

Finding the meaning in meaningful activity



Deborah Murphy HMP Pentonville

David Murtagh – HMP Worwood scrubs

Lead Occupational therapists and daycare managers

What gives our life meaning?

- Activities – leisure, productive, caring for/ treating ourselves
- Roles in our life
- Identity
- Self esteem
- A sense of success
- Values
- Relationships
- Achievement
- Recognition
- Spirituality
- Belonging



The “prisoner” journey - Where they came from

- Trauma
- Abuse
- Underachievement in education
- Communities with lack of opportunities
- Lack of experience that provides vision
- Limited exploration of leisure
- Isolation/ ostracised from family (care system)
- Antisocial peer groups
- Poor life skills
- Damaged attachments
- Poor coping skills – difficulty regulating emotions
- Possibly success from antisocial pursuits

Finding meaning in crime

- Something to be good at
- Financial rewards - status
- Being looked up to
- Being part of something bigger
- A social group – somewhere to belong
- Peer approval
- Safety needs – self protection
- A purpose – a structure
- Equalling social injustice/ revenge
- Doing your bit for the community



Prison life at its worst

- Cellular confinement – struggling with endless focus on internal phenomena
- Lack of activity to punctuate day - boredom
- Poor access to library and high levels of illiteracy
- TV can be difficult to access
- Social networks – who can get what from whom, bullying, trading, the hunter and the prey
- Impoverished days and impoverished interactions – transactional.
- Absence of former roles – reduced to being a “prisoner”
- Depersonalised, dehumanised, traumatised
- Suppression of self as a survival strategy

Making meaning in prison

- Independent - Mans innate desire to be creative - historical use of what's available. Creativity to pass time, collaboration.
- Structured activities – work, education, therapeutic services, programmes, prisoner support roles – reading, mentoring, listening etc.
- Antisocial pursuits - amusing self with bullying, violence, disorder, NPS/ spice, heroin, ebbing time away.



Chaplaincy based prayer, meditation and courses

In cell – Challenge - security

Man's innate desire to create



Activity in prison – Is it meaningful?

- **Education** - Valuable for those who can succeed - short courses, oversubscribed, challenge for some to be in classroom, rigid curriculum, illiteracy, shame, fear of failure, lack of interest. Negative entries for non attendance due to lack of confidence interest
- **Work roles** - Limited availability, pressures from other prisoners, issues with authority - ran by officers, favouritism, difficulties getting security clearance if behaviour is disturbed (many traumatised prisoners act out violently). Negative entries and they lose their role if problems, no work on reparation and developing, no 'soft skills' training. Case study.
- **Vocation based training/ workshops** - Can be meaningful or repetitive labour - skills suited to practicality rather than academic suits some, structure/ something to do, where does it fit with hopes and dreams. Are wider needs met to prepare for moving on?
- **Peer type roles**— insiders, mentors, listeners, mediators

- Community services - linking people up for work, some excellent services and willing employers, but service users double stigmatised - ?realistic chances in work force diminish. Hope V's Reality of current job market
- Are we feed into a broader societal view that work is the only thing that truly defines us, the thing that gives us status and fulfilment. If so what if they fail at this, crime likely to become the obvious other option for status and fulfilment.
- We need to widen ours and their perspective regarding what it is to lead a meaningful life outside of a work role.



What's the alternative?

- Structured holistic services
- Occupational therapy day service model.
- Limited history of occupation in prisons so we are starting from scratch. experimenting
- What do we provide and why?

Graded activities concurrent with person skills (practical, intrapersonal, interpersonal)

‘Entry level’ of activities’ – often creative – art, music, pottery

Direct skill teaching – skills for daily living – Budgeting, cooking, domestic skills

Skills for managing emotions - coping etc but more than that from 'hidden curriculum'.

A Wellbeing/ Daycare model & Occupational Therapy

- What we are doing, why we are doing it, what skills are we providing?
- It's not the activity necessarily but the relationship formed working side by side day by day
- Trust forms allowing the men to reveal hidden aspects of personality, they allow you to see them and they therefore see themselves
- Reducing barriers to a meaningful life



Belonging needs

- Community responsibility and belonging
- Accepted as a part of community
- Have a voice in the community's development
- A sense of responsibility and ownership for environment, each other and self is engendered
- Making items for family, considering family



Recovering/ developing a sense of self

- Help consider their range of feeling when in cell, when in activity - get more familiar with their internal weather
- Where you can dare to be yourself - drop the mask /bravado
- Develop sense of agency – choices, decision making, guide direction/ success of groups
- None of us are solely defined by the worst things we have done - finding acceptance
- Developing trust to accept more difficult parts of self.
- Humanising environment
- Develop self esteem and confidence through success in activities - grading
- Coming outside of role of prisoner – artist, group member, musician
- Finding a reason to stay alive

Structured routine

- Punctuating day - something to talk about breaks monotony of prison life - Become somebody with a life and purpose again
- Getting into flow

Develop skills for life

- Cognitive skills practice – concentration/ attention etc.
- Skills for daily living
- CBT style groups
- Skills for daily living
- Healthy living – physical and emotional

Exploring interests -developing leisure

- Supported Vocational roles
- Finding creativity
- Considering future options



Role modelling

- The use of self disclosure - living vicariously through you to access world outside/ want to understand how people live their lives
- Something to lose – having consequences shapes more positive behaviour
- Pro-social behaviour and responses modelled - being real. We also can't hide behind mask four hours a day every day, how humans are, less than perfect role models



Interpersonal skills

A place where social interaction can form in a different manner than on the wings

Relationships flourish that go back to the wings in the form of support

Breaking and repairing relationships - the suspension process

Exploring emotions

Showing vulnerability in a safe place

Peer led groups

Hearing voices group

Mood/anger/ anxiety

