

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA

To gain a greater understanding of program delivery and broader systemic issues relating to the treatment of sexual offenders.

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2000 Churchill Fellow

INTRODUCTION

In early 2000 I attended a meeting with Hal Fry of Rotary as a first step in applying for the Group Study Exchange program. Given my field of employment Hal suggested that a Churchill Fellowship would be more beneficial as I could tailor the program to suit my needs. Hurriedly, I submitted an application and to my surprise was successful in achieving what I had considered to be one of the most prestigious awards offered in the country! As such, I would like to extend my gratitude and thanks to a large number of people. Firstly to Hal Fry and my referees Professor Don Thomson, and Psychologists Katalin Kraszlan, and Denise Cull. A very special thank you must also go to my mentor and great support, Judy Lazarus. As for those who assisted in making my trip so memorable, the list is too large to detail. So in summary, my thanks go to the following people and their teams: Steve Hudson, Bill Marshall, Anita Schlank, Barbera Schwarz, Janis Bremer, Ruth Mann, Alex Spencer, and Allan Boath. All of these people coordinated my time with them to ensure I obtained the most global perspective of their service and those services offered by other sexual offender treatment services in their State or country. Not only did they arrange a program for me, but arranged accommodation - more often than not with them at their homes. This was a bonus as the trip I mapped out for myself involved 14 flights, and in most cases visits at the equivalent of Australian outback locations! Not to mention the cost of hotel accommodation with the Aussie dollar doing so poorly! The occasional home cooked meal, pets, children, décor and atmosphere superior to that of very average hotel rooms was very much appreciated very soon after leaving Australia! An integral part of my trip of course was to enjoy what the countries had to offer over and above prisons and sex offenders! And that I did. However, in hindsight, I should have heeded the advice given to me by Steve Hudson - namely to attend programs maybe two to three days per week, use one day to write notes, and "relax" on the other three. Unfortunately I failed to heed this advice and worked on most days that I was not in the air on my way to the next location. This resulted in illness and extreme tiredness by the time I reached the United Kingdom with still one month to go.

However, from Arthur's Pass in New Zealand to the Kentucky Fried Chicken car park in Manchester avoiding gang warfare, this experience was one of the toughest and most exciting of my life to date. The hospitality of those I encountered, their willingness to share information about their programs and their personal lives humbled and refocussed me.

Although tiring, my confidence in my own skills and knowledge developed and I returned to Australia tired, but keen to inform others of my learnings.

DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

In order to disseminate information I learned whilst on my fellowship I plan to place all materials I obtained on reserve at library of the Office of the Correctional Services Commissioner. I will circulate written summaries of all locations visited to CORE - The Public Correctional Enterprise, specifically Sex Offender Programs, with lists of available materials attached. I will also make this information available to HM Prison Ararat via communication with the Programs Manager. In addition, I plan to forward similar information to the Sex Offender Program in Perth, Western Australia as it is my understanding that they are currently undergoing some changes and may benefit from the information I obtained.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Project Description: To gain a greater understanding of program delivery and broader systemic issues relating to the treatment of sexual offenders.

The provision of treatment for sexual offenders has been the focus of the Wimmera Treatment Unit, HM Prison Ararat for approximately 5 years. Although many years behind other Australian States, during this time the program has developed to become one of Victoria's leading community protection programs as awarded by the Australian Institute of Criminology 2001. Whilst on my Churchill Fellowship I visited a variety of correctional facilities, and attended a large number of sex offender treatment programs with the intention of examining a variety of issues from program delivery and co ordination, through to the impact of systemic issues on treatment integrity and efficacy. Facilities and programs I attended varied from government correctional facilities (Kia Marama, Te Piriti, Massachusetts Treatment Centre, Lino Lakes Correctional Facility, Brixton Prison, Wandsworth Prison, Edinburgh and Peterhead Prisons), mental health institutions (Moose Lake Sex Offender Program), non-government community-based treatment programs (Project Pathfinder), residential programs (Alpha House), and private provider groups (Bill Marshall, Queens University). The majority of these services were selected due to their reputation in the field as providing efficient treatment services, and leading edge research into what works with sexual offenders. Visits to other services such as Project Pathfinder and Alpha House were arranged for me by those who gratefully thought a visit to such institutions and programs would be of benefit.

Despite fundamental differences in program structure, many common factors were identified (through meetings with staff, prisoners and observation) that appeared to impact on the delivery of treatment

programs to sexual offenders. These included resources (staffing, facilities), supervision, staff retention and burnout, weak community program integration, and limited community re-integration of offenders. In general, it is my opinion that the treatment service offered by the Victorian system is heading in the right direction, and is in fact leading the way in some aspects of service provision such as inter-agency communication and integration into both the community corrections and prison systems. However, we can benefit from observing some of the lessons learned by our international counterparts, including the benefit of continued research and development, and of having a strong theoretical basis for intervention.

The main themes identified and major lessons learned will be covered in my report. These include:

1. **The mismatch between Government and community expectations and resourcing for sexual offender intervention programs.**
 - (a) Integration of SOPs into the core business of the supervising Department is essential for program efficacy and success. At a local level the work environment in which sexual offender intervention is conducted must fully embrace the treatment philosophy for such programs to succeed.
 - (b) The management of staff employed to deliver sexual offender treatment programs must be of primary importance to any service provider in order to ensure effective and ethical treatment of offenders.
 - (c) That inter-agency co-operation and information sharing is an essential part of ensuring that risk to the community is minimised.
 - (d) External and internal monitoring of sex offender programs through objective research methods and publication of results is pertinent to increase debate within the field about what works in sexual offender treatment.

LOCATIONS VISITED

- Kia Marama, Special Treatment Unit, Christchurch, New Zealand
- Te Piriti, Special Treatment Unit, Auckland, New Zealand
- Queens University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada
- The Canadian Department of Corrections, Kingston, Ontario, Canada
- Massachusetts Treatment Centre, Bridgewater, Massachusetts
- Minnesota Sex Offender Program, Moose Lake, Minnesota
- Alpha House, St Paul, Minnesota
- Project Pathfinder, St Paul, Minnesota
- Lino Lakes Sex Offender Treatment Program, Lino Lakes Prison, Minnesota
- The Home Office, London, England: Brixton Prison, Wakefield Prison
- The Scottish Prison Service: Edinburgh Prison, Peterhead Prison

SUMMARY OF IDEAS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Government Commitment

- Without absolute government and departmental commitment to intervention programs and the embracing of the respective treatment philosophy such programs are doomed.
- Prisons are the ideal environment in which to commence sexual offender rehabilitation process.
- Commitment to programs to address sexual offending require large budgets, full incorporation into the core business of the supervising department and the local prison (New Zealand, Peterhead, England).
- Adequate and realistic resourcing needs to be provided.
- The treatment philosophy needs to be fully embraced from the top down.
- Prisoners overseas reported that an environment dedicated to sexual offender rehabilitation made the change process easier to embrace (New Zealand, Peterhead, Minnesota).
- Better prison-based reintegration/transition programs will assist in reduction of recidivism in the months immediately following release to the community.
- Better access to programs and services (whilst incarcerated) to assist offenders with securing housing and other essential services well prior to release should be provided by the Government.
- The option of a "half-way" house for offenders to be explored as a further step in transition back into the community.

Staff recruitment, retention, and management

- The SOP is understaffed. Additional resources are required to provide an ethical and effective service.

- The efficacy of Sexual Offender Programs relies on well-recruited, highly trained, and motivated staff. Staff are the linch-pin to therapeutic relationships.
- Examine current recruitment processes rather than cut corners due to departmental pressures. Look at what works overseas rather than reinventing the wheel. Examine recruitment incentives such as financial incentives, training options, trial periods (eg, three months) of employment, and job rotation options, to attract and retain professional staff, to better develop existing staff skills, and increase overall job satisfaction and commitment.
- Develop adequate and well-supervised succession planning schemes to attract and retain higher qualified and motivated staff.
- Consider an increase in SOP staff in both the Community Correctional SOP and the prison-based SOP to accommodate an increase in the number of offenders being given prison terms. Victoria has a small number of therapy staff for a large offender population. The alternative of decreasing the number of programs run per year, or decreasing the services provided by the SOP in Victoria does not appear to be a viable option as it places too much pressure on community resources which are stretched as it is.
- Options for retention include the provision of time out for other duties (eg, multi-skilling, training, research, literature review), mandatory external supervision (funded by the Department), and other job rotation activities. These could be incorporated into staffing budgets in order to recruit and retain staff in this field.
- The provision of assessment teams would substantially reduce the workload of therapy staff, allowing them to focus on treatment-related activities. New Zealand, Canada, Massachusetts, Minnesota, England and Scotland all have assessment teams which locate, interview, psychometrically assess, and provide thorough case formulations to therapy staff. This decreases travel time, time taken to collate information and write reports.

- Personal (external) counselling at core points throughout delivery of sex offender intervention programs for therapy staff (including custodial staff involved in service delivery).
- Video-recording of staff performance (including supervision sessions) to monitor behaviour, attitude change and professional development.
- With thorough training consider the use of other non-professional staff in the delivery of group therapy (eg, programs staff, correctional officers) to overcome problems associated with burnout, and vital information leaving the program when professionals resign. To avoid problems associated with dual management develop protocol at local level to address possible concerns.
- Examine possibility of developing accredited training programs for therapy and correctional staff, which count towards a higher degree or qualification. Departmental support and resources are required here.
- Similarly, correctional staff involved in the SOPs should be adequately trained, supported, rewarded (as opposed to being penalised financially or otherwise), and not removed from core SOP duties to accommodate other areas of the prison service. Correctional staff involved in SOPs need to be supported in focussing on a task which is usually outside of their job description.

Information sharing, Interagency cooperation and throughcare

- The Victorian SOP has a thorough intrastate networking system in place compared to other places I visited. Continue to develop these links through forums, informal meetings, newsletters, sharing of information. Aim to extend these links to interstate counterparts through similar forums.
- Continue to develop throughcare to community correctional services from the prison service.
- Consider staff swaps, information days, and newsletters, so as to establish better links between service providers.

- Development of a variety of treatment or treatment-related programs at various stages through a prison sentence, including voluntary programs/discussion groups.
- Provide prisoners with written information that makes sense to them about intervention and the change process.
- Although convicted aboriginal offender numbers are low, the Victorian system may benefit from approaching an Aboriginal consultant to develop a culturally sensitive component to the treatment program (eg, The Bi-cultural Therapy Model by McFarlane-Nathan). Based on my experience these offenders are usually considered by the Adult Parole Board to have a primary drug and alcohol treatment need, and tend to be disadvantaged in a mainstream treatment group, but are too high functioning to participate in a group for "special needs offenders".
- Better use of treatment "graduates" to assist others in the change process, and to spread accurate information about the programs.
- Provide alternative forms of the treatment content for offenders who have slower information processing skills (eg, tapes) and literacy skills (dictaphone) - of course administrative support is required for this.
- Consider further exploration about the validity and ethical limitations of a National data-base or "tracking system" to increase inter-agency cooperation and supervision of sexual offenders.

Research, development and evaluation

- Research and development require greater priority. Consider the development of a trained research and evaluation team to objectively monitor program effectiveness (maybe through attachment to a Melbourne University) - internal and external evaluation processes required.
- Publication of research results so as to promote discussion and feedback about program delivery and systems. Publish research to put Victoria on the world map.

- Examine the benefits of accreditation: Victoria could benefit from moving towards establishing standards so as to ensure best practice methods are utilised.
- Further exploration of alternatives to incarceration for young and low risk sexual offenders, such as residential facilities, could be one way in which to reduce problems associated with overcrowding of police cells and prisons.