

## PRISON AND AFTERWARDS — A personal view

Prisons aim (a) to hold prisoners securely, (b) to act humanely, decently and lawfully towards them and (c) to reduce the risk of re-offending. However well prisons may succeed with (a) and perhaps (b) they don't do (c) very well. I say prisons can do better, and that we ought to recognise their success in reduced rates of re-offending by people they have held in custody.

Some say we can't hold prisons responsible for behaviour after release: they have no authority or power once men have left. Now consider this: do you think that Jesus Christ, or Mohammad, or Ghandi, or even Christopher Hitchens, have no influence on the thoughts and behaviour of people who heard them? Do you think that parental discipline and love has no lasting effect on children? Do you think that "no-one forgets a good teacher" is bunk? Do you think that men's experience in their regiment and war service does not affect them after they leave the army? If you think any of those things then you have not much time for inspiration, family, education, or training.

There is a problem with rehabilitation: the break in personal interest and caring when a prisoner leaves prison. So if our aim is to startle everyone by improving the life chances of released prisoners, cut crime, make better use of our best national resource (people), and reduce the cost of prisons, then we must persuade the prisons and the criminal justice world generally to address aim (c) more seriously. I submit that progress could be made with aim (c) by bridging the gap between prison and post release support. There may be many ways of doing that. I propose two: (i) allow official prison visitors (OPVs) to see people after release; and then eventually (ii) establish a distinct group of volunteers with an explicit mission for rehabilitation.

Some OPVs definitely want to avoid contact with released men. So in my view we must eventually establish a new force of dedicated volunteers (big society by all means) who do want to bridge the gap and show continuing love and caring and help and support for people in prison after release, properly empowered to access willing prison inmates whilst in custody, as well as a full range of support services outside.

To achieve that will require the enthusiasm of ordinary prison staff as well as key influencers in criminal justice. And that will come only if these people start from personal conviction or with an open mind, and if the contribution of prisons, as well as others in criminal justice, is recognised and congratulated.

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For a Scottish view on rehabilitation see <http://bit.ly/hF68dm>

From Australia, see <http://bit.ly/dZfkOB> particularly the para "What needs to be done?"

For research highlighting cycles of recidivism see <http://bit.ly/fYv5wD> especially Slide 9