

Subject: Models for community involvement in restorative justice  
- speaker's notes

Presented by: Michael Wood

At: Restorative Practices International - 2015 national conference  
Grand Chancellor Hotel, Hobart, Tasmania

On: 25 March 2015 - 11:15am to 12:00pm

## **OH1**

Title and author

## **OH2**

Context (photo is the Risdon Prison complex, in Hobart Tasmania)

- (i) focus is restorative practices in the criminal justice system; and
- (ii) the author's primary experience is in Tasmania, but with some exposure to equivalent situations elsewhere in Australia and (some) overseas.

## **OH3**

Purpose - to "prime the pumps", i.e. to stimulate some discussion on possible approaches to improved communication and cooperation between the relevant parties.

## **OH4**

Outline of the presentation that follows.

Background - The benefits of restorative justice (in this context)

Background - Prison Fellowship

Prison Fellowship - Examples of programs, activities and partnerships

Discussion - Opportunities that I see

Discussion - Constraints that I recognise

Conclusion

## **OH5**

Background - benefits of restorative practices in the criminal justice system

Definition ...

notwithstanding shock jocks' strident cries every time a serious crime is committed by a person on parole or bail ...

RJ is NOT seen as an alternative to a custodial sentences in every situation, although non custodial sentencing and related court orders and processes may be legitimate and effective measures in many circumstances

RJ is defined as

- (i) restoration of the victim;
- (ii) restoration of the offender to a law - abiding life; and
- (iii) restoration of the damage caused by crime to the community.

Restoration is not only about restoring past damage, but also about building a better society for the future.

Under this definition, the benefits are self evident.

There is plenty of published evidence to support this claim,

## **OH6**

### Background - Prison Fellowship

- + is a faith based (Christian) organisation
- + is international - operating in more than 125 countries, including all Australian States, the ACT and NT
- + was founded in the USA by Charles Colson in 1976 (Charles being a former senior aide to Richard Nixon, who was jailed for perjury in association with the Watergate scandal)
- + embraces the Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox traditions, being the only faith based organisation that I know to do so
- + commenced in Australia in 1981, and now has 1200 volunteers and fifteen staff (<10 FTEs)
- + works to restore broken lives amongst prisoners and ex prisoners, their families and victims
- + develops and conducts programs and activities in response to need, opportunity and the ability, interest and experience of its staff and volunteers
- + operates on the premise that real and lasting restoration depends on belief in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, BUT
  - its first focus is on meeting felt needs, irrespective of belief;
  - then on building relationship, irrespective of belief; then
  - if asked, on sharing what we believe about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus

**OH7**

Typical parties with whom Prison Fellowship partners or liaises when developing and conducting its programs and activities.

Corrections departments

- these differ from State to State and from prison to prison

Prisoners and ex prisoners

Other government departments

Local churches

Prisoners' families

Victims

Private enterprise and private individuals

Others not mentioned in the slide

- chaplains
- research institutions
- health professionals
- education professionals
- employee associations / unions
- advocacy groups

**OH8**

Introducing some Prison Fellowship programs and activities, and the different partnerships that they represent.

- + Not all of these are provided in all countries, nor even in all States, nor even all prisons within a State.
- + There are many others!

**OH9**

Visiting In Prisons (a “bread and butter” program for Prison Fellowship)

- consists of volunteers visiting prisoners

**OH10**

Involves Prison Fellowship partnering / liaising with Corrections and with prisoners.

**OH11**

Change On The Inside

(an example of a personal development or faith based course, of which there are also several others conducted by Prison Fellowship)

Comprises volunteers presenting formal courses to prisoners

**OH12**

Involves PF partnering / liaising with Corrections, prisoners and private enterprise (which may fund the purchase of materials needed to present the course, for example).

**OH13**

Sycamore Tree Project (one of Prison Fellowship's "signature" programs)

Comprises trained volunteers facilitating restorative discussion between prisoners and victims

Was the subject of Martin Howard's video presentation at the RPI dinner on Tuesday night

**OH14**

Involves PF partnering and liaising with Corrections, prisoners and victims

**OH15**

Angel Tree (another Prison Fellowship "signature" program)

Involves volunteers arranging Christmas gifts for prisoners' children. Gifts (or the funds to purchase them) are donated. Prisoners request that their children receive a gift from them (i.e. on their behalf). (They would otherwise be able to provide gifts for the children). Prison Fellowship checks with the relevant authorities that there are no legal constraints that prevent a prisoner having such contact with his children. Prison Fellowship arranges for local church members to distribute the gifts to prisoners' children in their locality. Prison Fellowship coordinates all the relevant communication and arrangements between the parties.

There is a similar Happy Birthday program

**OH16**

Involves Prison Fellowship partnering / liaising with Corrections, other government departments (e.g. child welfare), prisoners, prisoners' families, private enterprise and local churches.

**OH17**

T24

Comprises Prison Fellowship volunteers assisting ex prisoners for the first 24 hours and then the first 24 months after release (including by providing a "Welcome Backpack" to each prisoner upon their release, i.e. meeting them at the gate).

Seeks to address the main factors that contribute to a former prisoner's successful reintegration into society, following release, i.e.:

Accommodation	Employment	Health (physical and mental)
Family	Friends	Education
Drug / alcohol dependencies		Community engagement

Note that there are very many organisations with the potential to assist in this endeavour.

**OH18**

Involves Prison Fellowship partnering / liaising with Corrections, other government departments, prisoners, prisoners' families, local churches and private enterprise (e.g. sponsors for the Welcome Backpacks, potential employers and potential accommodation providers).

**OH19**

In reality, although the preceding slides have shown single entities to represent each type of party, many of the elements in the graphic representation reflect multiple entities, rather than single entities.

- Several government departments
- Several charitable organisations
- Many local churches (or other local community organisations)
- Many private enterprises

... and, of course, many prisoners, ex prisoners, prisoners' family members

**OH20**

Furthermore, with many of the larger entities, there are different levels of responsibility - each with potentially different perspectives

**OH21**

The result is a complex network of intersecting parties ...

... with objectives that may or may not coincide

Lots of parties, many with lots of layers within them ...

... no one person is likely to know all the players,

.. nor to have contact with all the layers

**OH22**

There is also the potential for Prison Fellowship's programs and activities to be developed in a somewhat ad hoc manner, which is not ideal.

The genesis of Prison Fellowship's programs and activities tends to be:

- (i) initiated by Prison Fellowship (e.g. because it has worked well elsewhere or is a new idea in response to a new situation);
- (ii) developed and implemented by Prison Fellowship (with assistance from other parties, in many cases).
- (iii) submitted to Corrections for approval; and

The risk is that such an ad hoc approach might be:

Opportunistic	Subjective
Blinkered	Competitive

And might not necessarily address the greatest need as perceived by Corrections, by prisoners or by other parties ... or

... might unknowingly duplicate or compete with the programs or activities of another service provider.

**OH23**

Opportunities - there is / are:

- + a growing interest in and commitment to restorative practices
- + a growing focus on individual case management within Corrections
- + lots of well established, credible NFPs
- + a growing culture of corporate philanthropy
- + a growing number of volunteers and potential volunteers

ref Lisel O'Dwyer (University of Adelaide), in her 2012 report

- there are currently 6.4M volunteers in Australia
- this number has doubled over fifteen years from 1995
- quote "With the looming retirement of the first wave of baby boomers, these figures are likely to increase at an even more rapid rate".

- + ongoing political, academic and community debate about criminal justice

**OH24**

Constraints

Security is always a primary constraint for Corrections, and this must be acknowledged and respected by other parties.

Privacy and individual rights

Resources

- + For governments and for NFPs
- + Noting that constrained government resources may also represent an opportunity (e.g. for NFPs to provide services that governments cannot)

Reporting requirements

- + Let's not over do this ... what are the key things that we need to measure

Perceptions - reputations, motives and hidden agendas

### Scope and scale

- + Scope - e.g. parties' horizons may end at the prison gate, and not extend to the importance of post release support for former prisoners
- + Scale - too big may be too unwieldy (especially for NFPs)

## **OH25**

Concluding discussion - the suggested need for a peak body that facilitates better communication and cooperation between the relevant parties. Functions could include:

Strategic assessment to confirm primary outcomes (examples)

- + keep society safe now
- + improve likelihood of future societal safety
- + improve offender behaviour

Agree on secondary outcomes

(i.e. other parties' desired outcomes that are consistent with primary outcomes)

Identify gaps - what is not being done, or not being done well

Establish and maintain partnerships directed at meeting agreed primary and secondary outcomes

Avoid duplication

Promote excellence

Build capacity

Review performance

It is suggested that such a peak body needs to be a government initiative, including Corrections and other departments, so that other community organisations can work effectively with those relevant government parties.