

Identity Change, Spirituality and Desistance from Crime: The Belief in Change Programme

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Belief in Change is a faith informed reintegration programme for medium to high risk offenders. It is being piloted in two sites started in 2011: in HMP Risley it is being trialled as a 6 month, and at HMP Channings Wood as a 12 month programme through the European Social Fund. It has been accredited for pilot by the Correctional Services Accreditation Panel.

It is a structured community, based on a wing in each prison. Although drawing on insights from the therapeutic community movement, the Belief in Change Community is not closed - the idea is that participants also pursue work, education and other activities within the wider prison so that they have the chance to try out the new approaches to life and relationships that they are learning within the context of the programme.

Woven into the ethos is a view that Faith and Spirituality can be a key element in supporting people on the journey of change, although there is no expectation that participants will be formally religious - rather that they should be open to insights from the faith and humanistic traditions that point to a different set of values by which to live and practices that support such values.

The focus is on positive reintegration back into the community by developing supportive links with faith communities, families, formal mentors and statutory agencies. Two key outcomes of the programme are that on release, participants will have a support network in the community, and a detailed Life Plan to support them in their journey to desist from crime.

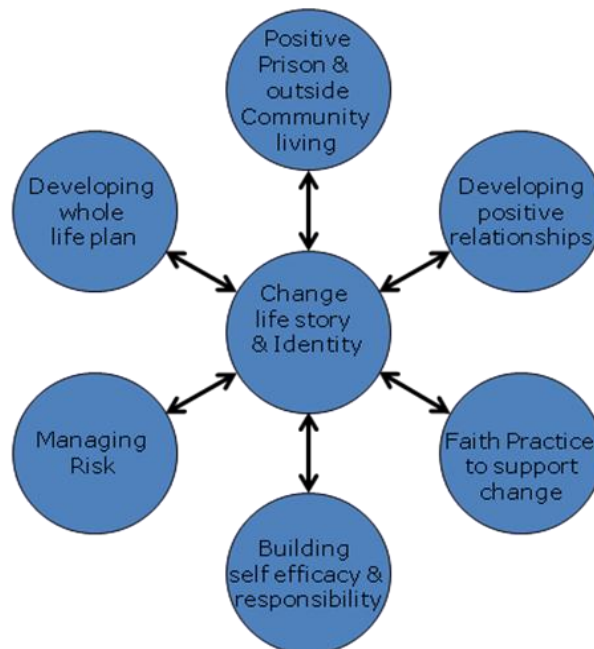
The programme was developed with a view towards formal accreditation and so is clearly manualised and delivered to specific standards with quality assurance being key. However, given that it is a pilot programme, there is the capacity for responsive development e.g. the capacity to look at the pros and cons of a 6 versus 12 month model of delivery.

Whilst there have been other faith based programmes delivered, the specification here was to develop an 'in house' programme with an explicit value base, one that was truly multi-faith, with integrity, combined faith and psychological approaches, that was to a standard that would be consistent with accreditation, firmly grounded in empirical theory and with robust evaluation. The programme draws on good practice and builds on the strengths of existing models from across the world.

A number of theories have been drawn upon in the design of Belief in Change. The Risk/Need Model focuses on the risks an offender needs to manage and how these needs may be met. An example in the programme might be a person who poses a risk by virtue of their temper and through the programme they learn to look at how to manage their anger in a variety of ways. People who come on the programme are likely to have already done some

courses to address their risk. For some participants some of the programme will be a reminder of what they already know but can be valuable revision as they prepare for release. Also, the men have appreciated the holistic context within which, for example anger management is set so they feel it about them as people rather just about the risk they may pose. Another key model is the work on Desistance. This explores what factors help to support an offender on the journey to desist from crime. Within the programme, the modules focussing on relationships, family life and building productive lives on release draw on these ideas. Narrative is also key to change. Participants are given a number of opportunities both to review their story but also to begin to think of writing a fresh chapter. In the programme they hear many stories of transformation from the faith/spiritual traditions as well as from inspirational speakers who attend the morning meetings. Participants are also encouraged to explore moral behaviour both through pro-social modelling drawing on the examples of staff and volunteers, and also through developing their own 'Golden Rule'. Evidence shows that in the process of rehabilitation, moral reasoning can be a helpful tool if it is used in an exploratory way with participants rather than simply giving a list of dos and don'ts. The course draws on insights from the faith/spiritual traditions about human flourishing that in turn have influenced practices in positive psychology. For example, participants learn about meditation and relaxation but not in a way that is rooted in any one tradition. They are also signposted to contemplative practices within their own traditions. The course at no point aims at syncretism but rather honours and celebrates the 'dignity of difference' to quote the Chief Rabbi.

The diagram illustrates the dimensions of the programme supporting a new life story: The programme is rooted in empirical research such as the 'what works' literature that underpins



the work of the Correctional Services Accreditation Panel. There are also meta-analytic studies demonstrating that faith and spiritual practices are linked with lower levels of

antisocial behaviour. There is good evidence that faith can be a significant factor in the successful outcome of substance abuse programmes. Research also shows that religiosity can increase positive adjustment and decrease misconduct in a prison context. Work demonstrating the power of the therapeutic relationship especially around motivational interviewing also influenced the development of the programme and staff training. The programme makes clear use of the insights from the work of the social exclusion unit on the needs of offenders that led to the development of the seven pathways from offending, relating to accommodation, education and employment, health, drugs and alcohol, finance, children and families and attitudes/thinking and behaviour.

The aims of the Belief in Change can be summarised as follows:

- To facilitate change through the development of faith and spiritual affiliation.
- To use a holistic approach to bring about change.
- To provide an environment that challenges anti-social behaviour but incorporates compassion and respect.
- To provide an environment that encourages peer support and a sense of community.
- To encourage participants to take responsibility for the aspects of their lives of which they have control, to acknowledge the harm they have done or do to others and make appropriate reparation.
- To provide the opportunity to gain knowledge and learn skills that will help them in all aspects of their lives.
- To provide the opportunity for participants to build strong support networks that will help them 'stay on track' once they have left the programme in prison.
- To encourage community engagement with offenders by using volunteers from faith and community groups.
- To provide a structured programme cohesive with other prison activities and interventions.
- To encourage participants to live constructive lives in custody and on release by working, self improvement and 'healthy' use of leisure time.
- To achieve collaborative working approach between staff, volunteers and participants.

The target group for the programme is the prolific career criminal and for the pilot study, adult males. They are medium to high risk aged, ideally between 25 and 40 with multiple offences. Whilst they need not acknowledge their index offence, they do need to be open about some history of antisocial behaviour. At present the course is not open to men with a history of sexual offending.

There is no requirement for participants to be religious but they need to have come to a point in their lives where they are open to examining questions of life's meaning and purpose, and be open to hearing stories from across the traditions that may challenge them about their own choices, suggesting other ways of approaching life, setting goals and developing priorities that will support living an offence-free life.

The aims of the programme are:

Offending-Related Aims:

- **Reduce Reoffending**
- **Participants take responsibility for their anti-social behaviour and understand the impact on others.**
- **Participants develop skills, which contribute to addressing and managing their risk of reoffending.**
- **Participants develop pro-social life goals that benefit themselves, their families and communities**

Holistic Aims:

- **Participants adjust the personal meaning to their lives, ensuring it is pro-social**
- **Participants explore their faith and spirituality with potential for personal transformation.**
- **To develop in participants, volunteers, and staff a sense of 'community' incorporating service to others.**
- **To bring social cohesion between participants from different Faiths.**
- **Participants reintegrate into society successfully and pro-socially by development of support networks in their own faith and wider community.**

Elements of the programme that draw explicitly on the spiritual traditions include the idea of community, and the programme has been influenced by the idea of retreat. The community on the Wing is one in which the men seek to serve, having a variety of jobs to support the life of the Wing. They are also encouraged to look at the outside community and consider forms of voluntary work on release as part of the means by which they make reparation. As noted, participants are introduced to contemplative practices and are encouraged to develop a regular reflective practice consistent with their own tradition. Each site has a library of inspirational texts that participants are invited to study. They are encouraged to both see the

benefit of and practice forgiveness, empathy and love. They are also invited to see the value of discipline and a rule of life to guide them when things can become challenging. It is hoped that through the programme participants may have a stronger sense of hope for a different future and glimpse something of the serenity that can come from living a more holistic life.

The participants are encouraged to keep a journal as a means of reflecting at the day's end. One of the practices that they are invited to consider is based on the Examen of Consciousness of St Ignatius, when participants are encouraged imaginatively to play back the events of the day, spot the highs and lows, see what can be learned from these and how tomorrow could be better. They enter in their journals what they have learned and what they will seek to do differently in the particular situation next time it arises. As noted they also practice the three blessings exercise to take time to notice what 'blessings' they have received each day and so cultivate an 'attitude of gratitude' rather than one marked by feelings of entitlement.

In summary, a number of methods are used to support offenders on the journey of change including the following:

- Structured Life Skills Sessions (40 x 2 hour sessions) - see below
- Run as a community (participants, staff, and volunteers). A part of a Wing is set aside for the Belief in Change Community and participants take responsibility for both the practical work to support the community such as organising the morning meetings and also for the 'decoration' of the group rooms; there are a number of opportunities within the programme for creativity that include painting and drawing to decorate the group rooms and writing poems or inspirational verses that can be put on the walls
- Personal Coaching (16 x 1 hour individual sessions). This gives participants the chance to work to identify their personal aims and make plans to achieve them. The goals are designed to be short/medium and long term, to take the participant 'through the gate' and intended to be holistic and practical, such as learning how to write a CV, or around learning about an aspect of their spiritual practice and finding ways to make it a natural part of their daily lives
- Journaling (daily, structured and unstructured). At the beginning of the programme there is a suggested format for the journal including reflecting on what has gone well during the day and what hasn't worked out as planned, and how to address this building on the reflection on the day's end exercise as well as noting any reactions to the Life Skills Sessions. As the programme progresses, they are encouraged to find a way of using the journal that is helpful to them so that it becomes a means of making reflection a natural part of their lives; they may include drawing or poetry as part of their journal. Although they are able to discuss their journal as part of the coaching process, it is seen as a private resource for personal reflection and something they are encouraged to keep upon release.
- Work, education and charity. Although there are some similarities with a therapeutic community, in this programme the Wing is not a closed community and participants

attend work/education. These are opportunities to try out skills learned on the programme and to explore with people in other parts of the prison a person's evolving identity on a journey away from crime and towards a new future with new priorities and values. This will be difficult upon release, and being able to experience these challenges within the supportive environment of the community allows participants to develop strategies to cope that will help them later. They are also able to attend gym sessions designed to complement the programme that are designed to foster cooperation and develop leadership rather than simply being centred on weight training. Participants are encouraged to see work as reparative - a way of giving back - and in due course demonstrating to the wider community that they have changed; they are also encouraged to take an interest in a charity of their choice.

- Daily reflection time. There are times when participants are locked up for roll checks. Instead of simply going to sleep or watching TV, members are encouraged to use them as times of reflection on the day as it is progressing and to plan for the rest of the day's activities; again, this is geared to helping them manage time more creatively following release.
- Faith and Spiritual Study. The spiritual traditions teach the value of 'spiritual reading' as way of developing the person - filling the mind with positive thoughts and stories that support the person in their growth. Given the fact that many in prison tend to read crime fiction that would not support them in developing a new identity, both sites have libraries of inspirational books, faith and non-faith based, and participants are encouraged to read these as a way of changing habits that will support them on their journey of change upon release.
- Faith Fellowship Groups. If there are a number of people from a particular faith community within the programme, there is the opportunity to meet together to explore what their particular faith community would teach on the topics within the Life Skill sessions.
- Spiritual Advisors from Chaplaincy Team. The chaplaincy team is available as a resource to participants and staff both in the provision of faith teaching within the Life Skill sessions and pastorally, as some of the themes are particularly challenging. Examples would include exploring experiences of loss and of parenting.
- Personal Stories and Public Commitments to Change. At the beginning of the programme, participants are invited to tell their personal story as part of the morning meeting; they are supported in doing this by staff members who have also gone through this themselves as part of their training in order to experience how difficult it is; later in the programme they revisit their personal story and combine it with a statement of reparation, setting out how they feel they have changed, intend to move forward and make amends, as well as what their hopes are for the future. Clearly, this echoes the practice of testimony in some spiritual traditions and part of its strength is that by being public, it makes participants accountable to the community for keeping their word.

- Mentoring and support from the wider community via volunteers. This is crucial to the success of the course and each site has a reintegration manager responsible for the recruitment of volunteers and their training. Offenders generally find the involvement of volunteers really encouraging, as they are surprised that people would give their free time up to spend it with them. Some volunteers will be involved in on-Wing activities but some explicitly offer to train as 'through the gate mentors' to meet the participant upon release and help them negotiate the first few weeks when they are out, a crucial time for setting a direction away from crime and addiction. If the person wishes to join a faith community upon release, then contacts are made with the receiving community to ensure they can properly support the participant.
- Reintegration and Life Planning - from the above the focus upon reintegration and preparing for release is clear. In the Life Skill Sessions this is also a theme to ensure participants experience the whole programme as providing them with a chance to do things differently, as they will have already experienced release and the challenges that go with it, but have ended up back inside.

During the programme, participants take part in forty-two one hourly Life Skill sessions. They are designed both to meet specific areas of risk such as impulse control, and to help members to have a holistic vision of an offence-free life and the skills/knowledge to sustain this. Most sessions contain a variety of teaching methods including group work, role play, drama and stories from faith/spiritual traditions to enable reflection as well as direct teaching of new skills.

Module 1: Preparing for Change: Beginning the Journey

Participants are encouraged to explore change as a journey; like all journeys there are setbacks, moments of insight, times of boredom, moments of challenge. To make a journey there is a need for preparation, so included in the module are some skills that will support participants on their journey and stories from faith traditions that encourage participants to recognise that by persevering and overcoming obstacles then it is possible to live a different sort of life in the future. They also need to recognise that 'if you always do what you've always done, then you'll always get what you've always got'. In other words, if they want a new sort of life then they need to make changes now. This module works synergistically with the early coaching sessions and the work on the life plan. Through stories such as that of the Exodus, they are encouraged to explore just what their own personal 'promised land' will be like.

Module 2: Relationships

Drawing on insights from both faith/spiritual traditions and psychology that emphasise loving oneself is integral to being able to love others, the module begins by exploring the roots of self-esteem, how this may be nurtured in ourselves and how we can encourage it in others. The module goes on to explore what makes a good friendship; how to recognise one and how to be a good friend. For many participants, their relationships will have been marked by

instrumentality and be conditional. So the idea of sticking with someone through good and bad times because they matter in and of themselves is stressed. This is important since positive social relationships are crucial in maintaining desistance from crime. With this foundation the module then goes on to explore intimate relationships and how these may be deepened and challenges met in a creative way.

Module 3: Health and Wellbeing

The module begins by introducing participants to a key theme in the humanistic/spiritual traditions - namely an 'attitude of gratitude', to use a well-known phrase of Zig Ziglar, the motivational coach. The three blessing exercise from positive psychology resonates with spiritual practice¹. Giving thanks for three things in an explicit way at the end of each day is good both for mood and for a shift in perception towards seeing life as gift. The notion of the body as a temple is explored in the context of advice around diet and exercise, complemented with the involvement of staff from the gym.

Module 4: Productive Living

The first part of this module explores the need for restoration using the story of the Prodigal Son as a non-threatening way to explore the impact of behaviour on others and how broken relationships can be healed. The Sikh concept of Tanakah is also introduced. This is a mode of restorative justice focussing on the way an offender is reintegrated into the community. The module also tackles practical issues around time management and the skills needed to work and live productively.

Module 5: Parenting and Family Life

Recognising that many offenders have themselves had difficult parenting experiences, the module explores their own understanding of being a parent and especially of being a dad and then goes on to find innovative approaches to parenting and the legacy that participants would like to leave as parents. For those who are not dads, the module provides skills both to be a good 'uncle' or simply to be supportive to friends with children.

Module 6: Resources and Social Networks

The module is practical in providing skills around budgeting and financial management. However, it explores this from a humanistic/faith/spiritual point of view - what it means to have enough, rather than seeing striving for more as being an end in itself. The module also seeks to draw together themes from across the course through a session on meaning derived from the work of the psychiatrist and holocaust survivor, Victor Frankl.

¹ Seligman, Martin. (2011) Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being Free Press: Reprint Edition

Summary

Belief in Change is a holistic programme that seeks to offer offenders a chance to change their story in a positive way by writing a new chapter that is crime-free and positive for themselves, their family and friends and their community.

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We express our gratitude to the European Social Fund who made the development and piloting of the programme possible, to Lynette Emmanuel for her work on Reintegration, the Delivery teams in Channings Wood and Risley, and most of all to the participants who are seeking to live the vision of a faith-informed community on a daily basis.