

Realising Potential: Community service, pro-social modelling and desistance

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Abstract

Recent attention to the question of ‘what works?’ in supporting desistance, coupled with the emergence of a number of research studies which suggest that Community Service (CS) might be effective in reducing recidivism, has contributed to growing interest in the rehabilitative potential of CS. Informed by this context, this paper reports on the findings of a small scale Scottish study which set out to evaluate the impact of pro-social modelling training on the practice of CS supervision within a local authority team. The study indicates that the training had a positive impact on CS supervision – most accurately described as a validation or development of existing approaches. However, the findings also highlight areas of limitation in training impact and, in doing so, present a rationale for attending to a number of key areas if CS is to realise its potential and assist offenders in their efforts towards desistance.

Keywords: Community service- Pro-social modelling – Offenders – Desistance

Introduction

Recent years have seen increasing research, policy and practice attention given to the question of ‘what works?’ in reducing re-offending and supporting desistance. Amongst other things, this has resulted in a growth in our understanding of what works in community based interventions, coupled with increased expectation in terms of service outcomes. Recently, this ‘development’ has been extended to community service (CS), resulting in something of a renaissance in attention to CS and, albeit on a modest scale, to its reintegrative and rehabilitative potential.

Undoubtedly, such developments have contributed to the emergence of a number of UK wide practice and research initiatives aimed at enhancing the rehabilitative potential of CS, most notably the CS Pathfinder projects – the stated aim of which was ‘to develop the research base to investigate what in CS might be effective in reducing offending, focussing on a number of promising approaches’ (Rex et al, 2003). Practice developments in Scotland are, for the moment, less pronounced though there exist clear indicators of growing attention to this area of service development – see for example the recent ‘Scottish Government Review of

Community Penalties' (Scottish Government, 2007) and the subsequent report of the Scottish Prisons Commission (2008), both of which point to a more central and expanded role for CS.

Amidst the many tentative messages to emerge from recent CS related research studies, the concept of pro-social modelling (PSM) has emerged as a particularly promising approach, in so far as it is considered to provide an opportune framework for the incorporation of features found to be most associated with positive outcomes in CS. In its most limited sense, PSM refers to the way in which probation officers, or others, model pro-social values and behaviours in their interactions with clients. More broadly, it refers to a group of skills which include role clarification, modelling of pro-social values, reinforcing pro-social behaviour, expressions and actions, and collaborative problem solving (Trotter, 2009: 138). As Trotter notes, PSM is now widely and variously used in community correction settings across the globe and is increasingly recognised as a key skill in the effective supervision of offenders. However, in the less research-rich context of CS, knowledge relating to the use, implementation and potential of PSM (and indeed other evidence based approaches) remains limited and currently rests on the findings of a small number of related studies (Rex and Gelsthorpe, 2002).

Informed by the above context, this paper seeks to contribute to our developing understanding of, and enquiry into, the rehabilitative potential of CS. Specifically, it reports on the findings of a small scale Scottish study which set out to evaluate the impact of PSM training on the practice of CS supervision within a local authority team¹. The paper is structured in 3 parts. I begin by providing a brief overview of the research evidence which has prompted recent developments within CS and the use of PSM in particular. Attention is then given to the research study and its key findings. In closing, I provide a thematic analysis of the study findings in an attempt to highlight key themes which appear pertinent if CS is to realise its potential and assist offenders in their efforts towards desistance.

Community Service, Rehabilitation and Recidivism: exploring potential

Noting CS's longstanding public image as a predominantly punitive disposal it is worth noting that the origins of CS reveal a much broader and more re-integrative vision. Formally proposed by the Wootton Committee in 1970, as Rex and Gelsthorpe (2002) observe, the initial appeal of CS lay in its potential to operate as a penal 'Jack of all trades'. Specifically, its ability to combine 'constructive' and 'reformatory' activity for offenders (in the form of unpaid work) with proportionate and reparative punishment (p. 311-312). This initial and expansive vision of CS is barely recognisable in the practice that has followed – a practice which, at least officially, has tended to capitalise on the punitive aspects and appeal of CS. More recently, discussion and debate around CS has seen a notable return to some of these early aspirations, resulting in renewed attention to its rehabilitative and reintegrative

¹ In contrast to the rest of the UK, and many other English-speaking countries, responsibility for providing services to the criminal justice system - in the form of assessment, supervision and throughcare of offenders - rests with local authority social work departments. For the last two decades, this has typically been delivered via specialist criminal justice social work teams who are tasked to deliver a range of services and schemes, including the provision of reports to the court, probation and community service.

potential. As already noted, this movement very clearly reflects recent research findings which suggest that CS may have a contribution to make to the project of penalty beyond that of punishment and deterrence. Perhaps less generously, in a context of fiscal and political efficiencies, it may also reflect broader political drivers to 'get more for less'. If CS does have the potential to operate as a penal 'jack of all trades' then it is not now surprising to see that potential exploited.

With regard to the research evidence, the 1990s saw the emergence of a small number of studies which, in an analysis of reconviction rates following community sentences, found that reconviction rates for offenders given community service were slightly lower than those predicted taking into account individual offender profiles (see for example Lloyd et al, 1995, Raynor and Vanstone, 1997, May, 1999). Similarly, Killias et al's (2000) analysis of the comparative effects of CS and short term imprisonment found that that offenders sentenced to CS had lower reconviction rates than those sentenced to prison. Significantly, in exploring the detail behind this data, Killias et al suggest that the reduced reconviction rates associated with CS completion may be related to offenders' perception and acceptance of their disposal as fair and legitimate (i.e. 'a result of their own behaviour' p.53).

McIvor's (1992) seminal study of CS in Scotland supports the above findings though provides additional insight into the relationship between offender experiences of CS and reduced recidivism. Principally, McIvor found that offenders who viewed their experience of CS as positive and worthwhile were more likely to comply with their order and less likely to re-offend. For the offenders in McIvor's study, positive and worthwhile experiences of CS were associated with engaging in meaningful work, the opportunity for contact and exchange with beneficiaries and the opportunity for skills acquisition. McIvor's study also foregrounds the significance of CS providing help with other problems, though this was seen to relate more to short term compliance and completion rates than to recidivism.

As noted earlier, the above findings have prompted a number of recent practice developments aimed at enhancing CS's rehabilitative potential – with PSM emerging as a particularly 'promising approach' (Rex and Crosland, 1994, Rex et al. 2004). The value of PSM in supporting the achievement of positive outcomes in offender supervision generally is now well documented (Andrews and Bonta 2003, Trotter 1993, 2009). In addition, there exist a small number of studies which indicate that the training of probation staff in this area can impact positively on the use of PSM and in turn client outcomes (Trotter, 1996a, 1996b, 2009). However, in common with the broader research base examining the implementation of evidence based practices within offender supervision (see for example Kemshall et al. 2004), research in this area tends to highlight that the delivery of training is only one factor influencing the use and impact of PSM in practice. For example, Trotter's (1996) analysis of the implementation of empirical based practices (including PSM) amongst community corrections staff in Victoria found that 50% of those trained failed to make use of the prescribed practices for 'a number of reasons'. The reasons highlighted by the study included: a worker's experience in the job, previous training and education, and the worker's personality characteristics or traits. Interestingly, the principal reason highlighted by the study relates to the dissonance the worker perceives between the proposed practices and the wider 'culture' of the organisation – a finding supported by a similar study which examined the implementation of empirical practices in New

Zealand (Trotter, 1996). Reviewing both of these studies in a more recent discussion Trotter (2009) concludes:

It seems likely that attempts to increase the use of pro-social modelling among direct practice staff will be most successful if they are part of a concerted effort involving training, supervision, collegiate support and modelling by senior staff (2009: 145).

Exploring the use of PSM within CS, Rex and Crosland (1994) report on a small pilot study which examined the implementation of a PSM approach within community service in Cambridgeshire. Again, in common with findings from probation based studies, the study found that offenders supervised predominantly by 'project' CS supervisors (i.e. those trained in PSM and legitimacy) were more likely than offenders supervised outside of the project to report experiences consistent with PSM. The former group were also more likely to view their CS experience as positive and to gain a better work rating. In addition they were less likely to have unacceptable absences or to have been breached.

The Community Punishment Pathfinder projects provided the first opportunity to test out the above findings on a larger scale. Funded under the Crime Reduction Programme in 1999, seven (pilot) pathfinder projects were established across 10 probation areas in the UK. PSM was one of the 3 approaches implemented and tested across the projects (the remaining two being skills accreditation and tackling the problems underlying offending behaviour). The findings from this initiative were first published in 2002 and, overall, present an encouraging picture with regard to the rehabilitative potential of CS. With regard to the efficacy of PSM in particular, the report tentatively concludes that projects focussing on PSM and skills accreditation were found to be most promising. The findings provide less insight into the relationship between staff training and changes in staff practice or service outcomes, however attention is given to factors found to be associated with effective implementation of the projects generally. The findings in this area echo the findings from Trotter's (1996) research on this subject and indicate that effective implementation of the projects was aided by 'commitment, understanding and support from managers and colleagues', alongside 'team-work, staff adopting creative problem-solving and flexibility in delivery' (Rex et al, 2004, p.2) The study also identifies a number of factors found to impede effective implementation, ranging from staff reservations about the overall coherence and feasibility of the projects in light of practical constraints (for example, the tensions in implementing the detail of project initiatives while supervising the whole work party) through to the lack of priority given to CS work generally.

The above findings have much to contribute to both the what and the how of service development in CS. There is now a growing body of evidence which suggests that CS has the potential to demonstrate impact beyond its traditional boundaries of punishment and deterrence. In addition, there exists a small number of studies which indicate that, with the right supporting conditions, the training of staff in PSM (and other evidence based approaches) can improve staff practice and in turn service outcomes. However, the embryonic nature of our knowledge and understanding in this area needs to be acknowledged. For example, the above discussed findings foreground that achieving and demonstrating impact is by no means straightforward

and that staff training is only one variable in this complex endeavour. Similarly, the sustainability and longer term impact of what have predominantly been pilot projects has yet to be demonstrated. From a different vantage point, as we explore the potential of an expanded role for CS there is perhaps a need to progress cautiously. Both Mair (1997) and McIvor (1998) highlight the real and potential pitfalls of a disposal that attempts to be 'all things to all people'. Related studies of probation practice suggest that an overly broad conception of professional role may lead to unfocussed and ineffective practice (Dowden and Andrews, 2004; Bonta, 2007). By way of example, in discussing the outcomes associated with the 'less promising' Pathfinder projects (i.e. those prioritising offender related needs), the authors conclude that this was 'possibly because a lack of strong focus hampered success' (p.4, 2004). While acknowledging then the significant contribution of recent research in this area, the field, as it were, is wide open. As Rex and Gelsthorpe (2002) conclude with reference to most large scale research study in this area to date:

The pathfinder initiative is merely the beginning of a programme of research into CS. We need to know considerably more about the processes that actually take place, if we are to understand how the experience of undertaking work for the community can have a constructive impact on offenders, for example (p. 323).

The research study to which we now turn seeks at its simplest to contribute to this programme of research. In accordance with the research aims it seeks to demonstrate if and to what extent the training of CS staff in PSM can be seen to impact on staff practice and, where feasible, service outcomes. As importantly, it seeks to contribute to our understanding of the broader processes influencing training impact and service development in CS generally.

The Research Study

The research study set out to evaluate the impact of a pro-social modelling (PSM) training programme on the practice of CS supervision within a criminal justice social work team, drawing primarily on staff and offender perspectives. Informed by the above aim, and mindful of the potential limitations of in-service training evaluations (Clarke, 2001), Kirkpatrick's (2006) four level model of evaluation was adopted as an overarching framework, directing evaluation at the following four levels: staff reaction, staff learning, staff behaviour and service outcomes.

The training was delivered to the CS staff team (suggestion - 'a CS staff team' since the reader does not know the team) over two consecutive days. The intended outcomes of the training were identified as follows²:

1. Provide an improved respectful, caring and enthusiastic delivery of service to clients, with a fair and consistent use of authority.

² Though there was a clear desire that the training would improve the relational skills of staff supervising CS - and in turn service outcomes - no attention was initially given to the intended outcomes of the training. As a result, the above outcomes were produced at the researchers prompting following brief discussion between the service team leader and the training provider.

2. Provide an improved level of support, help and guidance to clients during the course of their order.
3. Provide better pro-social models and reinforcement to clients of their positive behaviour.
4. Improve client attendance and reduce the level of breaches and reviews.

Methodology

From the outset the study was concerned to assess training impact from the perspective of those directly involved in the delivery and receipt of CS (that of staff and offenders). In part, this reflected a realistic appraisal of the resource available. More importantly it reflected a belief that each held a unique vantage point from which to evaluate training impact. In addition, it was hoped that interviewing both groups would permit data triangulation and so provide a more rigorous account. To this end the study employed a multi-method approach to data collection, drawing primarily on qualitative tools. Specifically, the study drew upon the following data sources:

CS Staff

Pre-training and post-training questionnaires were sent to all staff attending the training for self-completion and return³. 10 of a possible 12 completed questionnaires were returned. In addition, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all twelve staff attending the training. Interviews took place within the agency, were audio recorded and lasted approximately 45 minutes.

Offenders

Three semi-structured focus groups took place with three CS work teams, involving 25 offenders in total. The decision to interview offenders within a pre-existing group reflected knowledge of the value of group-based interviews in gathering qualitative data alongside practical concerns to maximise offender participation and minimise disruption to the CS work day. Focus groups took place within the agency without staff present, were conducted by two researchers and lasted between 60 and 75 minutes.

Agency and National Data

Attention was given to relevant agency and national data information systems. This included documentary analysis of national criminal justice social work statistics and agency breach rates for comparative three-month periods before and after the training. At the outset it was hoped that offender perceptions of CS would also be measured by analysis of data from completed Crime PICS II questionnaires. In the event the agency was not in a position to provide this data.

Data were analysed using thematic content analysis in 4 stages. Initial analysis began with thematically coding answers to the questionnaires and interview questions. This was followed by identification and coding of additional themes that emerged beyond

³ Pre-training questionnaires were issued immediately prior to the training and sought predominantly to measure staff expectations of the training as well as pre-training conceptions of the CS role and task. Post-training questionnaires were issued immediately following the training and sought primarily to measure staff reaction to the training. The more detailed analysis of training impact was explored via the staff and offender interviews.

the answers to the questions. Next, a comparative analysis of staff and offender responses was completed. This led to a progressive refinement of the themes, patterns and relationships.

The research sample

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Staff were invited to participate via briefing meetings which took place prior to the training. Of the 12 staff interviewed, 3 of the participants were female, 9 were male. Experience in the job was generally high though ranged from 6 months to 12 years.

With regard to offender participants, 3 CS work teams – comprising 2 day teams and one evening team – were identified as potential participants. Offenders were briefed about the research study and the opportunity for involvement in advance of the groups and immediately prior to the group starting. Across the three groups, 25 offenders attended and all agreed to participate. 22 of the offenders were male, 3 were female. The majority of participants had a reasonable amount of CS experience to draw upon (19 of the 25 had been on CS for more than three months) and most were keen to express their views and experience.

Limitations

The methods adopted for the evaluation were limited by the focus of the study and the resource available. Specifically the following factors need to be acknowledged.

- The evaluation was modest in its aim and sought primarily to evaluate training impact on staff learning, behaviour and practice, with attention to service outcomes where feasible.
- The study did not attempt a ‘before and after’ comparison of staff practice or service outcomes. In part, this reflects the fact that a similar training was delivered to an earlier staff group two years previously, therefore any pre-training measurement would be compromised. In addition, the resource required to create such a measurement was beyond the scope of this study. No comparative control group was identified for like reasons.
- The absence of direct observational data and, in turn, the reliance on participant perspectives requires acknowledgement of the potential for bias in the data gathered.
- The small sample size and the limited information available concerning the larger population of CS staff and offenders limits speculation about the representativeness of the findings. Suggest simpler phrase- ‘limits the representativeness of the findings.’

Research Findings

Level 1: Staff Reaction

Staff reaction to the training was, for most, notably positive. The findings indicate that the training legitimised and reinforced the importance of a pro-social approach to practice or, as one staff member put it: ‘going beyond supervision’. Staff identified various areas of learning arising from the training (i.e. the importance of praise and positive reinforcement, how to diffuse conflict) though the aspect valued most highly (cited by more than three quarters of the participants) lay in the opportunities to

discuss, debate and evaluate practice alongside colleagues. Expectations of training impact were generally high though responses foreground an awareness of the limitations of PSM (particularly in respect of outcome 4) and a perception that some clients were 'beyond' its reach.

Level 2: Staff Learning

In addition to general learning, staff were prompted to consider learning in terms of how they understood their role and how they carried that out. Again, most expressed the view that the training had 'reinforced', 'refreshed' or validated existing knowledge in this area, though a smaller number of participants identified a 'shift in emphasis' towards a more relational/ pro-social practice approach. As one respondent expressed suggest 'put it' instead of 'expressed': 'it put more emphasis on assisting [offenders] to get through the court order, rather than only monitoring through encouragement'. Another reflected:

In a sense although my role is to enforce the order ... enforcement is one part, but we're also here to help them through that order ... the training makes you more aware of how you actually work with clients.

In addition, 9 of the 12 respondents identified specific learning arising from the training. Areas most frequently cited include:

- Enhanced insight into the impact of worker/ offender interactions
- The value of a reflective and considered approach in routine practice
- The value and associated skills of a non-confrontational approach

Generally, responses highlighted an encouraging level of personal and practice reflection arising from the training, though this was qualified by expressed concern regarding the limited opportunities for reflection within practice. In discussing learning gained, responses frequently incorporated supporting practice examples indicating an encouraging level of learning transfer.

Level 3: Behaviour

Noting the desired outcomes for the training (three of which focus on the 'improvement' of staff behaviour and practice) attention to reported changes in staff behaviour was central to the research exercise. The majority of respondents had little difficulty identifying behaviour change or training impact. Areas of change most frequently identified accorded well with the desired outcomes of the training, with staff identifying behavioural impact in the following areas:

- General interaction with clients towards a more 'positive' / 'progressive' approach
- The use of authority
- The use of praise
- The provision of help and support re family/ social issues

Notably, and again in keeping with the intended outcomes, staff discussion highlighted that the nature of change in these areas was incremental in nature, frequently described in terms of an 'improvement in ... ', or an 'increased use of ... ' a

particular action, method or approach. As one respondent explained in relation to his general interaction with clients:

It's difficult to put into words but seems to come across different now ... the importance of listening and a little bit of praise. [It] has changed, can't just put my finger on it ... its not just with this type of work it comes out in other situations outside of work as well.

Of the 3 respondents who didn't identify direct change, each considered themselves to have been adopting a PSM approach prior to the training. Also, 2 of the 3, in discussing their application of a pro-social approach, placed significant emphasis on the beliefs, attitudes and skills they brought to the job, as well as the experience and learning gained through doing it. For these and other members of staff, such factors were considered to be as significant as the training itself.

Notwithstanding the positive nature of the above findings, it should be noted that fewer than half of the respondents felt that 'changes' would be noticed by an offender, colleague or senior. For most, this was considered to be 'for the best of reasons', i.e. that change was subtle, that the nature of the training was more conducive to improvement rather than change, or that there was much in their previous practice that already reflected a PSM approach. Where staff did discuss observed 'changes' in colleagues' behaviour, examples mostly focused on staff-staff interactions, including:

- improved relationships within the staff team (arising from group learning opportunities)
- an increased openness in discussing theory (within the constraints of a non-interventionist disposal)
- growing recognition of (and debate regarding) an expanded role

The above findings indicate an encouraging level of learning transfer and suggest that the training was perceived by most staff to have had a tangible and positive impact on their behaviour and practice. The nature of impact was described more in terms of improvement than change - perhaps accounting for the limited confidence that changes would be noticed by others. Equally significant is the fact that the training was seen by some to have impacted on staff interactions and wider staff culture. Naturally, any conclusions about behaviour change are tentative in the absence of data from those at the receiving end of that behaviour, i.e. offenders. The final level of analysis attends to this area in some detail.

Level 4: Outcomes

Firstly, it needs to be acknowledged that the identified outcomes for the training – which are predominantly behavioural in nature - sit between levels 3 and 4 of Kirkpatrick's evaluation matrix. Due to the scale of the research project it was not possible to consider whether the training had any impact on offenders reconviction rates/ longer term compliant behaviour. Further, the impracticalities of constructing a control group or a 'before and after' analysis mean that findings in this area are best construed as indicators. Notwithstanding these limitations, the data drawn from staff and offender perspectives provides reasonable insight into the extent to which the intended outcomes of the training were achieved, outcomes which, as will be discussed, may also be associated with longer term service outcomes.

Staff perspectives

In considering impact on the training outcomes, again, participants generally rated training impact highly. However, responses in this area highlighted varied interpretations of the concept of 'training impact' as well as, in some instances, the outcomes themselves. Also, a number of respondents, while scoring the training as having a high impact in a particular area, immediately acknowledged other contributory factors, for example: previous experience, existing knowledge and beliefs and/or other training.

Acknowledging the above qualifications, analysis of the data gathered indicated that the training was considered to have greatest impact on outcomes (1) and (3):

- (1) Provide a respectful, caring and enthusiastic delivery of service, with fair and consistent use of authority

10 of the 12 respondents identified that the training impacted positively on their ability to 'provide an improved respectful, caring and enthusiastic delivery of service, with fair and consistent use of authority'. Supporting examples underscored the developmental nature of training impact in this area, in so far as staff described themselves as 'more' respectful, or 'more fair' as a result of the training. As one respondent put it: 'I treat them with more respect ... and fair ... I'd say slightly more fair than before the training'.

- (3) Provide better pro-social models and reinforcement to clients for their positive behaviour

8 of the 12 respondents identified that the training impacted positively on their ability to 'provide better pro-social models and reinforcement to clients for their positive behaviour'. Again, respondents were keen to point out that they had always used 'praise' and 'encouragement' in their work, asserting that the training 'reinforced' this and encouraged 'more of it'. As one respondent put it: '[its] a bit like recharging a battery'.

Staff responses were most varied in relation to outcome 2: 'provide an improved level of support, help and guidance to clients through the course of their order'. This reflected a distinct variance in views regarding what was meant by support, help and guidance, as well as the extent to which staff felt sufficiently trained or equipped to improve provision in this area. Though most were committed in principle, this was considered to be an area requiring further clarification.

As might be expected, staff were most reticent in identifying training impact on outcome 4: 'improve client attendance and reduce the level of breaches and reviews'. Of the five respondents who felt that the training would impact on this area (less than half), responses are best described as reasonably hopeful, with each acknowledging a relationship between a pro-social approach and attendance and compliance, though also acknowledging the considerable impact of 'other factors'. Supporting examples in this area highlighted an improved level of problem exploration, negotiation and problem solving prior to breach decisions.

Those more hesitant expressed the view that it would 'work with some', but that the nature of some offenders' experience, attitude, or 'other problems' meant that: 'some [would] always return to court'. Those most sceptical felt that this was an outcome 'beyond' the influence of either staff or 'PSM'. Indeed, for most expressing scepticism in this area, this related less to the inefficacy of PSM and more to the 'stronger' influence of other factors. Interestingly, the 'other factors' highlighted by staff extended beyond offenders' personal and social problems (i.e. marital or drug problems) to also encompass significant organisational and even socio-political constraints, i.e. 'poor' or 'boring' placements, staffing levels, public attitudes, external and 'political' pressures, and what some perceived to be the 'numbers game' currently dictating the quality of local CS provision.

The impact of 'wider factors' was also keenly felt in regard to the broader impact of the training. Staff highlighted various issues that made it difficult to put the training into practice; including: the size of CS teams, the quality of placements available, and the attitudes and/or 'suitability' of offenders. The most frequently cited obstacle - identified by over half of the respondents - was the perceived impact of wider public, professional, political and media attitudes to offenders and/or CS. As one respondent concluded: 'if a pro-social approach is to be truly effective it needs to be implemented at all levels, both within the agency and beyond it', i.e. within the typically punitive matrix of social interactions that offenders in the community regularly find themselves tasked to negotiate.

Offender perspectives

Offender perspectives broadly supported staff perspectives, though the findings in this area present a more varied and detailed picture.

Firstly, offenders were quick to endorse the existence of a PSM approach in most supervisors. However, offenders consistently asserted that this was not the case for all. The findings in this area indicate that the PSM training appeared to have no impact on a small but consistent minority of supervisors with whom relationships were described as 'difficult'. Focussing on their relationship and interaction then with 'most' supervisors, most respondents were quick to provide evidence of outcomes 1 and 3 (supporting the findings to emerge from staff interviews). Supporting examples focussed on consistency and fairness in the use of authority, the use of praise and encouragement, and, most significantly, the way staff spoke to them. Consistent with wider research findings on the relational element of supervision (McIvor, 1992), offenders placed considerable value on being treated respectfully and considered this critical to progress. As one respondent put it: '[they] treat you like a person, not like a criminal'. Another observed: 'Mine is brilliant ... If it wasnae for her I'd have breached ages ago'. For the minority of staff with whom relationships were difficult this was felt to be evidenced in 'the way they speak to you', by the 'lack of give and take' and an unwillingness to 'work alongside' or offer help with work tasks.

Again, in line with the findings to emerge from staff interviews, offender responses were most varied in relation to outcome 2: 'provide an improved level of support, help and guidance'. Initially, offenders were quick to agree with the above statement in respect of supervisors. However, further discussion highlighted that, for most,

responses related to the provision of practical support, help and guidance with CS tasks. When asked to consider the provision of support with wider problems, responses varied. A minority of offenders had experienced help with problems outside of CS and clearly valued this aspect of the role. As one offender noted: 'they've helped me put things into perspective ... problems and things'. Another responded: 'I get loads of help ... with the job and life ... you can actually sit and have a talk to them'.

Where 'help and guidance' did occur it appeared to be largely down to the attitude and motivation of the offender to bring problems into the supervisory relationship, which in turn depended on the quality of that relationship. For most however, this was deemed to be 'not their job', with some offenders expressing genuine surprise on hearing that fellow offenders had discussed and received help with personal problems from staff. Though many were surprised by the idea that they would discuss or seek help with problems within CS, all agreed that 'other problems' greatly affected motivation and compliance, both within and beyond CS.

As with staff perspectives, offender responses were most reticent in identifying a relationship between a PSM approach and attendance and compliance within CS (outcome 4). In common with findings from previous studies (McIvor, 1998, Rex et al, 2003), respondents were clear that the positive attitude and behaviour of staff towards them supported attendance and compliance. Offenders were equally clear that 'negative' attitudes and behaviours on the part of supervisors 'made you think twice' about attending. As one respondent expressed: 'you don't want to come in if it's the supervisor you don't like'. However, staff attitude and approach was not considered as critical to attendance and compliance as 'other' factors. Noting the significance placed by offenders on 'other' factors – and of knowledge relating to compliance generally - attention was also given to factors offenders considered most critical to compliance within CS; specifically, those factors most likely to aid compliance and those most likely to impede it. The findings to emerge on this issue are as straightforward as they are complex and are outlined below.

Finally, it needs to be acknowledged that while offender perspectives broadly supported staff perspectives in identifying evidence of a pro-social approach in practice, only one offender reported a noticeable 'change' following the training. Arguably, this message fits with staff perspectives on this issue (see above). Nonetheless, if CS is to realise and sustain the potential of a pro-social approach amongst all staff this remains significant and is an area for further analysis.

Offender compliance and the significance of other factors

The most significant 'aid' to compliance identified by offenders was the desire to 'have their time back', linked by many to a desire to move forward and 'get on with life'. Interestingly, CS was seen by most to be 'holding them back' from this process. Other identified aids included: knowledge of consequences – i.e. fear of going to jail – and relationships with fellow offenders on CS. However, when discussed in the context of individual experiences of non-attendance, the above factors appeared to exert limited influence on attendance and compliance decisions, i.e. for many of the offenders interviewed - and, arguably, for the 2161 offenders represented in recent breach statistics (Scottish Government, 2008) - fear of incarceration or a desire to 'have their time back' were not, in themselves, enough. In this context, respondents

struggled to explore what they or others could do to help them comply with their order. In part, this was underpinned by a narrative that neither they nor others had much control over the myriad of factors (i.e. life's problems) affecting compliance. However there also emerged a sense that participants had not considered what might help with such problems. Certainly, offenders did not consider that others (i.e. CS staff) might assist with this.

When invited to consider more practical aids to compliance, responses were contrastingly clear and forthcoming and related exclusively to the nature of work undertaken. Repeatedly, participants expressed a desire for more 'relevant tasks', 'better jobs' and an end to 'pointless work'. As one respondent summed up:

If you could actually be doing better work rather than sitting there sanding a bit of wood .. you're standing there sanding something and it doesn't need to be sanded, or painting a fence and then coming back and painting it again, its pointless work that you shouldn't be doing. Fair enough you've got to work 'cos you've done something wrong but when it's work like that what's the point of that? It's like they've ran out of things for you to do so they make you do stupid things like that.

Though the experience of engaging in 'pointless' work was familiar to all, some were uneasy expressing this as a problem, suggesting that was 'the point of CS'. As one offender expressed: 'It's work and you just come and do it ... basically you know you're gonna get jobs that nobody else is going to do, you're no here to enjoy yourselves'.

Factors considered by offenders to impede compliance focussed almost exclusively on practical or operational issues (i.e. job monotony, the 'cost' of CS, operational frustrations, etc). While discussion occasionally touched on the (greater) significance of wider personal problems, for most, such issues were deemed to be beyond the focus of CS and as such our discussion. Notwithstanding this reticence, offender discussion did reveal a relationship between non-compliance and 'lack of motivation' - in particular an absence of things (or rewards) to motivate you to turn up and complete your hours. The apparent tension between this view and the view expressed earlier regarding what most helped (i.e. fear of going to jail) was not lost on participants and attests to the complexity of offenders' experience and views on this issue. For example, one offender who very clearly asserted 'you come because you've got to come', later acknowledged that, despite being only weeks away from completion, he had recently returned from an 8 week period of unexplained absence. For this individual - and some others - lack of motivation was at least part of the explanation, linked to: 'other stuff going on in your life [that] might have nothing to do with CS'. Significantly, for most of the offenders interviewed, such factors were seen to matter a lot more than 'what people here say and do to you'.

Discussion and Conclusions

Returning to the principal aim of the study, two key conclusions can be drawn from the findings. Firstly, the findings suggest that the training impacted positively on CS staff and on the practice of CS supervision. Specifically, the data provides considerable evidence of staff learning, with encouraging indicators of learning

transfer in key areas. In addition, the data provides substantial, albeit variable, evidence of the intended outcomes of the training, with evidence most apparent for outcomes 1 and 3. However, the extent to which the training contributed to the above outcomes is more difficult to measure. Responses from both staff and offenders suggest that while the training certainly supported the application of a PSM approach in practice, staff training was only one factor contributing to this outcome (with a worker's experience, knowledge, beliefs, general attitude and attributes identified as equally significant). Finally, the training appeared to contribute to an improved learning/ reflective culture amongst the staff group – a not insignificant finding in the context of CS service development.

The second conclusion to be drawn from the study relates to the nature of training impact – most accurately described as a validation, 'reinforcement' and/or 'development' of existing practice, as opposed to direct change. In part, this would appear to reflect the nature of the training, the intended outcomes and the fact that some staff had engaged in similar training previously. However, the findings from levels 3 and 4 of the analysis also highlight limitations in training impact. Specifically, the training appeared to have no impact on a small minority of the staff group. Further, impact was limited, or certainly more 'complex', in key outcomes areas, i.e. 'the provision of support help and guidance', and 'reducing the level of breaches and reviews'.

In a practice domain where the implementation of evidence based practices remains at an early stage, the detail behind the above conclusions is as significant as the conclusions themselves, in so far as it is in this detail that we can identify a number of themes and issues relevant to the development of evidence based practices within CS. The final part of this paper gives attention to these emerging themes and considers the implications of the study's findings for future CS policy, practice and research.

Developing and Sustaining a Pro-social Approach

Perhaps the clearest message to emerge from this study with regard to the successful implementation of a pro-social approach (and, one would venture, other evidence based practices) is that the delivery of staff training, though of value, is not enough. This message is entirely consonant with the findings of wider research in this area (see above) and reminds us of the need to now attend as much to questions of 'how' we effectively implement and sustain evidence based practices within offender supervision as to questions of 'what' evidence based practice might look like (Bourgon, 2009). What then can we learn from this study with regard to implementing, realising and sustaining the potential of a pro-social approach (and indeed other related service initiatives) within CS practice?

Firstly, the findings foreground the need for a strategic, coordinated and coherent approach to service development. Specifically, one in which the intended outcomes of new initiatives are clear, achievable and coherent with the wider objectives, approach and practices of the organisation. Secondly the findings support a individualised and multi-modal approach to service development, i.e. one which recognises staff 'starting points' and which draws on a variety of learning and development mechanisms which are capable of achieving and sustaining the desired outcomes. Specifically, the findings point to the value of mechanisms which create routine and ongoing opportunities for group learning, dialogue, review and reward.

Finally, the findings suggest a need for enhanced and ongoing attention to staff recruitment and development generally. In common with probation based studies, staff in this study placed as much significance on the experience, values and attitudes that they brought to the role as on the training itself. This finding is particularly significant in a CS context when one considers the potential contact hours spent between CS staff and offenders. Current Scottish guidelines prescribe that offenders complete a minimum of two CS days per week, arguably resulting in an hourly tally (per week) that exceeds the hours a probationer will spend with his officer/social worker over the course of an entire order. In light of this very basic analysis it seems reasonable to deduce that if we wish to realise the potential of the supervisory relationship within CS then we need to invest in these relationships.

In a correctional climate where new initiatives come and go the above messages are neither new nor unique to this study – not least when considered in the context of recent probation-based efforts in this area. However, in a climate of public spending cuts and increased fiscal accountability, if organisations and governments are to continue to invest in new initiatives it is morally and financially prudent to expect more – not least that we strive to cultivate the knowledge, culture and conditions required to realise the potential of such investments.

Revisiting the Community Service Role and Task

Though the findings suggest that, for many staff, the training contributed to a developing conception of the CS role and task, the findings also highlight a concerning lack of clarity (amongst both staff and offenders) regarding what it is that CS is seeking to achieve. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that the absence of clearly articulated objectives for the service, specifically those which relate to the broader restorative and reintegrative potential of CS, may in fact impede the successful achievement of these objectives. For example, both staff and offenders described notably diverse supervisory practices currently in evidence within CS, each of which were seen to be legitimised by the, at times, competing objectives of the service (i.e. to punish and assist). Similar examples can be drawn regarding the nature of work offenders are expected to undertake, the accepted scarcity of local placements and the routine, albeit undesirable, prioritising of quantitative over qualitative outputs. From a different perspective, offenders appeared to have little if any expectations of CS beyond punishment. Though offenders were keen to point out that the experience of CS was not necessarily punitive - in that many of the supervisors treated and interacted with them positively - this and other elements of CS, including the provision of help and support, was for many beyond what was expected. More disturbingly perhaps, offenders appeared to locate the completion of CS within an ‘offending’ rather than a ‘desistance’ trajectory - in so far as the process of ‘moving forward’ or ‘getting on with life’ (and the priorities associated with that) was seen to begin following completion of the order. Noting Maruna’s (2001) work on the significance of personal narratives within the change process, this finding is troubling and would suggest that CS has some work to do if it is to achieve a shift in offender conceptions and expectations of CS. Certainly, for the offenders in this study, the project of desistance or ‘going straight’ was seen to begin after CS.

The above findings suggest a need to revisit the role and function of CS at both local and national levels. As outlined, there is now a growing body of evidence to suggest that the outcomes of CS can (and frequently do) extend beyond its more traditionally

conceived objectives. However, to date (with the exception of a small number of pilot projects), such benefits appear to have been achieved by default rather than design. While, as noted earlier there is a need to progress cautiously in this area, the findings from this study suggest that a failure to sensitively incorporate recent developments into official and shared objectives may in fact impede the success of such developments - specifically, realising CS's rehabilitative potential. As a starting point, there is perhaps a need to 'make up our minds' regarding what we want CS to achieve. The emerging context of 'Community Payback' in Scotland presents both opportunity and challenge in this respect. On the one hand there is opportunity to formally articulate a broader and more 'constructive' vision for CS or 'unpaid work', as envisaged for example in the report by the Scottish Prisons Commission (2008). The attendant danger of course is that the reparative, re-integrative and rehabilitative ideals of community payback become obscured by competing political priorities to publicly 'package' payback as punishment first and last (see for example Maruna & King, 2008).

More practically, if we are serious in our efforts to exploit the reparative, restorative and reintegrative potential of CS (as some recent policy espousals indicate), the findings from this study suggest there is also a need to revisit the more rudimentary elements of that disposal (i.e. 'boring placements' and 'pointless work'). In our late modern preoccupation with form over function, such elements may have become less fashionable but they remain, at least for the offenders interviewed, outcome critical.

Getting to Grips with Support, Help and Guidance

Noting the range of personal and social problems typically experienced by offenders completing CS (Rex et al, 2003), the now well documented correlation between offenders' problems, compliance and recidivism, (Raynor & Vanstone, 1997, McIvor, 1998) and the significance offenders in this study placed on 'other stuff going on in your life', a concern to improve the provision of support, help and guidance would seem a particularly legitimate service objective. Indeed, recent research on enhancing the effectiveness of CS has highlighted the potential of a problem solving approach within practice (McIvor, 1998, 2002). Additionally, one of the three approaches developed within the Community Punishment Pathfinder projects focussed on the use of community service to 'address the problems underlying offending' (Rex et al. 2003).

However, the findings from this study suggest considerable ambivalence amongst staff and offenders regarding the appropriateness and scope of a problem solving approach within CS. As outlined, while all offenders acknowledged the considerable impact of 'wider' problems on motivation and compliance, most were clearly surprised by the suggestion that they might receive support or help with such problems within CS. The limited research in this area presents a similarly ambivalent picture. For example, in a paper presented to The Clarke Hall Day Conference, McIvor (1998) discusses the value of 'concrete problem solving' within CS and advocates the use of a problem solving approach at the following 3 levels:

- (i) in the supervisor's approach to the completion of work tasks
- (ii) in the development of work tasks which help to alleviate offenders' social problems

- (iii) in actively helping offenders to deal with problems which arise in the course of an order (p.59, italics added)

In a more recent professional paper, McIvor's (2002) discussion of problem solving within CS is notably constrained to 'the tasks that offenders in teams are required to undertake'. Similarly, despite a clear focus on this area within the Community Punishment Pathfinder projects, the findings to emerge on this issue are far from straightforward (Rex et al, 2003). For example, though projects focussed on using CS to tackle offender-related needs were reported to produce significant reductions in offenders' 'self-perceived problems', the authors go on to observe that they 'did not appear to produce positive outcomes overall' (p.76). Interestingly, success in this area was thought to be hampered by implementation problems, in particular 'a lack of strong focus' – a particularly salient observation in light of related findings from the effectiveness literature which indicate that the provision of help or problem solving should be focussed, clearly targeted, and appropriately resourced (Dowden and Andrews, 2004; Raynor and Vanstone, 1997).

In light of the above, perhaps the clearest message to emerge on this issue is the need for further research. Specifically, there is a need to further explore if CS can be effective in assisting offenders with the personal and social problems experienced in the course of an order, and if so, how CS staff (or others) can best do this. In the interim, the findings suggest a need for service providers to clarify the nature and scope of what is currently envisaged in the provision of support, help and guidance, and to effectively communicate that with both those delivering and undertaking CS. If the provision of support, help and guidance is to extend beyond the 'completion of CS tasks' then there appears to be a need for organisations to ensure that staff possess (or have access to) the knowledge, skills and time required to fulfil that role.

The Complexity of Compliance

Despite a growing recognition of the centrality of compliance to effectiveness in community penalties (Bottoms, 2001, Robinson & McNeill, 2007, McCulloch, in press), few studies exploring the rehabilitative potential of CS attend in any direct way to this complex issue. Rather, writing in this area has tended to focus on developments aimed at enhancing the offender's experience of completing CS, the assumption being that a positive experience of CS will in turn improve compliance. The findings from this study suggest that offender compliance with community service is more complex.

While the majority of those interviewed – staff and offenders alike – agreed that the nature and quality of the worker/ offender relationship made a difference to the CS experience, and even 'supported' attendance and compliance, responses were routinely qualified by an attention to other 'stronger' influencing factors on the attendance/ compliance dynamic. On one level, responses in this area endorsed existing research messages with staff highlighting the greater significance of offenders' attitudes and problems, alongside the considerable influence of wider organisational and socio-political constraints. Offenders, again as might be expected, attested to the considerable influence of those they worked alongside, the perceived consequences of non-compliance and, most significantly, the nature of work they were expected to undertake. Despite the familiarity of these messages, in a climate

where we are witnessing the emergence of a range of new ‘technologies’ to aid compliance within CS (i.e. the introduction of text messaging to support attendance), each present a considerable challenge to those concerned to influence and improve CS compliance in the long term. For example, despite the fact that ‘the nature of work undertaken’ has been highlighted as outcome critical in almost every evaluative study of CS to date (see for example, McIvor, 1998, Rex and Gelsthorpe, 2002), these same studies, in common with this one, continue to provide ample evidence of offenders engaging in ‘pointless work’.

Beyond these familiar messages, offender discussion also highlighted the considerable complexity which surrounds attendance, motivation and compliance. In essence, the detail emerging from individual accounts suggests that supporting compliance within CS is about much more than what goes on within CS. For at least some of the offenders interviewed, there emerged a tentative expression of the need for a valued reason, reward or purpose to comply in the long term.

As is often the case with offender perspectives, there is a common sense nature to the above finding; there is also a growing body of research evidence to support it (see for example Maruna, 2001; Ward and Brown’s, 2004; McNeil and Robinson, 2007). Nonetheless, offenders’ need for a valued reason to comply perhaps presents one of the greatest challenges to contemporary penal policy and practice. To return to the Scottish context, the new penal discourse currently emerging in Scotland has once again endorsed a commitment to providing offenders with an opportunity for change within the context of community penalties – a commitment which, for many (particularly those looking on from other jurisdictions), is to be celebrated and seized. The challenge however lies in the perhaps inconvenient truth that offenders – both in this study and others – appear to need more than opportunity for change, they need a reason.

Conclusion

In this paper I have sought to report on the findings of a small scale Scottish study which set out to evaluate the impact of pro-social modelling training on the practice of CS supervision within a local authority team. In doing so I have attempted to locate this discussion within the evolving and complex landscape of contemporary CS practice – an approach which highlights both the considerable potential that resides within CS, as well as the many obstacles that lie in the way of sustainable service development. Certainly there is evidence to suggest that the delivery of staff training can impact positively on staff practice, offender experiences and service outcomes. However there is also much to suggest that the business of improving staff practice, offender experiences and service outcomes in CS is a far more complex and demanding endeavour.

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