

RICHARD SPARKS

So, what can usefully be done in prisons? David Wilson again.

DAVID WILSON

It's about remaining focused about what we can do as a prison service in terms of offender behaviour and treatment programmes which tackle directly why people were coming into prison in the first place, tackling things to do with addictions, either drug or alcohol, tackling issues to do with a specific offending behaviour, giving them the opportunity to make change. And that's the big thing that I would say about prison. Prison at its best offers opportunities to people. The best prisons offer the most opportunities.

RICHARD

Grenden is a Category B prison which is run as a therapeutic community. Most of its prisoners have committed offences of violence and many are serving life sentences. Governor, Tim Newell.

TIM NEWELL

What we have demonstrated through the 32 years of Grenden's work is that when people are given an opportunity to actually take responsibility for themselves and seek to change the direction of their lives with the support of a community of fellow prisoners who're also thinking along those lines and with the help of a few skilled and dedicated staff, it is possible to achieve communities in which real change can take place. And the evidence is that both from immediate behaviour patterns within the prison setting there are remarkable changes in people's behaviour and secondly, the evidence is of a, a long term change in people's eventual likelihood of reconviction.

RICHARD SPARKS

Governors Wilson and Newell argue that for prisons to work they must provide opportunities for change. But would their favoured prisons look austere enough to satisfy the Home Secretary or the press?

TIM NEWELL

What we provide within Grenden are five small communities of 40 prisoners in each community and some 15 staff. Each individual has an accountability to the community for their behaviour, for the work which they do. They have areas of discretion in organising the activity of the wing, in making decisions about the wing and certain power is delegated to that community in order to organise its time.

But the main purpose of people coming here is to examine their past and their present behaviours in order to improve themselves in their day to day functioning with each other and eventually, in the long term, hopefully to address their offending behaviour through that process. We try through the process of-providing this environment to eliminate fear which exists in most other prison settings because it's only through being able to trust each other, and particularly to trust staff, that people can begin to be honest about very painful early experiences they have had, very painful current experiences. The experience of deprivation of one's liberty is not an easy experience to go through and we take that for granted quite often, many of us working in prisons, but in Grenden people are actually able to express what it feels like to lose your

freedom, whereas in many other places it's something that you can't really expose and can't deal with because it is so painful that you may not be able to handle the anger and the frustration, the tears which flow from that deprivation that you're experiencing.

RICHARD SPARKS

So, does this make Grendon a holiday camp? Both Roland the lifer and Mr Newell the Governor say not.

ROLAND

The way I felt when I first came inside was that I was forgotten, that nothing was going to be done for me. I was the big bad boy, which I was, but I was never going to be allowed to forget that, that it was going to be continuously drummed in to me in a very forceful manner from the day I got in there to the day I got out. That doesn't do anything for your own self esteem, if you're trying to break out of that, or if the people working within the system are trying to get you to change, if you've got part of that system it's continuously putting you down with a sort of a thumb on your head.

So what happened is that I was going out there, even though I said, like loads of inmates would say, oh, you'll never see me again. You have those sort of good intentions but the underlying thing, the thing that makes you tick hasn't really changed and maybe has got worse, as I said. And the next thing you know you're re-offending again.

If you haven't had that help at those initial stages of coming inside as a raw recruit to prison, say, you can go out and not realise the basic faults that you have unless they've been sort of, pointed out. So you're going out no better than what you were when you came in.

I think Grendon's changed that inasmuch as the way I'm, I'm talking about how I perceive myself and, and the way the system is running now. I would never have looked at things like that, in that depth, before. I would never have looked at myself in that depth before. I never saw the need. I always felt that really the world owed me a living for past grievances that were quite genuine, that had been committed to me, you know.

And I'd never got over that. I'd always had a hang up about that. I'd always felt that I needed my pound of flesh - consequently, my offending behaviour because I didn't get my pound of flesh. And one of the things that Grendon's helped me to realise is to make me look back at my past, see where things stemmed from, why they happened the way they happened, why I've carried them on, and then learn to change things about my here and now attitude to life, to people, to myself. So these are the things Grendon's given me, the chance to change and to grow and to become, a little bit more of a more rounded normal human being.

WELL

This certainly isn't a soft option. It superficially sometimes does appear to be a rather easy place to be in and that's because in order for the prison to work there has to be an

open and good communication between people and so there is a friendship between staff and prisoners which is not evident in many other prisons.

But if you actually asked prisoners of their experience they would say, and they have said to me, that this experience of Grenden has been the hardest period of their custodial experience because they cannot avoid responsibility for what they have done. And the prime responsibility which men here have to accept is that they have created victims in the past and that they have been dangerous and damaging people and that their, it's their behaviour that did that. There may be all sorts of reasons for that behaviour but in order to make progress they have to accept that they are the people who need to do something about this. No-one else can.

#### RICHARD SPARKS

One of the distinctive features of Grenden is that prisoners volunteer to go there and a condition of their staying is that they agree to give up a number of the traditional consolations of prison - drugs, alcohol, sex, violence, gambling.

#### ROLAND

Well, I wasn't into drugs anyway, so that's never been my forte. Alcohol was the big thing for me. Yeah, and that's hard, especially in other institutions where you can, there's hooch alcohol going around. That can be hard. I mean, say, it can be hard not to want to take somebody in the recess and punch them on the nose because he's upsetting you, if you're that way inclined. It can be hard not to sort of drink yourself into oblivion because it makes it easier for the day to go by, rather than just suffer all the sort of, you know, the stupid things that happen in prison. And that, that can awkward at times. It, the close friendships some men have with each other can be hard when they, they, they have to open them up and, and analyse them.

Yeah, I can, I can see all those - of course they're hard. But then again what's going to be harder? Is it going to be harder to continuously come back inside and maybe die inside as an old man and create no end of more victims outside. I mean, I would have thought that was far harder than to give up drink for eighteen months, two years, whatever the case may be I mean, I'd sooner do without all those sort of things rather than to create more victims outside, you know.

#### RICHARD SPARKS

Perhaps it's a matter of exchanging the pains and illicit pleasures of the classic austere institution for the challenges of greater responsibility. But does it all work? And how can we tell? Psychologist, Eric Cullen.

#### ERIC CULLEN

We actually see the changes for ourselves in the men. They actually report the changes in themselves as well, that they're feeling better about themselves, that they gradually take on more, responsibility, that they're reassured and reinforced by that, whether it's within the community, being a chairman or a, a representative of the community or going off to education and achieving, trying to achieve more qualifications.

We also assess it in terms of the lowest rate of institutional offending of practically any comparable prison in the country, certainly the lowest rate of any Cat B prison and one of the half dozen or so lowest rates every year, year after year, of any of the 1345 prisons in the country.

But most critically, we actually assess how well we're achieving our objectives, I think, ultimately, by lower rates of re-offending, fewer victims. And essentially, the critical point I would make there, is that almost every man who comes here has failed miserably and demonstrably in relationships. They are destructive in relationships and we focus on interpersonal skills. We focus on building relationships and, uniquely in the prison system, when you concentrate on improving people's interpersonal skills, helping them gain insight into where they've gone wrong in the marriages and whatever it is, whatever relationship it is, they achieve a greater sense of peace, of self confidence and resolve to have no more victims.

#### RICHARD SPARKS

Grendon, as yet, is a special place for people who pose a serious danger to others and all the therapeutic effort reflects that. Most people might agree both that prison works in securely confining those people and that there is a need for serious work to address their behaviour. When prison governors speak of the need to focus their work, this is what they mean. But the greater part of the prison population is not of this kind and here the consensus breaks down. What of the wayward youth, the mentally ill, the persistent minor property offender, for whom problems of literacy, employment, housing and addiction are more salient to their offending behaviour and their life chances.

These are the sorts of people that magistrates see and sentence everyday.

#### LARRY VINER

What we're talking about are people that are sent to prison for whom we would like to have an alternative. We do have alternatives. We have community sentences. We have the facilities to treat alcoholics, drug addicts, schizophrenics, all of whom find themselves in prison.

What we don't have is the will on the part of either the Home Secretary, the government, or society, to treat people in that way.

#### RICHARD SPARKS

We are faced with some fundamental problems, not just about the role of prisons but about our very ideas of punishment.

#### DAVID WILSON

A lot of my job as a prison governor is trying to explain to the public why they should be engaging with prisoners, what advantages there are for them in engaging with prisoners and the prison service because, at the end of the day who's currently inside as a prisoner will come out back into the community and if they come out in some way in a better position to engage more positively with the community, then that benefits us all.

ALISON LIEBLING

We do use imprisonment as a punishment. We don't send people to prison for punishment. I think we're in a slightly confused ideological era and people have very contradictory demands. I think the public have contradictory demands. They, if they think about what they want, what they want is less crime but what they also want emotionally is revenge and I think we get all those sorts of feelings tangled up and the two things can't be done in the same way.

(Prison door closes)

PATTI LANTON

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