

Seminar 3: Notes from discussion group 1.

Brian Stout Chair Tina Eadie Notes

General agreement that it had been a useful morning.

Q1: Is denial not a risk factor? The challenge of working with sex offenders in denial and supporting desistance (maintaining relationships)

It had been agreed that Mark Farmer would be asked to say something more in response to this in the plenary.

There was some agreement in the group that denial could be a risk factor if, for example, it meant an individual could not undertake a particular programme.

There are many reasons for denial and different perspectives were outlined:

- Straight denial – "I didn't do it" / "It wasn't me".
- Partial denial – some part of behaviour admitted but not all.
- Taking the blame – "It wasn't really me – I did it to protect x"
- Minimalising – "Yes I did it but nothing much happened" or person attempts to minimise the outcome of the behaviour.

Members of the group were asked if they themselves challenged denial. Various responses including discussing behaviour in the third person to take the focus off of the individual in the room.

Brian noted that Maruna's research suggested that workers should focus on how a person is living his or her life *now i.e* is the offending behaviour continuing? Maruna suggests that an offender who regards him or herself as essentially a 'good' person who was led astray' is less likely to reoffend. This relates to a positive self-image and links to social as well as human capital as discussed by Mark Farmer. This poses a challenge as denial / minimisation is usually regarded as a negative rather than a positive officers can feel that their work with someone has not been a success if s/he continues to deny committing the offence or the extent of their involvement. This moves us away from previous and more traditional approaches of working with an individual's denial. It was noted in the group that the skill of 'rolling with resistance' can be hard when working with someone who remains in denial for a long period of time. Another point was made that if someone continues to deny the offence or the part they played in it there is a tendency to feel that the work has not been a success, even if the individual is not re-offending and completes the order.

Q2: How might practitioners do more on social capital?

Some people in the group had not come across the term 'social capital' before today. Some resources in the different Areas represented were mentioned – e.g. Volunteers in Grantham who offered cookery classes and others who had developed an allotment which offenders were encouraged to use. Some people in the group felt there was a limited knowledge of community resources in their teams and Areas. The community profile of a team seemed to be becoming more

important once more. The point was made that although the information was valuable, community profiles needed to be kept up-to-date and this task was in addition to supervisory requirements and offending behaviour work.

Q3: A Guardian Survey was undertaken re. the percentage of time spent working 1:1 with offenders. How will relationships be affected by an ever-decreasing amount of time spent by officers with offenders. [West Mercia 13% of time working 1:1]

The lack of time spent working directly with offenders rang bells with members of the group. Examples of napo and some senior management groups taking steps to look at this further were given. The amount of repetition relating to some administrative tasks and the constant logging of information was given as reasons for the lack of time for 1:1 work. It was recognised that a session might be brought to a close due to the amount of administrative work an officer knew had to be completed that day. Those who appeared to be living offence-free lives were likely to be given substantially less time than those for whom a planned 45-60 minute session was required.

Q4: Emotional Literacy within staff supervision and the management of the organisation – building an emotionally literate workplace.

Some members of the group acknowledged that the term 'emotional literacy' was new to them. There was a general view that officers discussed feelings about the work with colleagues rather than managers as they felt the former were more likely to understand what they were experiencing – whether a specific issue or more generally the pressures of the job. People recognised that open plan offices made it easier to talk with colleagues / debrief from a difficult interview but the extent to which this takes place can depend on seating arrangements. The point was also made that informal support networks can be disrupted when a decision is made to restructure the office and move people around. A final comment was made about how much an offender can move forward following a very emotional interview but the organisation does not recognise that emotional responses by staff can also be positive. It tends to try to keep the lid on feelings at work.