DESISTANCE AND SOCIAL REINTEGRATION

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I. INTRODUCTION

Today's topics are the focus and goal of all the work that we have looked at in the last two lectures. Making assessments, building quality relationships with young people, planning and delivering diverse and effective interventions — the desired end result of all this activity is that young offenders should stop offending and be able to live constructive lives and contribute positively to their local communities. Yet at times this can seem almost impossible given what we know about the difficulties that many young people face — poverty, gangs, poor education, substance use and so on — and the often limited resources that young justice services have to work with.

We also know from experience, however, that some young offenders do succeed in changing their lives. What can we learn from their example? How is it that some young people manage to desist from offending but others don't? Yesterday we looked at the case management and programmes elements of this diagram and today we will look at the outer two components of desistance and community integration.

For a long time, criminological research and theorising focused on trying to understand why people started offending, but it is only relatively recently that more attention has been given to the equally important question of why people stop offending. The role of age and maturity in the desistance process has long been recognised but current research focuses more on the interactive effects of life experiences, self-identity, choices, social networks and opportunities (Maruna et al, 2004).

It is important because, as McNeill et al (2012) argue, 'desistance forces us away from static models of people as 'offenders', 'criminals' or 'prisoners' and encourages an understanding of change(s) in personal identities. It also brings to our attention the fact that today's 'young offender' is more likely to become tomorrow's 'new father' than tomorrow's 'habitual criminal'. As such, it implies valuing people for who they are and for what they could become, rather than judging, rejecting or containing them for what they have done'.[1]

II. UNDERSTANDING DESISTANCE

If the onset and continuation of offending behaviour is due to a complex interaction of different factors, it is no surprise that the process of stopping offending will often be a complex process also.

A. 'Definition' and Types of Desistance

The expanding desistance research literature contains different theories and explanations of how this process might occur (for example Farrall and Calverly, 2006) which we don't have time to fully explore today so we will focus on the core commonly agreed components.

Maruna provides a useful definition of desistance: 'the long-term abstinence from crime among individuals who had previously engaged in persistent patterns of criminal offending' (2001: 26). This highlights the need to look at a long-term perspective and it also hints at the need to be realistic about the circumstances of life — if people have previously engaged in persistent patterns of criminal offending it is likely that there are some entrenched problems that will take time to resolve.

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[1] http://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/how-and-why-people-stop-offending-discovering-desistance

It is also useful to distinguish between different types of desistance. 'Primary desistance' has been defined as 'any lull or crime-free gap in the course of a criminal career' (Maruna et al 2004: 274) and the focus here is on the young person's visible/observable behaviour — have they been arrested or charged for example? Primary desistance can refer to any time period, including short ones e.g. during a period of supervision. It may not reflect significant change in attitudes e.g. it could be due to illness or knowing they were being closely monitored. Maruna et al describe 'secondary desistance' as adopting a new 'non-offender' identity. This occurs when a young person no long seems themselves primarily as an offender but develops a new sense of self-identity e.g. as a worker, a student, a partner or a father. Tertiary desistance is a broader concept based on the recognition by others that one has changed and the development of a sense of belonging and acceptance within society.

B. The Desistance Process

A recurring theme in the desistance literature is that desistance should be viewed as a process rather than a one-off event. Whilst there are some offenders who manage to stop very abruptly, for many others the process will take a long time and there will be ups and downs along the way — periods of desistance, followed by relapses into offending and so on — until hopefully reaching the stage of tertiary desistance.

Understanding desistance involves taking account of both individual and social factors as illustrated in this diagram. Age and maturity will affect a young person's ability to make choices, to understand consequences, to compare costs and benefits, to empathise with victims. Social bonds refers to the relationships and networks that a young person may have with family, friends, community groups or institutions. The third section relates to a young person's self-identity (linking to the secondary desistance concept described earlier), their own narratives e.g. the stories they tell themselves about their life and their hopes and goals for the future. The final category of opportunities and resources includes the opportunities available to a young person in their community for leisure, work or training and also whether they are receiving help and support from statutory or voluntary services. Desistance can occur somewhere in the intersection of these different factors.

Farrall helpfully summarise this by referring to the 'relationships between 'objective' changes in the offender's life and his or her 'subjective' assessment of the value or significance of these changes:' . . . the desistance literature has pointed to a range of factors associated with the ending of active involvement in offending. Most of these factors are related to acquiring 'something' (most commonly employment, a life partner or a family) *which the desister values in some way* and which initiates a reevaluation of his or her own life . . .' (Farrall, 2002: 11, emphasis added)

C. Desistance and Young People

The literature on desistance amongst young people is not as extensive as the research relating to adult offenders, but there are some studies that help us to understand the factors that young people themselves identify as being important for stopping offending. For example, Monica Barry conducted two small-scale studies with young people in Scotland who were involved (or had previously been) with offending with a focus on asking for their views about what helped or hindered the desistance process (Barry, 2006). They identified a variety of 'push' and 'pull' factors. 'Push' factors were generally related to the negative consequences and general hassle of involvement in offending, for example, spending time in police cells, or damage to health caused by drug use. There was a sense that the young people reached a point where they were fed up with these experiences and offending just didn't seem worth the hassle any more.

'You could get away with it when you're under 15,16. You can get away with crime and that. But after that, you can't get away⋯it's not worth going to all the hassle of being in jail' (22-year-old male, Barry 2006)

'Pull' factors were to do with the positive elements/attraction of other lifestyles and ways of spending time. This could be a relationship, new leisure activities or gaining employment. Some gender differences were evident with young women more likely to cite relationship factors as being important for desistance and young men more likely to refer to work or training opportunities.

More research is needed specifically on young people, but it is already clear practitioners and organisations working with young people need to account of young people's perspectives and the interplay

between individual, social and structural factors.

III. SOCIAL REINTEGRATION

Many criminal justice interventions are weak in this area, even though they may be effective in other areas. For example, restorative justice interventions with young people in the UK have focused on achieving the '3 Rs' — promoting responsibility, reparation and reintegration. Evidence suggests that they are generally much better at achieving the first two but weaker at enabling reintegration (Crawford and Newburn, 2003).

Some of the key building blocks for achieving reintegration will be familiar and core aspects of correctional services, such as the provision of education and skills/employment training within prisons to equip offenders for life after release. For today, however, we will look as some other important aspects of this process.

A. Community Collaboration
In yesterday's lecture, we looked briefly at this diagram as part of the general picture of working effectively with young people and now I want to focus more specifically on this third circle of 'collaboration'. This can encompass a range of work with charities, volunteers, ex-offenders, mentors, local businesses, the public and so on.

One of the key benefits of such work is in breaking down barriers between offenders and wider society, helping to move away from the perception of 'them and us'. A small but powerful example of this in the UK is a project involving young people from a private fee-paying school (Bryanston) and young offenders from HMYOI Portland. The school pupils went into the prison and collaborated with the young offenders on creative projects e.g. poetry, drawing, writing short stories. These have been published in a very interesting collection showing both similarities and differences in their perspectives on life. One of the fruits of the project was in breaking down stereotypes about young offenders. For example, one of the school pupils writes about how he was nervous of meeting the prisoners but after working together with them he said '…there were many similarities in our ambitions, aspirations and desire for success. I guess they are just 'normal' people after all. We all desire to reach our full potential and live peaceful, fulfilling lives. It's just how we achieve it that differs.' (p90). Another example would be a relatively new charity operating in Scotland (Vox Liminis) that uses the creative arts to assist with reintegration by helping people to build new relationships through collaborative music-making.

Some of the most innovative approaches to rehabilitation and reintegration in the UK have come from charities. One of the most well-known is The Clink, a charity that works in partnership with HM Prison Service to provide training for prisoners in catering and hospitality. They run restaurants at four prisons (two are inside the prison walls and two are just outside) which are fully staffed by prisoners i.e. they do all the cooking, serving and front of house roles. It is different from some other prison training programmes in that, not only do the prisoners learn new skills, but they also obtain experience of working in a restaurant. There is an option for employers to sponsor a prisoner to complete the training and then to offer them a job once they are released. The public can also be involved by booking a table at the restaurant for a meal. So far, evidence suggests that the projects are successful in reducing reoffending rates. At the moment, these particular opportunities are for over 18s only, but it is a great example of how charities can bring fresh ideas, energy and new approaches to rehabilitation.

An area now receiving an increasing amount of attention is the role of faith based organisations. This has been a relatively neglected area of research in the UK until recently (compared to the USA where there is much more evidence and debate about the role of faith based services) but is now attracting more attention. One significant example in the UK is that of Community Chaplaincy. These are organisations that draw on volunteers from different faith communities who can act as mentors to offenders on their release from prison. They seek to complement the work of statutory services (but not replace it) and will work with offenders of any faith or none. There are now over 20 community chaplaincy schemes operating around the UK — they vary in size and in the services offered but all aim to provide both emotional and practical support to offenders as they re-settle into the community. An example of a project working specifically with young people would be the Feltham Community Chaplaincy. Feltham is a Young

Offender's Institution in west London. It can hold 210 young men aged 15-18 and 340 in the 18-21 age group. The Chaplaincy team recruit volunteers from churches, mosques and other faith groups who start to build a relationship with the offenders whilst they are still in prison and then act as mentors after release for as long as is needed/the young person wants to continue.

There are controversies and debates around the role of faith based groups in the criminal justice system (O'Connor and Pallone, 2002) which we don't have time to really explore today, except to say that obviously great care needs to be taken in areas such as recruitment and training of volunteers. There have been initial evaluations of Community Chaplaincy projects although much more research is needed. A recent interim report from the University of Cambridge[2], however, explores how the projects contribute to the desistance process. The report highlights key factors such as:

- The focus on authentic relationships
- Building trust and hope
- Ability to provide a flexible and individualised service

The role that faith groups can play will obviously vary across different countries and cultures, but it is a useful example to think about how statutory services can collaborate with different groups to help offenders establish and maintain links in the community.

B. Criminal Records — Wiping the Slate Clean?
One of the key obstacles young offenders face when trying to move on if their lives is that having a criminal record makes it very much more difficult to obtain employment. In the UK, the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 specified the length of time after which an offence becomes 'spent' i.e. after that time it does not need to be declared on many job applications (although it would still need to be declared for certain roles e.g. working with children or vulnerable adults, the police, prisons, security services etc).

These timescales have recently been amended by the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO) which allows offences to become spent more quickly. This slide shows the significant effect of the changes for young people under 18, for example, a short prison sentence of less than 6 months now becomes spent after 18 months whereas previously it would have taken 3.5 years.

For adults, including young offenders in the 18-25 age group, the timescales are longer but the 2012 legislation has also led to significant changes (as shown by this next slide). There is a careful balance between keeping some information on record to protect the public whilst also needed to allow offenders to move on with their lives. Overall, the recent changes in the UK are viewed as a positive development which should help to promote rehabilitation and reintegration.

IV. POSITIVE RISK TAKING

In the lecture on Tuesday we looked at how risk has come to be seen in predominantly negative terms, particularly in criminal justice, even though there are examples where it is viewed more positively in society (e.g. entrepreneurs, some sports). There is now a developing literature, however, on the concept of positive risk taking which challenges us to think in different ways (Titterton, 2011).

Titterton argues that the typical negative focus on risk assumes overlooks the importance of 'competence, coping, capacity and capital' (p 33). He argues that we need to give more attention to people's different reactions to difficulties and seek to develop plans that empower them to take more responsibility for their own lives and decisions. He is writing primarily about health and social care settings are but some of the ideas can be transferred to criminal justice.

This concept can be applied to the decisions that professionals take, but also to the choices that young people make. For example, 'many young people seen as 'at risk' quite often tend to be 'risk averse', in the sense that they can be unwilling or unable to take the risk of leaving their present situation, their immediate networks of family and friends and the locale in which they live. Being able to take actions to

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[2] https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0JgMrOj7EUpYkhvdldLUVRZUzA/view?pref=2&pli=1

loosen such ties can be crucial for 'pathways out of crime" (Boeck and Fleming, 2011). This suggests a need for youth justice workers to help young people take positive risks in order to reduce future offending.

There may be a reluctance to try such an approach as it seems as if you are asking people to 'trust the untrustworthy'. Is this realistic? It can be if we use this definition of risk taking as 'a course of pur-poseful action based on informed decisions concerning the possibility of positive and negative outcomes of types and levels of risk appropriate in certain situations' (Titterton, 2005: 25, emphasis added).

One example from the UK (similar schemes exist in other countries) is Release on Temporary Licence. This allows an offender to be released from prison for a short temporary period to help prepare for their resettlement into the community once their sentence is completed. It provides an opportunity to do practical tasks, such as looking for accommodation, opening a bank account, attending training or looking for employment, as well as to help strengthen family connections. It fits with Titterton's definition in that it will be based on an informed decision — it is only open to those who are assessed as suitable and not posing a security risk — and there is a clear purpose of preparing for reintegration after release.

A different example from the UK would be a scheme run by this company, Timpson's. Earlier we looked at the role of charities and faith based groups, but there are also innovative projects coming from the business sector. Timpson's provide a shoe repair and key cutting service. They run workshops in prisons and then employ selected offenders on day release schemes in the months leading up to release. If this goes well, the offender can be offered a job immediately on release. One of the key features of the schemes is trust as the Chief Executive commented: "One of the first things we do is give them the money to bank. If you give someone £2,500, it's a sign we trust them." The scheme has been running for over 12 years and currently has 400 ex-offenders working at all levels of the business, including 10 shop managers. Other businesses are also now developing schemes to give ex-offenders a second chance i.e. take a deliberate and positive risk with them.[3]

V. DESISTANCE-FOCUSED WORK WITH YOUNG OFFENDERS

What implications does all this have for the practicalities of day-to-day working with young offenders?

A. General Practice Principles
Weaver and McNeill (2007) suggest the following general principles which I will quote in full as they are so clear and helpful:

1. Be realistic: it takes time to change entrenched behaviours and the problems that underlie them, so lapses and relapses should be expected and effectively managed.

2. Favour informal approaches: labelling and stigmatising children and young people as 'offenders' runs the serious risk of establishing criminal identities rather than diminishing then, so it should be avoided as much as possible by favouring informal measures.

3. Use prisons sparingly: stopping offending is aided by strong and positive social ties, by seeing beyond the label 'offender' and by reducing or avoiding contacts with other 'offenders'. Prison makes all of these things much more difficult.

4. Build positive relationships: like everyone else, offenders are most influenced to change (and not to change) by those whose advice they respect and whose support they value. Personal and profes-sional relationships are key to change.

5. Respect individuality: since the process of giving up crime is different for each person, criminal justice responses need to be properly individualised. One size fits all approaches runs the risk of fitting no one.

6. Recognise the significance of social context: giving up crime requires new networks of support and

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[3] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/festival-of-business/11512614/Giving-ex-offenders-a-second-chance.html

opportunity in local communities *and* a new attitude towards the integration of offenders.

7. Mind our language: if the language we use in policy and practice causes both individuals and communities to give up on offenders, if it confirms and cements the negative perceptions of *people* who have offended as risky, dangerous, feckless, hopeless or helpless, then it will be harder for those people to give up crime.

8. Promote redemption: criminal justice policy and practice has to recognise and reward efforts to give up crime. For ex-offenders, there has to be an ending to their punishment and some means of signalling their redemption and re-inclusion within their communities.

B. Pathways Out of Offending

There is an increasing focus on using 'strengths' in a young person's life to help create pathways out of offending. There is some debate as to how exactly strengths or protective factors operate but some agreement that they can work either by:

- helping to prevent offending or anti-social behaviour — for example, reducing sensitivity to risk factors or reducing the impact of risk factors;

- helping to achieve positive outcomes — for example promoting self-efficacy or providing new opportunities (YJB, 2008).

One approach for developing pathways out of offending for young people is the Good Lives Model (GLM) (Ward and Brown, 2004). This suggests that everyone has a need to obtain primary human goods such as a sense of belonging or knowledge and skills (Ward and Maruna, 2007). The GLM also suggests that people pursue secondary goals — such as friendships or work, for example - as means to achieve these primary goods. If young people find it difficult to achieve these goods through pro-social means they may try to obtain them through offending or antisocial behaviour (McNeill, 2009). The GLM is a relatively new approach and there is a need for more research as to its effectiveness with young people in particular, but it does provide a useful perspective for thinking about intervention planning.

In applying this to practice, McNeill argues that practitioners should aim to 'balance the promotion of personal goods (for the offender) with the reduction of risk (for society). Too strong a focus on personal goods may produce a happy but dangerous offender; but equally too strong a focus on risk may produce a dangerously defiant or disengaged offender' (McNeill, 2009: 85).

C. Implications for Assessment and Intervention Planning

We can now add some more points to the material covered in the previous two lectures on assessment and intervention planning.

- Assessment is not a one-off event but needs to be ongoing to reflect the fact that desistance process takes time;

- Need to assess 'desistance-readiness' (McNeill and Weaver, 2010: 8).

We need to recognise that at the point of intervention, some young people won't be ready and so it may be better to avoid putting them into programmes. In such cases, working on awareness-raising or building motivation may need to come first.

- Need to have a clear focus on the aims and aspirations of an intervention (Farrall and Maruna, 2004) and understand how it will contribute to desistance and reintegration;

- Understand young people's perspectives on the change process

Desistance is difficult because it may involve a young person going in the opposite direction in life to their friends and this is particularly challenging at an age when the influence of peer groups is so strong. Therefore, it is important to try to understand their hopes and fears, their view of the costs and benefits,

and the barriers to change which they identify.

D. Managing Transitions

Transition points can be one of the key times for promoting desistance but they can also be times at which things go wrong. For example, a young person may leave prison with good intentions to avoid offending, but without adequate support they may drift back into old patterns of behaviour. These are points at which careful planning is required to help a young person maintain a path to progress. It also requires practical steps such as sharing information. Studies in the UK (e.g. Cooper et al 2007) have found that the transfer of data about young people between different parts of the criminal justice system is often poor and more needs to be done to ensure that information is shared between prison and community settings or between youth and young adult services.

VI. DESISTANCE AND ASSETPLUS

One of the aims in the design of the new AssetPlus assessment framework used in England and Wales was to incorporate desistance principles into each stage of the assessment and interventions cycle. This is done in a number of ways, but I will focus on some key points.
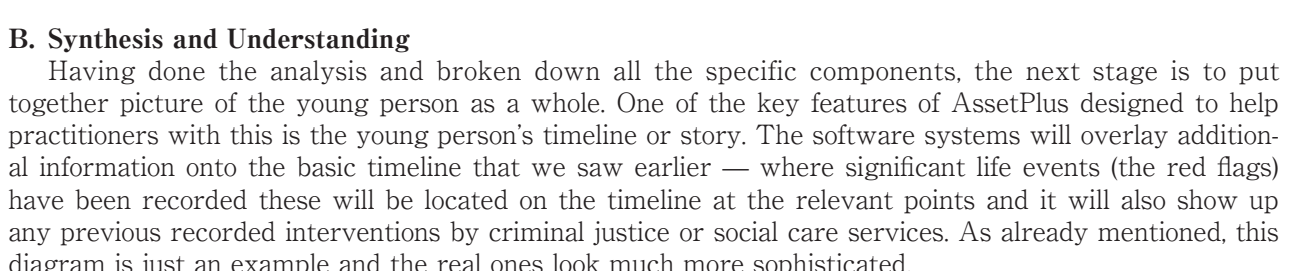
A. Information Collection

The first part of the information gathering quadrant covers many areas of a young person's life — family, education, friends, substance use, mental health and so on. A key point here is that practitioners are encouraged to record positive aspects of the young person's life, not just problems. Also, there are prompts to record significant life events and again these can be positive or negative (e.g. getting a qualification or experiencing a relationship breakdown). I will come back to these in a moment to show how this information is used.

The second section focuses on offending behaviour and the emphasis is on looking at patterns of offending over time. There will be specific detailed information about the current offence/s and then there are questions that prompt the assessor to compare this with other instances — more or less serious? Different or same type? More or less frequent?

The software programmes will automatically generate a visual timeline showing this pattern. The real version that practitioners will see looks much better than this prototype draft! However, it illustrates that a young person's offending goes up and down over time.

The Foundations for Change section, as the name suggests, is a key part of assessing 'desistance-readiness' (McNeill and Weaver, 2010). This is the place in AssetPlus to record things such as a young person's coping ability and coping strategies, what meaning they attach to relationships or education, whether they are aware of opportunities available to them and how motivated they are.

In the previous two lectures, we have looked at the principle of including the voices of young people and parents in decision-making processes through self-assessment. There are some questions in AssetPlus for young people that clearly link to the desistance concept, such as 'what things will make it hard to for you avoid offending?', 'who can help you avoid offending?'.

B. Synthesis and Understanding

Having done the analysis and broken down all the specific components, the next stage is to put together picture of the young person as a whole. One of the key features of AssetPlus designed to help practitioners with this is the young person's timeline or story. The software systems will overlay additional information onto the basic timeline that we saw earlier — where significant life events (the red flags) have been recorded these will be located on the timeline at the relevant points and it will also show up any previous recorded interventions by criminal justice or social care services. As already mentioned, this diagram is just an example and the real ones look much more sophisticated.

So, for example, here we see that there was an intervention and a period of stability (albeit with some minor offending), then a negative life event (e.g. bereavement) and the upward spike shows that the young person reacted to this stress by further offending. Then there is a drop and a period of desistance linked

to a positive life event and a further period of intervention. After the intervention ends, there is a further increase in offending and so. Having a visual display is helpful not only for the practitioner, but also to talk through with the young person and perhaps a parent or carer. It might help them to see patterns that they were not previously aware of. It can also be used as a creative way of working with the young person during supervision e.g. if this is your story so far, what happens next? What do you want the ending to be? If this is the journey, where do you want to go? What needs to be done to get there?

Very briefly, other examples are that there are sections where practitioners are specifically asked to explain the interconnections between different factors in a young person's life. There is a table where they can rate the relative strength of different factors in terms of whether they help or hinder desistance. The aim of these questions is to help staff develop 'individualised theories of change' about each young person.

C. Planning and Interventions
The specific desistance related points built into this section included questions asking practitioners to identify which of the young person's needs could be addressed through involvement with a community or voluntary group. Rather than statutory services delivering everything, the aim is to get young people linked into wider networks as much as possible to promote reintegration. There are also specific sections for preparing for the transition from custody to community and for developing an 'exit plan' so that there is a phased reduction of support rather than a sudden cut-off point at the end of the sentence.

VII. CONCLUSION

AssetPlus is by no means a perfect example. It is currently being implemented and has not yet been evaluated. There may well be problems that need to be dealt with and changes to the tool required. This was our best attempt at designing a framework with more emphasis on desistance and social reintegration based on the evidence and resources available at the time, but there will be other ways of doing similar things with different tools. My aim in outlining AssetPlus today, however, has been to give an example that will hopefully prompt further discussion about incorporating these important issues into practice.

Over these lectures, we have spent quite a lot of time thinking about the work of individual practitioners and the tools they use. Effective work by staff usually depends on also having organisations committed to developing high quality practice and we looked at some aspects of this yesterday. As we have seen today, achieving desistance and reintegration also relies on wider circles of local communities, the media, politicians and governments in developing a culture that allows offenders to have a second chance. Some of this is outside our control but developing links with charities, businesses and faith groups as in today's examples can be part of the process of changing social attitudes towards young offenders.

To conclude, there have been recurring themes across the three lectures and we can see how some seemingly mundane or technical tasks around assessment, planning and delivering programmes all contribute to the overall goal of enabling and empowering young people to move towards tertiary desistance and make positive contributions to society.

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