

North East Inter Faith Forum on the Resettlement of Offenders “Faith Communities Can Change Lives”

at Castlegate, Newcastle upon Tyne, 4th March 2010, 9.30am – 3pm

This event focused on the process of the rehabilitation of offenders and aimed to

- Recognise the equality and diversity of all faiths and build on existing good practice within the Prison Service and the wider community in helping to reduce re-offending
- Share good practice and develop ways to increase community engagement amongst the different faiths with the Prison and Probation Services
- Promote the engagement of Faith communities in working with offenders and make for more informed decisions with regard to offenders' resettlement
- Create effective partnerships

The event was funded by both the Ministry of Justice and the North East Regional Faiths Network. The 86 participants were roughly evenly divided between officers of the various Criminal Justice Agencies and members of different Faith communities.

The sessions were co-chaired by Fr Patrick Cope, Area Prison Chaplain (morning), and Michael King, “Faith to Engage” Regional Partner (afternoon). The keynote speech was delivered by Phil Copple, the Director of Offender Management for the North East Region. Mohammed Aslam (Director, HIMMAT Ltd) presented the first of 5 case studies. A ‘Q&A’ session was then followed by the first series of workshops, each facilitated by a Prison Chaplain. In the afternoon, case studies were presented by David Peel of the Cedarwood Trust, Rachel Henry of Open Gate Community Chaplaincy at Low Newton, Yvonne Yates of HMP Kirkclevington Grange and Muhammad Meah, Chaplain at HMYOI Deerbolt. The second series of workshops looked at challenges and next steps for the Forum.

Keynote Speech

Phil Copple opened his presentation by outlining the role of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and his own role within that as Director of Offender Management (DOM). NOMS is part of the Ministry of Justice and a new agency which brings together the Prison and Probation Services and aims to have a joined up management of offenders in custody and in the community, thereby reducing costs and devolving responsibility to the regions. It aims to protect the public and reduce re-offending, thus preventing victims by changing lives. The DOM's role is one of leadership of the offender management system and as Regional Commissioner. As Regional Commissioner he aims to engage in partnership since multiple needs require multi-agency responses, integration, local delivery (community safety partnerships) and regional partnerships to add value. He sees Faith communities playing a vital partnering role with NOMS North East in respect of helping to build safer communities and to resettle offenders returning from prison to their local communities. Faith can play an important role in the greater rehabilitation of offenders into law-abiding citizens bringing about a reduction in crime and therefore fewer victims.

The predicted budget for NOMS North East is £170m per annum with a split between prisons (67%) and probation (33%). The 17,000 offenders are split between prison (4,500 or 25%) and probation (12,500 or 75%).

The main priorities for NOMS North East are:

- Delivery of public protection and orders of the courts

- Diversion of low risk offenders from short term custody
- Prolific offenders
- Indeterminate Sentenced Prisoners
- Women Offenders
- Integrated Offender Management
- Improved housing and employment outcomes
- Improved access to benefits
- Improved youth-adult transition
- “Think Family” developments
- “Improving Health, Supporting Justice”

In the context of this Inter Faith Forum on the Resettlement of Offenders the DOM made a strong commitment to include all faiths in this vision and these aims. Chaplaincy work in our region has for a long time played an important role within our prisons and the desire is for this to begin to engage in more partnerships with local Faith communities in taking forward the resettlement agenda. To this end, as DOM, Phil had invested more in the role of Regional Chaplain and increased his days in order to be the key chaplaincy lead. He is resourced by the Regional Office and is to be particularly proactive in developing links with the local Faith communities, groups and organisations. Today’s Forum is to be seen as an important step in that journey and engagement.

Case Study One – Mohamed Aslam on the work of HIMMAT Ltd.

HIMMAT is based in Yorkshire. Their mission is to empower people by giving them the opportunity to develop their knowledge, skills, attitudes and confidence.

They engage especially with offenders from Asian communities and address their mindset of offending. HIMMAT runs a training programme called “Respect, Rights, Responsibilities” which is a citizenship programme to encourage tolerance and a sense of belonging among young people. Their work complements that of Offender Managers to ensure that clients from South Asian cultural backgrounds have better access to service provision. HIMMAT offers interpretation, communication, cultural, and religious advice to the Probation Service and advise on the possible effects of culture or religion upon offending, motivation, or denial. They also assist in delivering reports, supervision, parole assessments and risk assessments.

HIMMAT’s community outreach includes employment advice, supporting and mentoring families of offenders, and liaising between offenders, their families and the wider criminal justice agencies.

Case Study Two – Revd David Peel of The Cedarwood Trust

The Cedarwood Trust is a pastoral care organisation whose workers deal with a wide range of issues. Much one-to-one work is done such as supporting those they know who are in prison - usually about eight at any one time; accompanying/supporting people with hospital visits/court appearances; school problems; debt related/housing problems. Cedarwood operates an 'open door' policy. Much work is done supporting people who suffer from alcoholism, learning disabilities, drug abuse and depression.

Cedarwood was set up by the Diocese of Newcastle and North Tyneside Council in 1980 to reach parts others cannot reach in one of their more deprived places, Meadow Well, North Shields. Their core provision is a drop-in, open four mornings a week, where up to 60 people of all ages are offered a welcome and simple hospitality each day.

Cedarwood ministers with love in the ordinariness of people's lives - ordinariness which does not always include specific problems but in which the need for a pastoral response is nevertheless expressed.

Case Study Three – Rachel Waller, Community Chaplain, Open Gate Mentoring Project

Open Gate is a Mentoring Project working in partnership with HMP & YOI Low Newton. It was started in 2005 by Elizabeth McGurk, former chaplain to the prison. The project is based just outside the prison at Brasside. It offers mentoring and befriending support to women released from the prison into the North East, in order to aid their resettlement into the wider community.

Support for the women starts approximately 6-8 weeks before release. Where possible the women are linked with a volunteer who will visit them whilst they are still in prison to establish a befriending relationship. The volunteers are linked with a woman who is locally accessible but not on the door step. Open Gate staff and volunteers give support in the community through accompanying the women to important appointments such as probation, drugs and alcohol support, housing or medicals. Support is given 1:1 and depends on the individual needs of each of the women. These range from intensive support such as helping maintain accommodation and accessing employment or education to simply be to meeting up for a coffee and a chat.

Open Gate also coordinates a volunteer driver scheme which was started in 2002 at St. Joseph's RC Parish, Durham. Women leaving prison can apply for a lift from the gate to Durham train or bus station on their day of release to help get them on their way. To date approximately 800 women have benefitted from the scheme.

Case Study Four – Yvonne Yates of HMP Kirklevington Grange

Yvonne spoke of the heavy reliance HMP Kirklevington Grange, as a resettlement prison, placed on the local community. She looked for opportunities to bring the community and prisoners together to foster mutual respect and understanding. For example, during the Faith Week of their Diversity Month Programme, prisoners visited local centres of worship: a Hindu Temple, Sikh Gurdwara, Mosque and a church, enjoying the welcome and hospitality they received as well as the insight they were given to the faith of their hosts. All the prisoners who took part were struck by how much different traditions held in common.

Case Study Five – Muhammad Meah on the experience of being a Muslim chaplain in HM Prison Service:

Muhammad noted the increasingly fast-changing and diverse multifaith environments in which we live and work today. This is reflected in the growing number of multifaith chaplaincy teams in, for example, NHS Hospitals, universities, prisons and court services, providing for any religious or pastoral support to the public. He himself works in a multifaith chaplaincy team in the prison service at HMYOI Deerbolt in Barnard Castle, feeling extremely privileged to be a Muslim chaplain working with offenders. He has enjoyed serving as Chaplain for the past 2 years, especially working with people from different faiths. Some days he found challenging and others easy and enjoyable.

Muhammad's role as Muslim chaplain included:

- Doing all generic duties as any other chaplain.
- Leading the Friday Muslim service.
- Holding Islamic learning groups for Muslim prisoners.
- Arranging for Ramadan and Eid's.
- Giving pastoral support to all prisoners regardless of their faith.
- Being a contact point on religious advice to staff.
- Working alongside every other chaplain.

Workshops

Morning workshops strove to identify the opportunities and barriers to faith community engagement. In the afternoon they endeavoured to chart key messages, challenges and next steps.

Workshop 1. Are there any specific points in the offender journey where the criminal justice system should focus its effort in developing relationships with the faith communities?

The following introductory points were made:

- Faith communities are here for the long term
- The criminal justice system does not always understand faith communities and *vice versa*
- Look at what faith communities offer

Prevention: Areas where support could be given could include courses for young mothers and fathers; parenting courses for those who are struggling

Intervention: Working with community sentences (an alternative to custodial sentences). Providing a LINK between the school, the offence and the faith community

At Sentencing: Maintain community links with the faith community (where they exist) e.g. provide travel costs for someone from the faith community to visit the prisoner

On Release: There is still a need for more notice to be given of a prisoner's release (especially sex offenders). There is a lack of awareness of how to support that person on release

2. What opportunities are there for further partnership work between the prison service chaplaincy and faith based sector in the community?

Prisons and Area Chaplains need time to make contact with faith groups and to share knowledge and information. They should pro-actively engage with faith communities and recruit volunteers. However, this workshop identified the following barriers needing to be addressed for this engagement to be successful:

- Motivation to get involved: could diocese, church, mosque, gurdwara, temple or synagogue be encouraged to have a criminal justice/ex-offender 'champion'?
- Access to prison: if a community wants to engage who do they talk to – governor, chaplains, area chaplains?
- Training: some faith communities are not good at dealing with ex-offenders.
- Lack of information about good practice: how can community chaplaincy be expanded in the north east? What are the best models around? 'Reflex' offers a good model of training faith communities (churches) to mentor and support ex-offenders.
- A need to have an overview/ data base of what is out there in the community.
- M.o.J. must not assume that volunteers, or faith based projects, are free or amateurish! They still cost money.

3. What barriers are faced by Faith-based organisations and what can the Criminal Justice System do to overcome these barriers at regional level?

Finance. Faith communities can find it difficult to access money from NOMS and to compete with larger charities and providers. The use of local contracts was discussed and it was thought that these might be useful in overcoming some of these issues.

'Faith' and maintaining credibility can be barriers due to preconceived ideas on the part of commissioning authorities. This can be overcome by the building up of good relationships.

A "base" for faith based organisations in Prisons would be useful, both in terms of physicality and also accountability. There is often a natural link in with the Chaplaincy.

Faith based organisations can find difficulty in adapting to the cultural mindset of prisons and the wider Criminal Justice system.

4. How should NOMS North East better engage with faith-based organisations to ensure there is a strong faith-sector voice within the larger third sector?

Language: both NOMS and the Prison Service often used language and terminology which was impenetrable from 'the outside'. This could be a barrier to those on the outside who were being asked to engage with these two bodies. Even the phrase 'Third Sector' was not understood initially by those in the group from the community. NOMS must therefore seek to initially engage with faith communities in terms of the language it uses to explain what it requires. Assumptions can be made which actually act as more of a barrier to engagement with faith communities.

NOMS has to be realistic about the fact that there is not a great 'groundswell' of faith based organisations waiting in the wings to offer help. Some faith communities are themselves quite small and focus on support of existing adherents. Even the larger faith communities are often more focussed on their own issues rather than looking at engagement with NOMS. The pattern of engagement with people of faith often occurs through the work or vision of individuals who perceive a need and want to engage further, such as the development of the Open Gate Community Chaplaincy project at Low Newton.

NOMS must clearly articulate how it wants to engage with Faith Communities and what areas of its work it believes faith communities could engage with. This will help to start the work by which faith communities can begin to find a voice to articulate their own concerns and discern opportunities to be grasped.

There is a need to 'join up' offenders and ex-offenders with their communities. Faith communities might have a really important role to play. There is a clearly very positive provision for chaplaincy within prisons and this should be modelled into the community. The Community Chaplaincy/ Mentoring model can utilise people from faith communities which are very effective in providing social support.

The development of a 'forum' as a place of engagement between NOMS and faith communities would act as a vehicle of positive communication and engagement and help the relationship between the rather 'nebulous' NOMS and people in the communities to which offenders were returning.

NOMS North East could explore the potential for a 'Faith' resettlement pathway and commission research on the effect of faith on returning offenders and their reintegration into their community.

This conference was a first step in the engagement of NOMS with faith communities, but we need to make sure that there were other steps as a consequence of this day which could move the whole conversation forward.

5. How will your practice be different in two years time (to ensure that one size doesn't fit all) and what needs to happen for you to get there?

Work varies from prison to prison and so does the support each piece of work or scheme receives. In fact there is no one size fits all even now. There is a requirement for consolidation, networking, time, and funding to build successful micro models which can then be replicated at regional and national levels. In all this faith should be used as strength and not a limitation; for example, there should be no fear of including those of no faith.

We need to address issues such as

- The present lack of a support structure
- A lack of consistency. Different prisons will have different opportunities open to them; for example, Kirklevington by its very nature as a resettlement prison will be able to work more closely with the local communities than a closed prison such as Holme House.
- A lack of awareness/advisory services
- The limited sharing of best practice
- The discontinuance of good work begun in prison on release and sometimes upon transfer
- The different sizes of local area covered by a prison, eg Low Newton

6. What are the steps which need to be taken to develop relationships with Faith communities for mutual benefit?

- More team-working/workshops with community organisations/groups. There are community organisations willing to work in Prisons, and there is a need to advertise in the right places.
- Clearances to work: volunteer clearances in Prisons take a long time to come through.
- The recent centrally driven appointment of Imams led to frustrations: can this now be done regionally?
- The appointment of Imams who live a long distance from the prison does not make sense in building up relationships with the local community.
- The role of volunteers needs to be worked out clearly by the Prison service.
- If people are travelling some distance, there needs to be some consideration given to payment to maintain motivation for involvement.
- Community engagement needs to be encouraged, and specifically Inter-faith engagement.
- There are some good examples of community and inter-faith engagement happening. It is down to individuals to build relationships and that this is a lengthy process.
- The need to find a commonality of purpose.

7. After today's event, what challenge(s) would you want to make to faith communities?

It was important to offer encouragement to faith communities rather than challenge. The issue of offending, imprisonment and probation is little understood in faith communities (similar to the general population perhaps?).

CHALLENGES:

Faith communities are to be commended for what they do

Support faith communities in what they do. Motivate faith communities to become involved – but don't force it. Could a diocese, church, mosque temple, synagogue be encouraged to have a criminal justice/ex-offender 'champion'?

Identify leaders and potential leaders

Raise awareness of particular needs – e.g. Official Prison Visitors. (This is an example of an area where someone could play an important role, even though at first they may think that their lack of experience or their lack of insight into prison life would prevent them from being suitable).

Educate as to HOW to become involved (e.g. hearing about the work of Cedarwood was informative, but what is the next step?)

Fear of offenders or ex-offenders. How to balance discretion about that person's offences with concerns about public protection – e.g. when a sex-offender is released and is linked with a Faith Community, who should be informed?

Have events that raise our awareness of each others faiths.

Hold dialogue and discussion between faith groups at an organisational level.

Get involved!

Partnership working linking offenders, and ex-offenders, with organisations that work in their home areas.

Acquire increased knowledge of the needs of those caught up in the judicial system in order to gain a purposeful sense of direction to best meet those needs.

Work towards the restoration of the offender's social status.

Make effective utilisation of available limited resources.

Be receptive to innovation.

What challenges would the Faith communities make to the Prisons?

Support of Families and the role of faith communities.

Build up Prisoner confidence through our Faith communities to maintain contact.

What do faith groups expect? This leads to the wider question of what is the Criminal Justice System?

Knowledge of where each is coming from is essential and recognising some of the barriers e.g. the Prison hierarchy is important.

The role of Prison chaplaincy within all of this.

8. WHAT ARE THE KEY MESSAGES FROM TODAY – AND HOW CAN WE COMMUNICATE THEM MOST EFFECTIVELY?

- Faith Communities can “act as the glue in the middle” between prison, probation and other organisations (though prisons were felt to be less insular with regard to sharing information). Faith communities provide a unique link in identifying families that are affected by offending.
- There is often a need for someone to OVERSEE the support network with e.g. an ex-offender – such as linking together job /housing/ befriending/ providing a role model
- Let's replicate 'good practice' where appropriate.
- Set up a database of organisations/projects/ geographical areas where different things are being done.
- Don't underestimate the powerful effect befriending and mentoring can have on an individual. Do faith organisations and communities feel valued in what they have to offer?
- Faith communities don't have 'targets' and simply value the individual as someone who has inherent worth. This needs to be valued as a strength.
- Faith communities are not just about faith in isolation – they are involved in creative art projects, accommodation schemes, mentoring, etc – how do we plug in to the whole breadth and depth of what is on offer?
- There must be willingness on all sides for partnership working. This is not a case of 'us in our small corner' (as faith communities) being overwhelmed by a room full of NOMS people...the professionals and amateur dichotomy! We also need to have effective means of communication with prisoners about the role and work of faith communities. Offenders are very much a part of society who cannot be ignored and there needs to be some kind of education programme within faith communities which could be NOMS led.
- Plan and develop more engagement with faith communities; allowing faith communities access to the knowledge, experience and expertise that NOMS has and allowing NOMS to listen to the message from faith communities. This is very much a two way process. Regional chaplaincy meetings are a way in which we could explore this relationship. The fact that the Forum had come from NOMS was seen as a positive start.
- NOMS hasn't got all the answers!!!
- Communication needs to work both ways. The Criminal Justice System needs to communicate to faith communities, but also to listen.
- Get involved. Fill in the gaps left by others; for example, family.
- Offer unconditional love from mentors and befrienders. There should be no time limit to this.

- Sharing and communicating from Prison to Faith community and vice versa recognising that Prisons work on role and organisations work on relationships.
- There is a need to use grassroots people not necessarily leaders.
- There is a role for a community development worker with a Community Development background to work towards this greater sharing between prison and faith communities.
- The role of other organisations like the Police, social services and Probation and what they are doing needs to be discovered.
- To accept that not every plant gives fruit. Often there will be disappointment. It may be in the very nature of this kind of engagement. There was debate, because resources are limited, as to the focus of work. Although accepting that nobody should be excluded it was suggested that some offenders were more amenable to change than others and therefore it is these more receptive prisoners who should be the worked with. Not everyone agreed with this point of view.
- There must be a faith-based approach.
- Prison Chaplaincies need time to engage with faith communities and greater resources/training.
- There should be a role for Youth Offending Teams in this process.
- The need to pick up good practise from other parts of the country.
- How do we engage better with individual churches, mosques, synagogues, etc?
- The importance of making faith communities/ organisations aware of the 'pathways' so they have a better idea of where their services might fit.
- There will need to be specialised organisations.

What are the next steps?

- A role for faith communities and other faith organisations raising the profile of resettlement work for offenders.
- How do we help faith communities have confidence in the skills and resources they have already to get involved?
- Producing papers and having conferences is great but is the '*north east regional faiths network*' able to help produce or engage practical projects that are making a difference – is there a directory of such projects that is easily accessible? How can they be empowered to develop a vision for more practical engagement?
- To find some way of communicating the range of work and good practice that is already being done by individuals or groups within faith communities throughout the country. This could in a sense, offer a positive challenge and encouragement to faith communities in the North East statutory bodies need

to find ways in which a simple conversation could be started with faith communities in which the latter could articulate their concerns and apprehensions, be listened to and then potentially explore ways in which positive engagement with offenders/ ex-offenders could develop. It is vital that the facilitation of this engagement be NOMS-driven and the hope is that NOMS will continue this process and keep the momentum going. NOMS might not be the most 'inspirational' of bodies. It has a particular job to do and uses the language pertinent to that task; however when that language becomes a barrier to engagement then NOMS needs to adapt and learn to communicate more effectively

- Do it in small steps which are more effective and manageable for faith communities. The bigger picture can be daunting and NOMS must take care in the way in which it offers challenge or encouragement. We recognised the need for NOMS to offer a support, information and developmental structure for those within faith communities who respond.
- There is a need for mentoring and post-release care. The real challenge lies when prisoners are released.
- There would need to be an engagement strategy based on communication, education, and motivation which should lead to inspiration. Ex-offenders should be used to tell their stories as it has been demonstrated that they can inspire a motivation to change.
- Would Prisons Week in November be a good launch date for any agreed piece(s) of work that could be identified over the coming months?
- Fast track the decision making process at the top.
- Take away what has been learnt today and share it with our groups and organisations.
- A prompt report back on the discussions today, no need for a glossy report more a quick reminder on the important points is required.
- Open up the meetings to encourage a greater knowledge.

Conclusion

The structure of the day worked well and the speakers were well received. The aims of the event were met and almost all the main faiths were represented. Feedback from the event was very positive, recognising the urgent need to move forward. The Forum identified a large body of potential work covering training and education, resources and engagement. It was realistic, too, in recognising that there were barriers to be addressed for this work to be carried out effectively. Nevertheless, there were living examples demonstrating the worth to NOMS North East of engaging with Faith communities, opportunities to grasp goodwill and enthusiasm to be directed, and ideas offering solutions to problems.

NOMS North East, which proposed the establishing of this Forum, is clearly keen to initiate a conversation with Faith communities and to explore ways of developing positive engagement with them. The Chaplaincies in the region, recognising that they are the key players in this partnership, have offered their active support in making this happen and offer this report as a baseline to take forward a productive relationship between NOMS North East and Faith communities with the assistance and encouragement of the North East Regional Faiths Network (NERFN). We appreciate that no-one has all the answers but feel that we have all made a promising and positive start.

To this end, we propose to begin by offering workshops bringing together prison chaplains and members of the Faith communities within prison clusters. These would aim to

- encourage and support local faith communities to become involved in this process of rehabilitation in partnership with the Chaplaincies
- seek ways of achieving this
- raise awareness of the role that faith communities can play and the support that can be offered in the process of rehabilitation

The workshop would provide the opportunity to tour a prison and meet the prisoners, explain the role of the Criminal Justice System with specific reference to prisons and probation; where the Chaplaincy fits in the system; the issues faced by many prisoners (such as family breakdown, unemployment, educational attainment, debt, addiction); the kind of support needed by returning offenders with examples of how this can be offered. It would consider the current volunteer arrangements and process in prisons; why it is important for faith communities to be part of the rehabilitation process; how to engage, looking at practical issues; what Faith communities need; and how we can go forward from here.

Finally, our thanks to all who worked so hard to make this event a success, and to those who will work equally hard to ensure that the above report will be translated into effective action.

Forum Steering Group: Rev Patrick Cope, Elizabeth McGurk, Muhammad Meah, Michael King, Paul Southgate.

Coordinating Chaplains:

Revd Eric Bossward, HMP Castington
 Revd Matthew Tetley, HMP Acklington
 Revd. Barrie Cooper, HMP Durham
 Dr Beth Theobald, HMP & YOI Low Newton
 Revd John Little, HMYOI Deerbolt
 Revd Nigel Johnson, HMP Frankland
 Revd Yvonne Yates, HMP Kirklevington Grange
 Revd Terry McCarthy, HMP Holme House