damage has been done. Such examples have been damage to heritage sites or artefacts belonging to indigenous peoples or pollution of rivers destroying the water life and facilities and livelihoods of the local communities.

Society has much to gain in learning to listen to one another's stories, to hear and acknowledge pain, to move to address harm and remedy the hurt and rehabilitate those who have fallen short. Any process which seeks to improve communication between people is to be welcomed and implementing restorative justice across many different forums has much to contribute.

Further reading : Scottish Justice Matters - Restorative Justice edition
- vol.5 no1

<https://www.rjforum.scot>

Trauma, Justice and Imprisonment in Scotland: A Long Story – Mike Nellis

How I Got Started

I've been involved in penal reform for a long time, almost from the time I left university and started work as a social worker (mostly but not only with young offenders) in south London in 1974. Being a social worker, seeing people living in poverty for the first time, politicised me in a way that merely studying sociology and education never had. As much as I wanted – and needed – to understand why the individual young people I knew did what they did, I also wanted to understand how and why the systems and institutions that processed them – the courts, the schools, the remand centres, the “short, sharp shock” detention centres, the social security offices, even social services themselves did what they did. All too often, with some consistent exceptions, what they did was inept or damaging, and exhilarating as my time as a young social worker was it was a lesson in the limitations of what good people – and I met a lot of them – can achieve in bad systems.

In the late 1970s I became involved with Radical Alternatives to Prison (RAP), the first prison abolitionist group in Britain, and while my personal commitment at that point did not extend much beyond abolishing custody for young offenders (which was “almost-official-policy” at the time) it was a formative experience in lots of respects. Among other things in RAP, I came across a book – posted to us from the USA – called *Instead of Prisons: a Handbook for Abolitionists* by Fay Honey Knopp and others. I was not a Quaker then and it would have meant little to me at the time to have learned that Fay Honey Knopp was one. But the ideas in the book – quite moderate compared to more recent abolitionist thinking in the USA (which is not to denigrate these later insights and arguments) – seeped into my thinking even then and have never really left me. Today, *Instead of Prisons* remains foundational to my hopes that contemporary British Quakers will learn, as Knopp did individually during the Vietnam War, to take penal abolitionism seriously, and as the Canadian Quakers did corporately (partly via Knopp's example) in 1981.

All that said, I spent much of my career working within “the system”, training probation officers at the University of Birmingham, periodically involved in various penal reform campaigns. “In”, but not “of”, the system, I like to think, although I may be kidding myself, even as I still sit, ever more aloof, on a Ministry of Justice Advisory Group on electronic monitoring (“tagging”). I hope that being a long-time participant-observer of penal reform at least qualifies me to speak from experience on the strengths and limitations of working within the system, and for a number of years now I’ve been very disillusioned with what has been achieved over the past forty years, especially in England and Wales – where penal polices are now regressing – but also in Scotland, where aspirations are not matched by action.

Remembering Kelly Holland

I’d like to begin with a story about Kelly Holland, who was remanded, aged 17, to Cornton Vale Prison on 22nd June 1995. She’d been charged with disturbing the peace and resisting arrest. Not a happy young person at all, and while we need not sentimentalise or make light of whatever she did to get charged, we might well question the wisdom of a remand in custody. As it happens, she only served a month of it – as was often the case, then as now, she did not actually get a prison sentence for the offences. But during that month, encouraged by a couple of prison officers, she began to reflect, and when she got put on probation (as it was then called) she responded well to the opportunities that her criminal justice social worker created for her. She acquired skills, got work. There was a third sector organisation – in particular, a skilled and caring person in that organisation – who Kelly was always to say was crucial in helping her turn her life round. And so she grew up. She stayed gallus, of course she did, but she avoided trouble with the law. She fell in love – a few times! – and was loved back. She had children, and saw them though a much better adolescence than hers had been: they speak well of their mum. There was light and shade in Kelly Holland’s long life, as for all of us, but by the time her big fiftieth birthday party came around in 2018, she could not honestly remember all that much about those brief dark days in Cornton Vale in 1995. She was a different person, you might say.

I said I would tell you a story, and I have. I made this up, most of it. Kelly Holland was real, but not the life I just invented for her. At 17 years old, on 22nd June 1995, she really did get remanded to Cornton Vale for disturbing the peace and resisting arrest, but any life she might have lived never happened. Less than 24 hours after she arrived in Cornton Vale she took her own life. She was cut down from the bars on which she had hung herself in the early hours of 23rd June 1995. So much was lost in that moment.

Three days later Arlene Eliot, also 17, also committed suicide at Cornton Vale. Too many “alsos” already. But in the next 18 months, to Scotland’s shame, so too did Joanne O’Reilly age 26, Angela Bollan age 19, Denise Devine age 26, and Yvonne Gilmour age 22. The average daily population at HMP Cornton Vale was around 170 in this period.

Scottish novelist Janice Galloway - who had been a teacher in prison - published a scathing investigation into the deaths of these young women in The Observer newspaper in February 1997. “All of them were in custody on minor charges”, she wrote. “All of them committed suicide in the same institution, five of them on the same block. What on earth is wrong at Her Majesty’s Prison Cornton Vale? And how can it ever be put right”. Her article was called Forsaken on Romeo Block - the block where five of the seven young women died. Forsaken - not a word we bandy in everyday conversation - was exactly, heart-piercingly, the right word for what had happened - what had been allowed to happen - to them. Galloway’s article made a huge impression on me, and I commended it to every subsequent cohort of probation trainees I taught.

There was outrage in Scotland about the deaths of these seven young women - seven traumatised young women, as we would see them now - and it’s not that nothing happened. In 1998 the Social Work Services Inspectorate and the Prisons Inspectorate produced a joint report called Women Offenders - A Safer Way. This pointed out that, compared to men, women tend to commit minor, mostly property offences, “often rooted in poverty” (p52).

Their backgrounds, even moreso than men, were characterised by emotional, physical and sexual abuse. They suffer disproportionately from drug and alcohol abuse. A Safer Way noted that all this had been said before by Pat Carlen in research undertaken for the Scottish Office in 1983. In terms of reducing suicide in prison it proposed a “twin track strategy”, namely creating more remand and sentencing options in the community, and thereby reducing the number of women in prison from 170 per day to 100 or less per day by end of 2000, and 2) restricting prison to those women “who pose a real threat to the community rather than themselves” (p53). Pat Carlen - who went onto become a major champion of abolishing prison for women - had said this too.

In 1998, A Safer Way constituted a good plan. But it came to naught. As my late friend and colleague Professor Jackie Tombs (who had previously worked in the Scottish Office) pointed out in early 2002, the number of women in prison, far from falling by the millennium, actually rose to 213, almost 50 more than 1995/8 and double what the plan of action had aspired to. Worse still, “there have been more suicides and 15 year olds are still being incarcerated”, Jackie wrote. “How can this be?”

How indeed? And why is it that in 2022 we are still making the same arguments about the character of women’s offending and the need to reduce their numbers in custody. It’s not that nothing good has happened in the interim. Persuading the Scottish Government not to build a 300 bed replacement - HMP Inverclyde - for Cornton Vale in 2014 was a victory of sorts, but the community alternatives that were supposed to accompany that decision have not materialised. Far more has remained the same than has changed. For male offenders too. And in England and Wales, despite all argument and evidence to the contrary, the government is planning to let the prison population rise to 100,000 by 2026. It is for all these reasons that I no longer have confidence in traditional reform strategies

Why Abolition?

It is the longevity of the penal crisis, the enduring overuse of imprisonment in Britain generally, that is the relevant truth here, the truth we should be acting on. It is the relentless deterioration of standards in the expanding prison estate in England and Wales and the persistence of the illusion among liberal-progressives (with whom Quakers mostly align on these matters) that reform has not got too bad a record and will eventually make a bigger difference that has pulled me (back) towards abolitionism. Reform has a terrible record! The time for change is overdue, in exactly the same way that Martin Luther King said racial justice in the USA was overdue in 1963, in his response to the white church leaders who told him he was being overhasty and demanding too much too soon.

There is a political analysis that favours abolition over reform, and explains the differences, but space precludes exploring that here. But the starting point for Quakers who want to think about abolition can be a conventionally moral one – the political reading can come later. Social practices which demonstrably do harm to individuals should not be allowed to go uncriticised, morally speaking, all the more so – although the principle does not depend on this – if there are better and less harmful ways of responding to an issue. The idea of a “necessary evil” does not figure in Quaker thought: if something is evil (destructive of human flourishing) it should be called by its name and worked against, regardless of claims that it is unrealistic to do so, regardless of the perceived odds against success.

None of the earlier abolitions that Quakers and others worked towards – slavery, capital and corporal punishment – seemed realistic or likely, or even right in the eyes of vested, dominant interests, at the point at which forward-looking Friends embarked on them. Some eighteenth (and even nineteenth) century Friends, of course, strongly opposed the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade and slave labour, and profited from them, seeing them as part of a Divine or natural order, until Anthony Benezet and John Woolman enlightened them.

As Woolman argued, prosaically and profoundly, one attempts the abolition of evil practices because it is the right way to live, the right stand to take - not because it is easy or guaranteed. It is neither. Quakers have not yet succeeded in abolishing war, as the peace testimony commits us to doing, but we have not stopped working for it. We may not succeed in abolishing prisons (not in our lifetimes), but we should try.

Like Fay Honey Knopp and contemporary Canadian Friends, I think that prison abolition - and to some extent penal abolition as well - is a morally respectable position for Quakers to hold, and a truer expression of our testimonies than reform. I don't, at this stage, necessarily expect all British Friends to agree even with that, let alone accept the political analysis that underpins abolitionism. But I hope they will be willing to think about it. Certainly, some hard truths must be faced. Working against imprisonment's harm to individuals by reformist means - trusting the state to enact improvements (reduced prison numbers, better regimes and better after-care) on the basis of published evidence about better alternatives - has proved over half a century to be politically untenable, and we should not continue to make ourselves complicit with a failed and illusory strategy.

Report on the March 2022 workshop Trauma, Justice and Imprisonment: A Day of Quaker Reflection – Ren Clark

Anneke Kraakman introduced the workshop, and the many aspects that trauma can take on: physical, psychological and spiritual. She says that trauma is often a hidden source of pain, and asks the audience to consider how becoming trauma-informed could change society. If, for example, we took seriously the fear of a child, how would that change the adult that they grew up to be?

She mentioned the work of Gabor Mate, who when working with adults addicted to drugs asks ‘what happened to you?’ rather than ‘what’s wrong with you?’. These clients of Mate’s had to disconnect from their core selves in order to keep on living, and his work is in helping people reconnect. Consequently, healing trauma needs to be approached with an attitude of respect, compassion and inquiry so as not to produce more defensiveness and disconnect.

Anneke also talked about how trauma occurs on more than just the individual level: there are generational traumas and historical traumas, including loss of land, loss of culture, and loss of language. In the Scottish context, we can mention the Highland Clearances, and the Gaelic language being banned. She mentioned that Indigenous communities have sometimes had collective ceremonies to deal with trauma, but we can also think of family circles, or collectives of people over food.

Finally, she brought up the trauma of the Earth through climate change, and how climate activism can be a way to express our care. When we act with compassion there can be multiple ways to heal.

—

Next James Docherty gave a powerful talk on trauma both in a personal and professional context.

He started by talking about Adverse Childhood Experiences, and said that while everyone is in agreement that these negative

experiences shouldn't happen, people don't talk enough about what should be happening instead. He gave the example of a plant: if we see a plant that isn't getting enough sunlight, we would move it to a better location. Given the right conditions, everyone can thrive.

He said that when people experience trauma, they harden. Like hands are calloused from work, people harden from harsh experiences and get cut off from kindness, compassion and love. Bringing it back to prisons, he said that people in prison are constantly living in the stress response. When you're living with trauma and in a highly-stressful situation, your neo-cortex narrows. So people may be able to experience regret and other more nuanced emotions later, trauma restricts which emotions are available to access, and that 'Prisons are warehouses for trauma. You can't expect them to be navigating any kind of rehabilitative processes in that kind of environment.'

James has been trying to educate mainstream Scottish society about trauma. He said that Scottish men don't talk the way he does, about feelings and vulnerability, but that it is vital for changing the environment, because people 'can't transmit what you don't have. If it's only pain you have, that's what you transmit', and that while we may have all heard the phrase 'hurt people hurt people', it's also true that 'healed people heal people'.

He also bought up Gabor Mate – he had gone to visit him, and asked him why two siblings growing up in the same home can be affected very differently by their experiences. Gabor Mate told him 'No two children grow up in the same family, because everyone sees the world differently and everyone has different emotional sensitivities'. James bought Gabor Mate to Scotland, and got people in justice, health, early years in one room to listen to what he has to say.

James now works with young people in a Violence Reduction Unit, and talked about the challenges of this work when young people end up bringing each other up, rather than by adult caregivers. He stressed that solving domestic abuse should be one of the highest priorities for people who care about trauma, because children's 'conflict resolution skills are learned in their earliest environments'.

Pete Clarke next gave a talk about the Dovegate Therapeutic Community, as part of his work tutoring people in various 'secure environments'.

He said that with our current prison system, we take people from traumatic backgrounds, and put them in some of the most traumatic environments imaginable. Therapeutic Communities are operate entirely separately from prisons, and prisoners that apply and are decided to be suitable are taken from the general prison population and placed in a TC for up to two years.

Pete said that it is not an easy option – people in the TC are asked to examine the trauma in their lives, and what has led to their offences, and it requires a dedication to self-analysis that some people cannot cope with.

Pete said that he'd never met a prisoner who made a rational choice to be a criminal. Instead he's met people who have suffered from trauma and chaotic backgrounds, and then been further traumatised in prison. Pete said that as a penal abolitionist he doesn't believe that there we can start from the perspective of reforming what we have – prisons punish people not just for their crime but also for the backgrounds that they come from, and therefore being aware of trauma is vital for Quakers thinking about questions of justice.

—

After Pete, Ali Newell, who works with the group Capacitar, led a practical session of self-healing movement inspired by Tai-Chi, and talked about the importance of movement when trauma is so often held in the body.

—

Lastly, Mike Nellis raised the question of whether we as Quakers are where we need to be in terms of our testimonies, or if we are behind the curve. He told the story recounted in his piece for this publication, about the young women who committed suicide at Corton Vale prison.

He said that if we take Elizabeth Fry as an example, she was someone who used her social weight to oppose the principles of the prison system. She stood for more than just being kind to prisoners, and he believes that 'You can't turn prisons into places of kindness'.

He returned again to prison abolition and the idea that we have the tools to try something different. He said that we should look at the situation that we are in now in the fundamentals, and see where we can start to make change now.

Dovegate Therapeutic Community – a detailed contextualization of the presentation given at the Scottish Quaker Criminal Justice Network Event on one friend’s experience of working in a Therapeutic Community. – Pete Clarke

This paper has been written almost entirely based on the work of Brown J, Miller S, Northey S and O’Neill D, to whom I give reference and thanks towards the end of the document.

Background

Roland Woodward was the first Director of the Therapeutic community, (TC), at HMP Dovegate which opened in 2001. In his forward to the book ‘What Works in Therapeutic Prisons – Evaluating Psychological Change in Dovegate Therapeutic Community’, (Brown. Miller et al 2014), he begins by describing the TCs aim to provide an environment which enables prisoners to understand the construction of their personal universe and how they can and must live alongside others in their, (and our) world.

To do this, he argues, they need to change their relationship to their world, their understanding of it, and their experience thus far. In this way Woodward identifies that individuals, (including prisoners), can avoid conflict with the criminal justice system, (CJS). This ‘change’ implies the ability of an individual to affect their past and present relationships and existence in the world.

“Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills, and as he conceives himself after already existing – as he wills to be after that leap into existence. Man is nothing else but that which he makes himself’.

(Jean-Paul Sartre 1948 in Brown. Miller et al 2014)

As Quakers we have a long and honourable ‘record’ for campaigning on behalf of penal reform and delivering ministry in prisons in several forms.

However, this paper, in the context of Dovegate TC, looks more closely at 'cause and effect' and in so doing introduces us to a more comprehensive reform to the role of incarceration. In this paper, through a discussion around Dovegate TC, I will introduce the idea that the existence of prisons and their use to punish individuals who have experienced traumatic backgrounds and/or events is not effective and is in fact counterproductive in any sense beyond mere societal revenge. This understanding is in essence the bedrock of the approach of TCs.

In The Beginning

TCs, (be they within, or attached to, an existing prison - or as in the case of Dovegate built new but separated within a new prison) must operate in a context where prisoners and staff are the 'community' and the 'community' is centred on developing personal development within the community and society and reducing offending. Such a process of 'change' is aimed at contributing towards not creating any more victims, be they public, staff, or prisoners.

As such, activities in the TC are designed to be constructive, and primary psychological treatment is delivered by the 'community'. It is a residential and 'social' environment not usually experienced by prisoners or staff - together, 'this provides a context for other forms of treatment' (Woodward et al 2000).

In the case of Dovegate TC there seemed a clear contradiction in building a TC inside a prison designed to 'punish' and separate criminals from society and 'community'. However, given the opportunity of a new build to physically separate the TC from the main prison, concerns over security and the need to operate a TC along democratic lines were minimised, thus the main aims of a TC regime - to reduce social conflict, division, and to enfranchise all members of the community was achievable, not least because 'TC members comply with the rules because they internalise them during the process of making them' (Woodward 1999 p163).

This internalisation is not though simply a necessity for prisoners. Staff, as described earlier, are part of the 'community' but their background on arrival is generally from the mainstream prison service. Rules, rulemaking, and their application within a dominant and domineering hierarchy must be 'unlearnt' quickly. The role of staff in a TC is much more 'fluid' calling on officers to be both security aware, but also facilitator, community member, listener and an active part of therapy. Such potential ethical problems can also be turned to advantage within a TC where a closer staff/prisoner relationship is required, It can in fact garner a more functional/ social/moral set of behaviours that reflect those of the 'outside'.

“The TC concept is based on the assumption that prisoners and staff form the community of care and respect which is committed to the development of personal functioning, to address offending and offensive behaviour in order to change so that those who go through the process [of a TC] create no more victims”
(Newell 1996 in Cullen 1997).

Philosophy and Principles of Dovegate TC

At this point then it perhaps useful to state explicitly what the philosophy and principles of Dovegate were at the time of opening and which were supported by the structure, ethos and practices described in the previous section.

- An emphasis on unlabelled normal living, (Less use of jargon)
- An emphasis on personal growth through enhanced interpersonal relationships. [Here it is possible to see the link between the lack of such in a previous life experience and the experience of trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) - author's note]
- Non-Hierarchical decision-making structure
- A belief in self-help and that residents can help each other, sometimes more than professionals can help through advice
- An emphasis on 'moral treatment', i.e., treated as normal within a consciously sustained social atmosphere

- Shared responsibility for every possible aspect of life within the community
- An emphasis on open honest communication between all community members, staff and residents
- An activation of “living Learning” situations
- Safeguarding the culture of enquiry
- Allowing space to play
- Support and activation of the belief that the more people are empowered, the greater your empowerment

(Brown. Miller et al 2014 p 35)

Additionally, and so to not imitate previous TCs approaches, the work of Yalom, (1980) was to influence Dovegate’s approach. Yalom argued for many changes to the models of incarceration and the psychotherapeutic approach. In brief, these were:

- The instillation of hope
- Understanding that others share your problems
- Receiving through giving
- Returning members attention of the group to their own families to understand ‘what went wrong’

Prisoners who wished to enter the TC applied from whichever prison they were in and their assessment for suitability began. Upon acceptance and admission, prisoners resided in the Assessment and Resettlement Unit (ARU), where their response to working in small groups and their willingness to engage was assessed. In addition, lifers received a High Intensity Programme (HIP) aimed at understanding the needs of those who required more assessment and adjustment.

To achieve the best outcomes for prisoners, therapy was delivered in small groups in a very structured day split into community business meetings, education/training, and therapy. Within group therapy, trust building was crucial, and in a non- hierarchical structure, prisoners were encouraged to share life stories including earliest memories, childhood experiences, experience they identified as having the most effect on their life and particularly their criminality.

Prisoners who wished to enter the TC applied from whichever prison they were in and their assessment for suitability began. Upon acceptance and admission, prisoners resided in the Assessment and Resettlement Unit (ARU), where their response to working in small groups and their willingness to engage was assessed. In addition, lifers received a High Intensity Programme (HIP) aimed at understanding the needs of those who required more assessment and adjustment.

To achieve the best outcomes for prisoners, therapy was delivered in small groups in a very structured day split into community business meetings, education/training, and therapy. Within group therapy, trust building was crucial, and in a non-hierarchical structure, prisoners were encouraged to share life stories including earliest memories, childhood experiences, experience they identified as having the most effect on their life and particularly their criminality.

Success?

In the way outlined above, patterns of behaviour and the links between 'then and now' are explored...This is the crux of therapy in the TC. As Duckworth states in his custodial review 2011, this was a way in which prisoners could alter the way in which they interacted with others and become less anti-social and more 'pro-social' (2011). The success, or not, of this therapeutic approach is not a simple assessment. Instead, the long term 'success' was judged by the many small 'successes' of behaviour, (often back in the mainstream prison), employment, family relationships, and of course lack of reoffending.

Assessment of the success of the TC approach is at the centre of Brown & Miller et al's work described in 'What Works in Therapeutic Prisons', and the main source of information used in this paper. They argue that psychological impact of measures used in the TC are important in assessing post TC behaviour in the context of future behaviour in the mainstream prison system and of course the wider community.

To achieve this, 60 former residents of the TC participated in follow up assessment. Whilst the follow up research and outcomes for former residents is very wide ranging, here, I will concentrate mainly on representing Brown & Miller et al, findings in regard to behaviour and reconviction.

Behaviour

In terms of behaviour and 'functioning', TC former prisoners demonstrated patterns of improved functioning, less anger and violence, and improved self-esteem as they moved into other contexts such as mainstream prison or the community upon release. Clearly sustaining such change is dependent on many factors, not least of which is the social environment into which post TC prisoners are released. Family and other intimate relationships, community, employment, housing play a major part in maintaining improved behaviour and outcomes. All of these are of course out of the control of the TC and the CJS generally but may be implicated in the behaviour of those who fail to make long term progress.

Reconviction

Overall, there was as at 2008, a 47.8% reconviction rate for former TC prisoners, (this is overall and important does not take into account those who went back into the mainstream prison system, or were released at, (or soon after), their TC experience). This compares with a general rate of reconviction of between 54.5% - 58% of the general prison population, (Kershaw et al 1999, and Ministry of justice 2008). Of equal significance is that whilst TC reconviction rates peaked within a year of release and then declined rapidly, general reconviction rates increased over time.

It is of interest to understand the 'profile' of a 'TC reoffender':

- Likely to have served more prison sentences than non-offenders
- Likely to reoffend within 2 months of release and within one year

- Likely to have served less than 18 months in the TC
- Aged 31-40
- Likely to be back in prison due to breach of license

Of importance is that:

- There were no reports of serious violent offending and only one of sexual reoffending
- 87% reoffended within one year of release
- 70% of reoffenders had not served the full two years in the TC and had spent less than 18 months there, (suggesting a 'treatment dosage' effect)

(Brown. Miller et al 2014 p 227)

Who/what Benefits most/least from the TC?

According to Brown & Millar sex offenders had the most challenging experience in the TC and susceptible to 'early drop out'. (Miller and Brown et al p248). Interestingly, the toleration of sex offenders and the degree of understanding of their offence, whilst not condoned, demonstrated an understanding of life histories. Those who were able to connect with others, and overcome barriers to behaviour change, were more likely to complete therapy and overcome personal setbacks. Clearly, the converse was found to be true of other prisoners.

Prisoners in the TC developed a wider timeline in terms of their lives, and strived to avoid the mistakes of the past, as one former prisoner stated: "I'm still trying to get used to this 'new me' which sometimes I don't recognise and that in in (in Brown. Miller et al 2014 p 251)

The use of violence and drugs reduced, "As I wake up I say to myself, today I'm not going to use drugs" (in Brown. Miller et al 2014 p 252)

Taking responsibility for why they received a prison sentence, one former prisoner said: "For years I used to blame my old man... There's no excuse, that's what I dealt with in Dovegate"

I'll conclude this paper here with the comments of TC prisoners, and register my thanks and reference to Brown J, Miller S, Northey S and O'Neill D for their work which I have unapologetically referred to, paraphrased, quoted, and largely based this paper on. I have chosen to do this to give an overview of the development, philosophy, practices, and outcomes of Dovegate TC that they presented in their book, 'What Works in Therapeutic Prisons - Evaluating Psychological Change in Dovegate Therapeutic Community', and which I found as detailed nowhere else.

This paper is intended to be read by those who have attended the Scottish Quaker Criminal Justice Network Event, (2022), and heard my own account of working with prisoners within the TC as a Tutor for the Open University, and who wish to have a greater insight into a TC. I also hope that it may help friends understand why we as Quakers need to understand that there are positive alternatives to the present system of incarceration based on care, rehabilitation, and therapy, rather than isolation, punishment, and retribution.

Advocates of prison abolition, (like myself), are often misunderstood as promoting an 'easy path' and letting criminals 'get away' without punishment. As an abolitionist I support the need for a redirecting of criminal justice to deliver non-custodial sentencing which as well as fulfilling a need for the community to believe offenders have been 'dealt with' effectively, also delivers a positive pathway for those who contravene societies laws. Such non-custodial sentencing can, and should, include many of the interventions that the TC uses, and which have proved effective. However, I also recognise the need for the most dangerous offenders to be removed from society, (for whatever period), but instead of being the subjects of punishment, isolation and more 'trauma', they should be 'treated', 'cared for' in a positive and life changing 'prison'...the TC, or something very like it.

"When I got my head into thinking in a different way...I wanted to change"
(in Brown. Miller et al 2014 p 252)

References

Brown J, Miller S, Northey S and O'Neill D, 'What Works in Therapeutic Prisons - Evaluating Psychological Change in Dovegate Therapeutic Community', 2014, London, Palgrave-MacMillan,

Cullen, E., Jones, L, & Woodward, R,. (Eds) (1997), Therapeutic Communities for Offenders. Chichester: Wiley.

Duckworth, R, (2011). Next Steps for Dovegate, in E, Cullen, & J, MacKenzie (eds), Dovegate: a therapeutic Community in a Private Prison and Developments in Therapeutic Work with Personality disordered Offenders. Hook, Waterside Press

Kershaw, C, Goodman, J, & White, S, (1999), Reconvictions for Offenders Sentenced or Discharged from Prison in 1995, England and Wales. Research development and Statistics Directorate, research Findings (no 101). London: HMSO

Ministry of Justice (2008) Re-offending of Adults; New Measures of Re-offending 200-2005 England and Wales. Ministry of Justice Statistical Bulletin. London: Ministry of Justice

Woodward, R, Cullen, C, Hemmings, M, Moore, C, Chekwas, E, Angeli, G, & Jameson, A. (2000). Dovegate Therapeutic Community: Staff Training Manual. London: Home Office

Created May 2022

Artwork and layout by Ren Clark

