

## **Restorative Reintegration - A New Approach to Prisoner Aftercare in New Zealand**

### **Introduction**

There are around 8000 prisoners currently in the prison system. There will be a further 1000 prisoners in the system by 2011. Around 9000 prisoners are released from prison each year. About 50% of all released prisoners will receive a Corrections reintegration plan on leaving. The remaining 4,500 will get their \$350 and a bus ticket.

The first 3 – 6 months is the crucial period for released prisoners. Many prisoners walk out of prison, determined to make a new start. The first 3 – 6 months are critical. They need help with housing, employment, debt management, and family and community relationships. If they get help from mentors and the community in the first six months, the chance of them reoffending drops by around 40%. If they face barriers, red tape, and stigmatization, it becomes difficult to keep on the straight and narrow. That is where Prison Fellowship comes in.

Over the last four years, Prison Fellowship has developed a holistic approach to prisoner reintegration known as “**Restorative Reintegration**”

### **Operation Jericho - The First Step**

Operation Jericho, a mentor based prisoner reintegration program, has been operating since August 2003, and has achieved moderate success. While it is still too early to produce statistically significant results, the anecdotal evidence indicates a reduction in reoffending rates, well below the 70% reoffending rate typical of prisoners released after two years.

### **How Operation Jericho Works**

Operation Jericho trains church-based mentors to facilitate a relationship with prisoners and ex-prisoners and other community organisations in order to reduce the societal, resource and personal barriers ex-prisoners face. It seeks to increase the ex-prisoners' level of attachment to social institutions in the community.

The program is facilitated by a qualified case management team who oversees the mentor-inmate relationship, provides ongoing support and training to mentors, and links prisoners and their families with community and social service agencies as required. While Field Officers assist the ex-inmate and their family with practical day-to-day needs.

This program employs four main strategies to prevent re-offending:

- Active Case management
- One-to-one mentoring, up to eight months before release and up to two years following release
- Church and community integration
- Family/ whanau support

- Networking with key support agencies e.g. Housing NZ, Work and Income, Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Services

**Operation Jericho** works to meet the following needs;

- Suitable accommodation
- Employment
- Managing finance
- Managing relationship issues with whānau and community
- Providing positive community support;
- Victim-offender reconciliation;
- Ongoing rehabilitation
- Post-release health care.

Operation Jericho was originally developed to respond to the needs of Christian inmates leaving He Korowai Whakapono, the faith-based unit, living in the Wellington region. For those inmates, the program has been highly successful.

Prison Fellowship also receives referrals from local prisons from Work and Income, Housing NZ, church groups, and other agencies. Christians and non-Christians offenders alike have responded positively to the program.

### **Restorative Reintegration**

The last three years has shown that whilst the mentoring approach is successful, it is not in itself, sufficient to sustain long term change for those released prisoners that require a higher level of community affirmation and support in order to desist from anti-social behaviour. Prisoners respond positively to an approach which builds on existing strengths, and builds within the prisoner and their family, strategies to desist from anti-social behaviour.

Prison Fellowship has developed a comprehensive strategy based on the following seven characteristics:

#### **1. The Underlying Ethos – A Strengths Based Methodology**

The traditional approach to prisoner reintegration focuses on addresses prisoners needs – accommodation, employment, financial management, family relationships. It assumes that the prisoner is dependent on the state, or a provider to meet those needs.

The strengths based approach discourages dependency. It focuses on the acquisition of skills, moral inclusion of the ex-prisoner within a targeted community, encouraging ex-prisoners to actively address harm done to victims, families and the community, and ‘paying back’ to the community through voluntary reparation and community service.

### ***Intervention Logic of the “strength based” model:***

This approach to prisoner reintegration is based on the following assumptions:

2. That most released prisoners are subject to a prisoner reintegration plan, which identifies their one or more six reintegrative needs - accommodation, employment, social support, financial needs, ongoing health and rehabilitative needs, and victim issues (relating to victim safety)
3. This model acknowledges and meets those needs, but also focuses on other positive qualities such as the acquisition of skill. Skill implies mastery and competence rather than personal liability, and emphasises the interaction of training or teaching with the ex-prisoners proficiency and achievement.
4. Successful restorative reintegration involves full inclusion in and of a wider moral community. Successful reintegration is community – led. Restorative reintegration occurs when it draws on community processes through which informal support and controls traditionally take place. The community is the primary agent for reintegration.
5. One of the barriers to successful community reintegration is prisoner stigmatization and shame, which affects the prisoner and their family. Successful reintegration involves processes and opportunities which:
  - a) Provide opportunity for appropriate praise and approval;
  - b) Promote mutual respect;
  - c) Terminate disapproval with forgiveness;
  - d) Include the offender as a member of a communities of care (families, the school, the law abiding community”
  - e) Formally reconcile offenders with their victims, and the wider community;
  - f) ‘De-label’ prisoners, and recognises and reflects positive changes in a prisoners behaviour, through a process of status elevation, e.g. honouring positive change;
  - g) Involve ex-prisoners in voluntary community service, and nurturing behaviour, including support for other released prisoners – the “wounded healer” phenomenon
6. Successful reintegration involves more than physical resettlement. It includes strategies and processes of moral inclusion, - forgiveness, acceptance, redemption (secular or faith-based) and reconciliation.
7. Successful restorative reintegration is reparation – based. It requires a mutual effort at reconciliation, where offender and society work together to make amends for hurtful crimes and hurtful punishments – and move forward. It may involve restorative conferencing. Alternatively, it may be achieved through the offender making a positive contribution to one’s community in a reparative fashion.

8. Mentoring of prisoners is a highly effective non-professional approach to restorative reintegration – but of itself may not be sufficient. It should be seen as a catalyst for a more comprehensive community – led approach to prisoner reintegration where the mentors themselves are an integral part of that community.

## **9. Target Communities – Circles of Accountability and Support**

Prison Fellowship has identified key communities, within which it will build and create networks, norms and trust that promote support for prisoner reintegration. It will develop ‘circles of support’ – i.e. build social support with key community stakeholders, to support prisoners (and their families) when the prisoner is released.

### **Building Social Capital**

Strategies for building social capital will include:

- a) Identification of Maori and Pacific mentors, and securing commitment from the mentor and their church, to the prisoner and their family;
- b) Securing church congregation commitment to support the prisoner and their family
- c) Developing wider networks of support in targeted areas – key agencies, potential employers, service providers, iwi and Maori authorities, Pacific Island communities, service organisations, sport and recreational and other community organisations;
- d) Identifying potential employers within the target community and wider community;
- e) Promoting voluntary community service by ex-prisoners;
- f) Promoting opportunities for prisoner-community reparation or reconciliation;
- g) Facilitating prisoner-community meetings

- h) Facilitating community workshops on the provision of effective support for ex-offenders.

## **10. Mentor Support**

The mentoring process is well established, operational procedures are in place, and ongoing mentor training and development is of a high order. Regular meetings currently take place between mentors and the case management staff. The Restorative Reintegration will ensure that mentors have strong support from the target community and that there is a “community commitment” to ex-prisoners and their families.

The new strategy will include mentor support for the following:

- a) Facilitation of the strengths based model from within the community, with mentors being directed and supported in their community
- b) Mentor training within the target community
- c) Facilitated opportunities for prisoners to meet as a group, to share common experiences, to develop “survival strategies”, and engage in “strengths” narratives, and “status elevation” rituals
- d) Opportunities for prisoners to address common needs as a group, e.g. skills acquisition e.g. driver’s license, parenting, family relationships.
- e) Providing a platform within the community that enables it to grow by itself, increase at its own pace and provide a sense of achievement for all participants
- f) Providing a platform within the community that will enable it to repeat the model in other social areas as these become incorporated into the community also.

## **11. Prisoner Support**

Prisoners are encouraged to engage in the following activity:

- a) Engagement in voluntary community service, or prisoner “payback” initiatives;
- b) Engagement in dialogue and support with newly released prisoners;
- c) Mentor training (where appropriate), and active support for prisoners on release.

## **5. Case Worker Support**

Case workers assist prisoners to meet their reintegrative needs, and provide support in times of crisis; e.g. assistance with employment, accommodation, referral for ACC counselling, drug and alcohol counselling, family or legal issues. However case worker support is used as a last resort, with the emphasis on the ex-prisoner and the community working in partnership, using community support and resources.

## **6. Prisoner- Based Business**

In 2010, Prison Fellowship will investigate the development of a micro-enterprise to support, develop and grow prisoner-based businesses that generate assets and employment opportunities. These will address the employment needs of ex-prisoners, long-term unemployed, and their families.

## **12. Church and Community involvement in Prisoner Reintegration**

There is a growing call from the wider community to get involved with prisoners and their families. Many church and community members feel called to minister to ex-prisoners and their families, but lack the confidence and experience to do so. This new initiative encourages wider church and community involvement with prisoners, in a way which ensures that will provide a safe environment for both volunteers and ex-offenders. In 2008, Prison Fellowship and Alpha will combine to present community seminars on “Effective Care of Ex-Offenders”. In addition, Prison Fellowship will start running its prisoner mentoring training for those who want to get involved, outside of a formal prisoner reintegration program.

The community plays a key part in the creation of an inclusive social environment where ex-prisoners and young offenders, who display a strong desire to change, can start life afresh and become contributing members in the community.

Offenders encounter two prisons. The first is the physical prison to which they are sentenced as punishment. Once released, most ex-prisoners enter a second social and

psychological prison. The key to the second prison is held by family, friends, neighbours, colleagues, volunteers, religious groups and the community at large.

The first major barrier to prisoner and young offender reintegration is community and self-stigmatization. The second is sustainable and supportive employment. For many prisoners and young offenders, sustainable employment is not just about earning an income. It is about being accepted within a work family, and being regarded as a trusted and valued member of the wider community.

The “Restorative Reintegration” project is a funded program with specific service deliverables. There is a growing call from the wider community to get involved with prisoners and their families in a less formal way. Many church and community members feel called to minister to ex-prisoner and their families, but lack the confidence and the experience to do so. This initiative will encourage wider involvement with prisoners, but in a way which ensures that will provide a safe environment for both volunteers and ex-offenders.

This new initiative provides the tools for people who want to safely support ex-offenders on release from prison. In 2008, Prison Fellowship will start training programs to support churches in this ministry. Two different types of training will be held:

### ***Community Seminars***

In 2008, Prison Fellowship and Alpha will combine to present seminars to the church and the community on “Caring for Ex-offenders in the Church”. Prison Fellowship will also develop a similar seminar program for use in the wider community.

### ***Mentoring Training***

In 2008, Prison Fellowship will conduct mentor training for prison volunteers, who want to mentor ex-prisoners. The focus will be on mentoring as a church ministry activity, rather than as part of a funded mentoring program.

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