

scottish justice ' matters

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REIMAGINING PUNISHMENT AND JUSTICE

Margaret Malloch interviews
Nick Burgess, Criminal Justice
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MM: Can you begin by telling me about some of the things that have been happening in Central Scotland and your vision for Criminal Justice Social Work? I'm particularly interested in the reconstruction of the walled garden in Dollar Park.

NB: We have been trying to be as imaginative as possible, allowing managers and staff to share ideas and make a difference, being aware that you learn from things that don't always work out. Dollar Park (Falkirk Council 17.8.15) came about largely because there was some grant funding available to improve areas for public access so we worked closely with Friends of the Dollar Park Project, a community group, to look at what we could actually do and what our commitment could be. We took a brave decision, I think, locally over several years that we would concentrate unpaid work resources on developing the walled garden. It meant that we were there six days a week, sometimes two or more squads were down there working. And now we contribute to the maintenance of the garden with funds from Fiscal Work Orders under the supervision of the Cyrenians coordinator.

Most needs of persons with convictions are well known: poverty, inequality, attitudes, substance misuse or trauma, education and employment. Where it comes to those needs, we try and work with our partners as best we can, with joint time and/or funds to respond to these needs. Although 75% of people get through their orders successfully, some fall through the net or lose their way after the order has finished. How can we support these people? We need to improve follow on universal services so that they don't come back through the court system

We have created increasingly comprehensive resources for women including a mentoring scheme to provide follow-on support. We work in partnership with the Alcohol and Drug Partnership and health. We've got our own women's development worker paid for by Criminal Justice and we've been working with the Community Justice Authority to get more money for a healthcare assistant. Our intention is to offer a dedicated space for women where they will be seen separately from men. I'm not sure that that is very different in regards to some other areas but a lot of it's been organically grown.

MM: So it sounds like the model you have is responsive to local needs?

NB: We hope it's responsive; we have a lot of requirements from central government, but local flexibility is also needed. The important thing is to get hold of the money, have an idea about where the gaps are, and how you try and fill them. Sometimes that's not so good when you're not sure what's happening with other services and we know that there is vastly reduced funding across some of our partners. We have to consider who our natural allies are for the future and how we can transform services when we're in that situation. I think the next few months are going to be pretty difficult.

MM: And are you referring specifically to non-statutory agencies?

NB: Well the non-governmental organisations and particularly the third sector are often very reliant on the money they get from the public sector. And because our funding is annual it makes it doubly difficult. And the sorts of services that we require particularly around the employability field change quite radically. It makes it extremely difficult for supervising officers to have a good grip of all of that; it's a bit splintered. I'm hopeful that with the Scottish Bill going through that will at least help some of the employability side.

We do peer mentoring for women with the Cyrenians and that grew out of the employability project that the Cyrenians were doing for us and the employment and training unit. But again that's a bit tricky because there's quite a cluttered landscape regarding women offenders. We've got the Shine Project which deals with mentoring for some women. They might want to start peer mentoring, so you've got what we're trying to do locally and how do you fit that in nationally?

Some of the services that we purchase, like the Richmond Fellowship, provide additional support in line with the Supporting People Guidance. We knew that mental health, autism and learning disabilities were a feature for quite a few people in Criminal Justice. So we went through a procurement exercise and asked the third sector to provide support regarding not only mental health but also around the Supporting People Principles: keeping your front door secure against others, being able to budget properly, to shop, eat nutritious food, to support universal services.

Through that we've got a key worker approach and a mental health support worker. That was a way locally of trying to be responsive to needs when people come into crisis. That seems to be working quite well at the moment. How much we'll be able to do that over the next few years I don't know because the funding is likely to radically change for Criminal Justice from 2017.

MM: So when you say change do you mean reduce?

NB: We suspect that the total amount of money will remain the same for Scotland. At the moment the formula is two-thirds workload and one-third need, however, we expect the formula to change to 50% workload and 50% the economic and social impact of crime. So there is some debate about how the economic and social impact of crime is measured. What it's likely to mean is that local authorities with fewer areas of multiple deprivation are likely to have funding reduced over time compared to those with greater preponderance of those areas, who will have their funding increased.

Given that Criminal Justice Social Work is a reactive service, you can have areas with lower crime rates and higher rates of court orders so local authorities do need the resources to deal with the number of individuals sent by the courts regardless of deprivation.

MM: Given that context, how do you continue to address some of the needs that you've identified and how do you bring other agencies together?

NB: The Christie Commission (Scottish Government 2011) set the scene for public bodies to transform services. I see the Integration Joint Boards and abolition of Community Justice Authorities in the light of that report.

In any period of change, particularly when finances are so tight we have to use the overarching strategy set by governance, alongside our professional view of how to achieve common goals with our partners.

I expect we will be forming, storming and norming and hopefully performing in due course!



Falkirk Council's walled garden project in Dollar Park.

MM: In England there are attempts to introduce payment by results. Do you see that happening here?

NB: No I don't think the Scottish Government has an appetite for that. And I don't see how we would make that work. The needs of the populous haven't really changed. I would much rather look at how we concentrate on areas of multiple deprivation. For example I was at a meeting last week about educational attainment. Children who come from the catchment area in an area of Falkirk have an 8% chance of getting five GCSEs at age 15-16. If you come from the highest performing area you've got a 70% chance. 70% as opposed to 8%!

What priority services do we need for such areas to improve that? It's just continuing that cycle of deprivation if we don't address it. So I would hope that we can try and do something better for the areas where more of the problems tend to be concentrated. We know that 50% of our service users come from areas of multiple deprivation in Falkirk: only a few streets to be honest. We know that we can do something about it because we had similar issues in another area in the 1990s. There were really big problems there, but the Council with a bit of effort, took over a flat and had services going into the area and eventually we sorted it out. We need to do more for areas with concentrated problems in a more collective sense with health, and everyone else.

MM: Why do you think that isn't happening?

NB: I think the Christie Report provided backing for joining up services, but five years on there is still much to do ... I think there are things that we can do in Criminal Justice, for example, around poverty we might have the council's debt advice and welfare benefits team come along and at the same time as we're doing the literacy assessments people get an opportunity for a benefits health check. We're also looking at a health check as well with the health improvement team. We're trying to get a healthcare assistant so we're hoping that if we can frontload some of those checks right at the start of an order it will save time later on and hopefully a person can make more rapid progress.

Scottish Government (2011) *Christie Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services*

Falkirk Council (17.8.15) *Community payback restores walled garden*

<http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/news/article.aspx?aid=3619>