

## **Responsivity in Supervision: Enlisting offenders as agents for change**

### ***Notes from group 3***

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Initial questions we were to focus on:

- Emotional literacy in staff supervision and the management of the organisation –building an emotionally literate workplace?
  - How will relationships be affected by ever decreasing amount of (1:1) time spent by officers with offenders? (Guardian survey West Mercia 13%)
1. In response to these questions participants suggested that their training had not really addressed emotional literacy or the emotional dimension to the work. Off-loading and sharing of emotions was largely through peers and colleagues.
  2. Generally suggested that the emotional focus and pressure of the work was not something discussed within **supervision** –largely for fear that this might be interpreted as weakness and an inability to cope. This was echoed by someone working in YOTs where they did not want to reveal weakness to their manager.
  3. One person suggested that supervision felt in many ways ‘as a waste of time’ e.g. checking that MAPPA requirements had been met. SPOs seen as too busy and too pre-occupied by performance management to be prepared or concerned about practice with certain ‘cases’. “I’d like to talk to you about x but we need to check that ... has been done”. Another illustration was ‘SPO asks “is everything okay?” as they pass through the office in the morning but somehow I don’t think they want me to say no they just want to appear more human!’
  4. KF suggested that if practice was not shared, challenged and supported through supervision then this was potentially ‘organisationally dangerous’ and not indicative of ‘defensible decision-making’. One person suggested that they felt that the organisation was not behind them. “You learn who you can trust”. Some illustrated trust building through ‘breakfast meetings with coffee, croissants and support’. Also team building through sharing ‘downtime’ – socialising, going for a drink after work. This may be helpful to workers but if it’s the only source of emotional support this can lead to dangerous practice though, for example, collusive unchallenging relationships which exist outside formal structures. There should be a place for both.
  5. PSOs suggested that they often worried about their skills; ‘am I doing it right?’ ‘Do I have appropriate communication skills?’ as there was very little observation and feedback about individual practice. Few opportunities to be mentored or do co-working. They acknowledged that being observed can be

scary but it was both positive and negative and was a valuable source of feedback. It was recognised that, by contrast with accredited programmes which were recorded and looked at so that quality of work was maintained, there was little observation of 1 to 1 work. PSOs felt left to fend for themselves and exposed to a whole range of offenders. One person noted that as a TPO she was not allowed to work with sexual offenders whereas as a PSO this had been common place.

6. On the issue of **face to face work with offenders**, it was suggested that offenders know you are 'pushed for time' so they too mask that everything is alright; this gives you the chance to 'get back to the work' –the work is doing the paperwork rather than seeing the offenders. Seeing offenders gets in the way of the work! Average length of interview is 15 mins, one person suggested. Issue currently isn't high caseloads but the volume of paperwork that goes with each case.
7. Generally felt that the emotional dimension of the work was less to be evident in formal interviews with offenders. Discussion about the importance of the environment where the atmosphere was a little more informal and where there could be social groups e.g. in hostels, church halls. Is the role of the OM to signpost to other services or to develop a relationship that created motivation? Discussed the issue of the relationships and dependency –could the relationship result in the offender not changing? (this was in response to Jenny Roberts' input which suggested that education, peer support and choice could potentially empower women rather than through one-to-one casework) Worker had to be sensitive to issues of dependency –whose needs were being met through the supervisory relationship?
8. Again there was reference to the fear of being seen as weak –this time with colleagues –need to feel that you were 'hard' with offenders and that you could be tough, hold them to account and not be manipulated. It was recognised that if you wanted to help the offender build both human and social capital then this took time. In the current structure if an offender disclosed a risk or if risks in a situation increased then the case might be transferred to a more qualified practitioner. Concern was that this meant the loss of the current relationship and all the getting to know the person by the new supervisor whereas co-working might help both the development of the less experienced worker but also to avoid the feeling of being passed on for the offender. Question raised was whether the Offender Engagement Programme currently being explored by NOMS might produce a change in practice standards and approaches for one to one work.

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