Paying It Back: Does Community Service Activities Promote Desistance In Prisoners?

Steve Graham
Graduate Diploma of Criminology & Corrections (2008) University of Tasmania
Diploma of Business Management (2004) TAFE Tasmania
Diploma Social Science Youth & Community Work (1988) TAFE Tasmania

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Masters in Criminology & Corrections in the School of Sociology and Social Work at the University of Tasmania

October 2012
STATEMENT OF AUTHORITY OF ACCESS
This thesis can be made available for loan and limited copying in accordance with the Copyright Act 1968.

Steve Graham .......Steve Graham..........................

Date ........13/6/2013....................................

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP
This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Steve Graham ....Steve Graham..........................

Date ....13/6/2013..........................................
Contents

Index of Figures ............................................................................................................ 4
Index of Tables ............................................................................................................. 4
Definitions & Acronyms .............................................................................................. 5
Acknowledgements ...................................................................................................... 5
Abstract ....................................................................................................................... 6
Chapter 1 ..................................................................................................................... 7
  The Research Problem ............................................................................................... 7
  Literature Review ....................................................................................................... 13
  Definitions & Language ............................................................................................ 13
  Dominant Approaches in Correctional Theory & Practice ....................................... 14
  The Desistance Paradigm ......................................................................................... 16
  Desistance Theories & Concepts .............................................................................. 17
  Social Aspects & Generativity of Prisoners .............................................................. 17
  Desistance Principles & Approaches ....................................................................... 19
  Evaluation of the Literature ................................................................................... 19
  Critiques & Limitations of Desistance ................................................................... 21
Chapter 2 ................................................................................................................... 23
  Methodology ............................................................................................................ 23
  The Tasmanian Context ........................................................................................... 24
  The Focus Group & Interview Data .......................................................................... 24
    Paying Back but Moving Forward ....................................................................... 24
    Changes in the Lives of Prisoners ........................................................................ 26
    Identity, Ownership and Skills ............................................................................ 28
    Giving More Than Required .............................................................................. 28
    Benefits to Prisoners ........................................................................................... 29
    Community Service Activities & Reducing Crime ............................................. 30
    Why Prisoners & Community Service Activities ............................................. 31
    Human, Social & Bridging Capital ....................................................................... 31
    The Generativity of our Prisoners ....................................................................... 33
    Agencies as Bridge Builders ............................................................................... 34
    Activities Aiding Desistance .............................................................................. 36
    Emerging Themes in the Research .................................................................... 37
Chapter 3 – Research Observations ........................................................................ 39
  Participant as Researcher ....................................................................................... 39
  Theorising my Lens on What is Seen ...................................................................... 39
  Negotiating the Relationships ................................................................................ 40
  Learning Opportunities ............................................................................................ 42
  Challenges & Obstacles to Services ...................................................................... 42
Reintegration as a Process ........................................................................................................ 44
You Rehabilitate Yourself ........................................................................................................ 45
Roles in Reintegration .............................................................................................................. 46
Virtues That Aid Desistance .................................................................................................... 48
Implications for Change ......................................................................................................... 49
Gaining from Experience ........................................................................................................ 51
Which Activities Generate the Most Benefit? ......................................................................... 51
Do Activities Encourage Desistance? ....................................................................................... 51
Spontaneous Desistance ........................................................................................................ 52
The Desistance Based Lens of Non-Custodial Staff ............................................................... 52
Changing Prisoners Behaviours ............................................................................................. 52
Identifying What is Needed ..................................................................................................... 53
Insights by Custodial Officers ................................................................................................. 53
Is A Restorative Act Needed? .................................................................................................. 53
Conclusion ............................................................................................................................... 53
References .................................................................................................................................. 55
Appendix ................................................................................................................................... 61

Index of Figures
Figure 1 - Six Central Themes of Desistance ........................................................................ 21
Figure 2 - Two Prisoners ......................................................................................................... 41

Index of Tables
Table 1 - Difference between Orders and Activities ............................................................... 9
Table 2 - Community Service Activities at Tasmania Prison Service 2011-12 ..................... 10
Table 3 - Comparison of prisoner security status on activities in Tasmania ....................... 11
Table 4 - Released prisoners who returned to correctives services .................................. 12
Table 5 - Prison Populations since 1995 to 2011 ................................................................. 14
Table 6 - Differences in Models Applied to Community Service Activities ..................... 16
Table 7 - Significant Practice Pointers for Community Service Activities ......................... 19
Table 8 - Sampling of Desistance Research by Theory and Years ..................................... 20
Table 9 - Characteristics of Social Contexts that Aid Desistance .................................... 27
Table 10 - Qualities In Community Service Activities that Encourages Desistance ........ 51
Definitions & Acronyms
CSA Community service activities
GLM Good Lives Model is a form of rehabilitation used in prisons
IOM Integrated Offender Management
LSCMI The Level of Service Case Management Inventory is an assessment tool for Corrections to measure risk and needs of prisoners and probationers
NGO Non-government organisation
RBMSP Ron Barwick Minimum Security Prison
RNR Risk-Need-Responsivity model is a model and theory of offender rehabilitation and assessment used in prisons and community corrections in Tasmania
ROGS Report on Government Services
RVNC Risdon Vale Neighbourhood Centre
S42 Section 42 day leave for prisoners from prison which is part of the Tasmanian Corrections Act 1997 legislation
TPS Tasmania Prison Service

Acknowledgements
My appreciation extends to the volunteers and practitioners who contributed to the interviews from the agencies, my supervisors at UTas, the TPS staff and inmates over the years who shaped my reflections, and especially to my family for allowing me the time to complete this research.
Abstract
The prison as an institution in society is a complex and multi layered set of social relations confined to specific geographical places. Working with prisoners in these circumstances is a necessary and important task as they are nearly all released back into society. This highlights not only issues of the causes of crime and the nature of punishment, but also the importance of understanding and supporting the processes of desistance (of ceasing offending), pro-social change and community reintegration in that setting. The task of corrections is to maintain the safe order and security of the prison, reduce risk and recidivism, and support pro-social change in prisoners. It is the latter part which is difficult as corrections broadly applies mechanisms of security, but often fails to identify suitable individual solutions.

The research explores the use and impact of community service activities as a means of assisting desistance from crime for both minimum enclosed and minimum open prisoners in the custody of Tasmania Prison Service. In the past, community service has been used in many jurisdictions as a low level reintegration mechanism, seeing it as meeting the public or local community needs. This research examines the impact and benefits to individual prisoners, the agencies and stakeholders they are assisting, and assesses the efficacy of community service activities to promote desistance and reintegration. Fourteen different prisoner community service activities are considered here – for the first time in the public domain.

The findings of this study show that community service activities have a positive impact at a number of levels: on the staff and volunteers in the agencies, the communities who are recipients and beneficiaries of community service activities and, ultimately, the prisoners who develop their social capital, showcase their existing human capital and access real opportunities and supports for reintegration. This framework is developed in the context of Tasmania, and yet has relevance and utility to be tailored for other jurisdictions.