



Prisoner Resettlement

Policy and practice

WILLAN
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Edited by
**Anthea Hucklesby and
Lystra Hagley-Dickinson**

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Preface

This book primarily arose out of a one-day conference organised by the authors, Maureen Cain and Paul Kiff under the auspices of the British Society of Criminology in December 2005. While organising the conference we recognised that there was a substantial amount of knowledge, experience and evidence about prisoner resettlement which was not written down and could easily be lost if there was a shift in government priorities. Furthermore, one of us was acutely aware that some important evidence was not in the public domain. This book is an attempt to record the evidence base about prisoner resettlement which has been amassed at the start of the twenty-first century.

A number of people have been crucial in producing this book. First and foremost, we would like to thank the contributors who readily agreed to participate, produced the chapters we asked for and dealt with our queries swiftly. They also agreed with our suggestion that the fees should go to charity. Our thanks also go to Maureen Cain and Paul Kiff for their assistance with organising the original conference and Brian Willan and his team for sticking with us despite the delays. Anthea would especially like to thank Emma Wincup who has often been the voice of calm and reason during the four years we have been doing resettlement research together.

Finally, we thank our respective partners, John and Peter, 'who end up doing all the things we don't have time to do because we're working'.

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Introduction

This book is a product of its time. Prisoners' resettlement is high on current political and policy agendas. While the problems faced by prisoners leaving prison have been acknowledged for many years, a decade ago interest in the issues raised by prisoners returning to society after imprisonment was low. There was an awareness that reconviction rates for prisoners were high but the drive to tackle the crime problem was focused elsewhere. This has changed markedly in the last five years. The rapid rise in the prison population has meant that more prisoners than ever before are released and this together with the pressure this puts on the infrastructure of the prison estate has concentrated attention on attempts to ensure that prisoners do not return to prison once released. Contemporaneously, two influential reports, one by the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU 2002) and one by the Prisons and Probation Inspectorates (HM Inspectorates of Prison and Probation 2001), highlighted the problems faced by prisoners leaving prison and ensured that government attention was directed at this issue. The 'resettlement' of prisoners is now a priority policy area linked directly to government initiatives to reduce reoffending. Consequently, the Government has initiated a resettlement policy, which focuses on seven pathways to resettlement (Home Office 2004) and ensures that each region has an action plan to reduce reoffending by released prisoners. The pathways (accommodation; education, training and employment; mental and physical health; drugs and alcohol; finance, benefits and debt; children and families; and attitudes, thinking and behaviour) ensure that the issues and

responsibilities for prisoners' resettlement extend beyond criminal justice agencies to other statutory agencies.

The renewed interest in prisoners' resettlement forms the context to this volume and the current policy framework is discussed extensively in Chapter 1. Indeed this volume aims to bring together current knowledge and understanding about prisoners' resettlement. An important objective is to capture the knowledge gained by the recent upsurge in interest in resettlement and subsequently the number of resettlement initiatives and research projects which have evaluated them. This is of particular importance as many of the recent initiatives have received limited or no statutory funding. Consequently, they are run on time-limited funding and often cease to exist or metamorphose into different projects when funding runs out (see Chapter 8). Additionally, as Wincup and Hucklesby note in Chapter 4, the projects are rarely evaluated adequately nor are the reports disseminated to produce an evidence base to identify effective practice. This volume aims to provide a comprehensive discussion of the issues raised by the resettlement of prisoners at the beginning of the twenty-first century. However, space is limited and difficult decisions were made about what to include. In large part, the content reflects the current state of knowledge about prisoners' resettlement. It brings together current theory, policy, research and practice while acknowledging that gaps exist, especially around provisions for particular groups of prisoners such as lifers and young offenders and the role of families in supporting resettlement, yet these largely reflect a lack of research and evidence in these areas.

Defining what we mean by resettlement is no easy task as Raynor's contribution eloquently argues in Chapter 2. Certainly for many prisoners the process of leaving prison and returning to the community is not 'resettlement'. Often their pre-prison lives were not settled in any sense with homelessness, unemployment and unsettled and disturbed childhood and schooling common (SEU 2002). Indeed many prisoners' lives are blighted not only by unsettled backgrounds but current or past problematic use of drugs and/or alcohol, all of which are exacerbated by the problems which arise as a result of imprisonment (SEU 2002). Consequently, prisoners are often returning to environments which are more conducive to offending than desistance. In common with others (see Raynor, this volume) we use the term resettlement guardedly and with some reluctance, mainly due to the lack of a suitable alternative.

The current resettlement agenda is inextricably linked with reoffending as government policy in this area is almost always

expressed in terms of targets to reduce reoffending (Home Office 2004). It follows that resettlement policy should be linked with theories of desistance, i.e. the process by which offenders stop offending (Farrall and Sparks 2006; Maguire and Raynor 2006). However, as Raynor notes in Chapter 2, these linkages are relatively unexplored theoretically and empirically. In the absence of these connections prisoners' resettlement lacks the necessary underpinning to explain how and why some things work while others do not. Without this, an evidence base for resettlement activity will continue to be elusive. While acknowledging that reducing reoffending must be the ultimate aim of resettlement activity, the reality is that desistance is a process, not a single event, which occurs over time and often includes lapses back into offending (Farrall 2002; Maruna 2001). Consequently, more realistic interim measures of success are required to ensure that resettlement initiatives are not labelled as failures because they are unable to tackle entrenched offending behaviour directly. Interim measures such as finding accommodation for prisoners, improving job and life skills, dealing with debt and providing advice and support are often used and are important in a number of respects, not least to ensure that initiatives have some positive outcomes. However, the precise relationship between such factors and resettlement, their relative importance and the relationship between them is largely unexplored and, as Maguire and Nolan note in Chapter 7, are more likely to be necessary rather than sufficient factors in desistance.

Resettlement practice varies and Hucklesby and Wincup explore some of the ways in which activities are organised in Chapter 3. Key elements of resettlement work involve working inside prison and in the community and crucially linking the two, i.e. continuity through the prison gate (Clancy *et al.* 2006; Lewis *et al.* 2003). Part 2 provides some examples of initiatives which are currently operating in England and Wales, namely SWing and PS Plus, and discusses some of their successes and the challenges, which they have faced. The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) was created expressly to improve joint working and communication between the Prison and Probation Services. Of all the areas of its work, this should enhance the resettlement experiences of prisoners most markedly. In theory, offender managers will plan, facilitate and execute prisoners' resettlement from the point at which they enter prison to the end of their sentence. It is too early to judge how effective this move may be but the introduction of NOMS has the potential to change the landscape of resettlement practice. Nevertheless, putting theory into practice is fraught with difficulties, especially when the two services

involved have markedly different traditions and cultures. How this may be achieved is discussed in many of the chapters in this volume.

One of the potential issues with the end-to-end management approach brought in under NOMS is that it becomes a one size fits all model. Indeed the National Reoffending Action Plan (Home Office 2004) makes no allowance for the possibility that different groups of offenders have varied pathways out of crime. There are many different groups of prisoners who require resettlement services and one important question for resettlement practice is whether their resettlement needs vary and therefore require different services. Currently, different services are provided for some groups. For example, prisoners serving sentences of 12 months or more and prisoners who are under 21 are subject to statutory supervision whereas short-term prisoners who are 21 or over (serving under 12 months) are not. Consequently, recent initiatives have concentrated on the provision of services for short-term prisoners. Many of these have been provided by the voluntary and community sector and the issues which arise from this are discussed by Hucklesby and Worrall in Chapter 8. Other groups such as women and prisoners from minority ethnic groups have been targeted by individual initiatives (see Chapters 9 and 10). However, as Williams *et al.* note in Chapter 10, it is not always clear whether or indeed how the needs of these groups differ and what resettlement initiatives are required for such groups.

At the time of writing, the context in which resettlement activities are undertaken is changing. Most recently, the Home Office has been split into two, creating a Ministry of Justice which has lead responsibility for the resettlement agenda. It is too early to say what impact this will have but the chapters contained in this volume were completed prior to the split being announced and implemented. Other changes have resulted in a considerable degree of uncertainty about the future direction of policy at the time this volume was being compiled, namely the future of Custody Plus and contestability. The changes proposed have arisen mainly but not exclusively as a consequence of the introduction of NOMS, the Offender Management Model and associated policies (Home Office 2006). It was intended that Custody Plus would deal with the anomaly of prisoners serving under 12 months receiving no statutory supervision upon release despite having one of the highest reconviction rates. Custody Plus introduced in the Criminal Justice Act 2003 is a completely new sentence which involves offenders spending some time in custody followed by a period of supervision in the community. The proposals were well received mainly because they enabled this group of prisoners to be

supervised after release from prison although there was some concern about the possibility of net-widening and the impact on the prison population. However, at the time of writing the implementation of the proposals has been postponed indefinitely because of resourcing issues. This obviously has enormous implications for the future direction of resettlement policy and has left many organisations and initiatives in limbo while they await information about whether Custody Plus will ever be implemented.

The second area of uncertainty is contestability. Contestability is a fundamental part of the creation of NOMS. Under proposals to introduce it, key functions in criminal justice will be put out to tender with statutory, voluntary and private sectors being invited to bid to operate services. Officially, the purpose of contestability is to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of services and provide better value for money (NOMS 2006). It is of particular relevance to the provision of resettlement services as many of these are already provided by the voluntary and community sector (see Chapter 8). However, proposals to introduce contestability have taken much longer than anticipated. At the time of writing the Offender Management Bill 2006 is still going through Parliament and it appears that proposals to introduce contestability on a large scale have been watered down. The delay has caused significant problems, not least for some initiatives which have faced funding gaps as they were expecting to be able to bid for statutory funding in late 2006 or early 2007. It is not yet clear when contestability will be introduced nor the extent to which it will apply to services currently provided by the Prison and Probation Services. Indeed, it has been suggested that the threat of contestability is all that is required to raise the game of existing providers and improve value for money (Baumol and Willig 2001). If this is so, the policy of contestability may well continue to be advocated without being put into practice.

Despite these uncertainties, there is a considerable amount of work being undertaken to enhance prisoners' experiences of resettlement. Coupled with its high place on the political and policy agendas this is cause for optimism. For the first time, the impetus appears to exist to tackle the issues faced by prisoners leaving custody and to assist and encourage them to desist from offending. This book attempts to capture the essence of the work being undertaken currently, to enhance our knowledge and understanding of the process of resettlement and desistance and to disseminate knowledge and experiences of doing resettlement work with a variety of prisoners.