Getting a Blue Life

Personalisation and the Criminal Justice System

Summary Report to
Personalisation Steering Group

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Debra Moore and Tricia Nicoll

Introduction and background

This work was commissioned by the Yorkshire and Humber Improvement Partnership (CSIP Yorkshire and Humber as was) Offender Health and Social Care Programme. The overall aim of the project was to scope the implications of the Personalisation Agenda as it relates to offenders. Specifically, those whose pattern of offending is characterised by repeated short term offences often described as having a 'revolving door' to the prison. This group are also not usually supervised by Probation services nor do they attract support on release from prison from statutory agencies.

Project outcomes

- Explore the potential that the Personalisation agenda offers to people within the criminal justice system

- Identify and understand the potential barriers and opportunities to implementing personalisation

- Increase understanding of the views and aspirations of this group

- Increase understanding of the state of readiness of multi-agency stakeholders working with this group

- Develop the knowledge and understanding of staff and participants of the model of Personalisation

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- Develop the knowledge and understanding of staff and participants of the model of Personalisation

- Produce sample models and financial assumptions

- Produce a final report and associated materials that detail the process and learning from it

Personalisation - what are we talking about?

The roots of what we now call Personalisation, lie in the Independent Living Movement, which started in the early 1970's and led to the current legislation supporting the right to a Direct Payment for social care *(The Community Care (Direct Payments) Act 1996)*.

In December 2007, *Putting People First* was published. This set out the Government's commitment to independent living for all adults, and outlined the shared aims and values that are guiding the transformation of adult social care.

The Local Authority Circular published in January 2009 gave more detail about what that would mean for society. It specifically pointed to 4 areas that Councils should be focusing on to ensure that services become more personalised. It is worth noting that 'choice and control'; specifically the concept of Individual or Personal Budgets, is only one part of the picture.

'Personalisation through participation' in public services means users having a far greater say in writing the scripts for how their services are delivered, so that they have some say about the order in which things happen, how the story might branch, take different routes and end. As a result the users are more involved but also more committed and more likely to take their share of responsibility for ensuring success.'

Charles Leadbeater: 'Personalisation Through Participation - a new script of public services' www.demos.co.uk

Methodology

By working with a group of 10 - 20 offenders within HMP Everthorpe, staff and multi-agency stakeholders the project aimed to increase understanding of Personalisation and person centred support as well as to describe and critique current and alternative models of support.

Work with offenders

To be eligible for inclusion in the project offenders had to meet the following criteria:

a) Serving a sentence of 12 months or less

b) Have Mental Health Score of 1 - 6 on the TAG (Threshold Assessment Grid) for mental health or have learning disabilities.

c) Combined with a positive drug or alcohol problem as recorded on a DIR (Drug information record)

d) Can have additional accommodation or educational difficulties

e) Being released to the Hull or East Riding as determined by LA/PCT boundaries

Participants were identified in collaboration with the Offender Management Unit and it quickly became apparent that it would be difficult to identify a significant number of offenders. For practical reasons, criteria (e) above was expanded to include offenders who were due to be released into other areas within the Yorkshire and Humber Region. This process resulted in a total of 7 offenders participating in the project.

Participants were invited to attend a series of 5 meetings to share and explore their experiences of the criminal justice system. Using person centred thinking, approaches and tools, the meetings focused on drawing out the issues that the men thought were key in promoting or preventing

offending behaviour and to gain a sense of how they would utilise a 'virtual Individual or Personal Budget'.

Work with staff and other stakeholders

1:1 interviews were also undertaken with a broad cross section of the prison staff and other key stakeholders. Broadly, the purpose of the interview was to ascertain:

- The level of awareness in relation to the Personalisation agenda
- Views about the current system – what's working and what's not working and how Personalisation might affect this positively and negatively
- Potential and perceived opportunities and barriers to implementing Personalisation within the criminal justice system

The key concept: Getting a 'Blue Life'

In the first session with offenders, the group were asked to describe what they thought an 'ordinary' life looked like and compare this with their own experiences.

This was mapped out on a large poster that graphically chronicled 'life events' along a road and the age at which they usually occur in the general population e.g. leave school around aged 16 years.

On one side of a 'road' the participants mapped out the events as they thought they occurred in the general (non-offending) population using blue cards. On the other side they mapped out and compared their experiences using orange cards. This resulted in participants articulating the characteristics of what became quickly known as the 'blue life' and the 'orange life' and identifying where things 'go wrong' or where things could be different (see *Figure one* on the next page)

This concept formed a framework for thinking with the men about what would need to be different to help them get or keep a 'blue life', through exploring the principles of Personalisation.
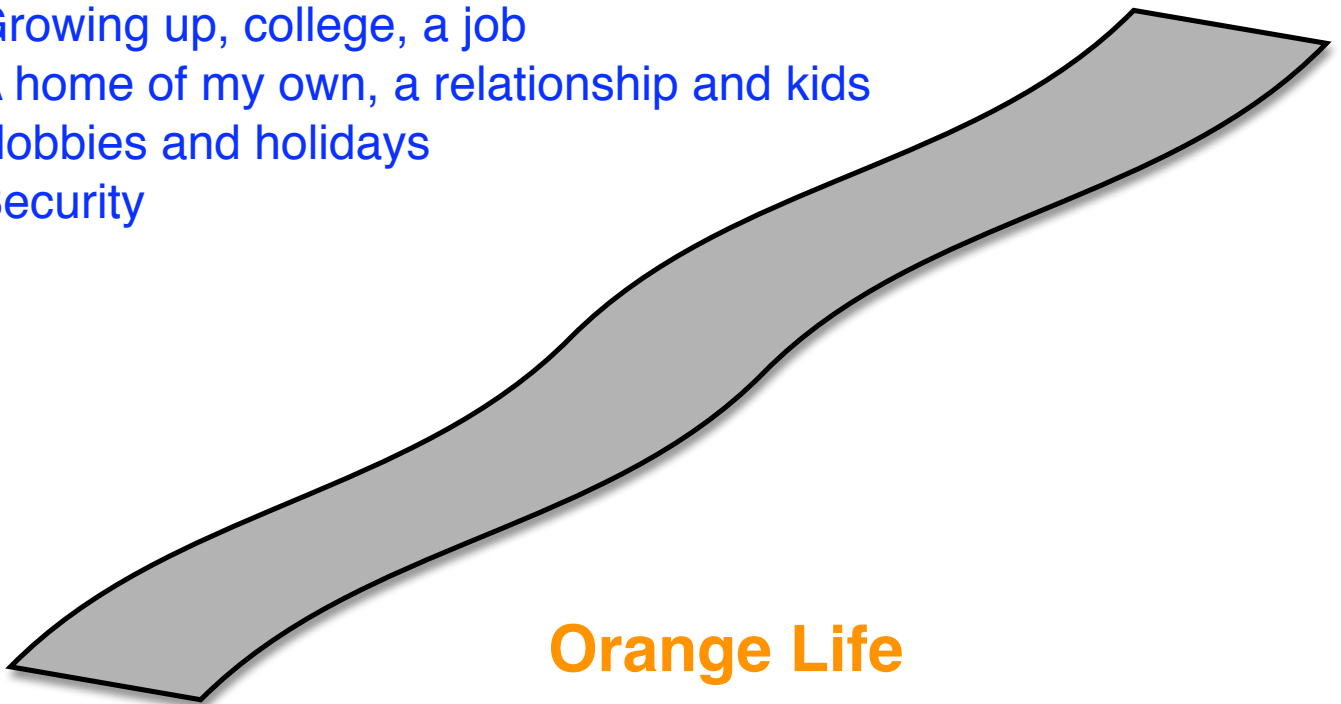
Blue life

Nursery then school
Learning and playing
Adults around you
Love and affection
Going to 'the Comp'
Growing up, college, a job
A home of my own, a relationship and kids
Hobbies and holidays
Security

'It's about the everyday things that most people take for granted.'

Death

Birth

Orange Life

Abuse, Foster homes
Lack of love or encouragement
Parents split up
Running away from home
'You've got a behaviour problem'
Care homes
Alcohol, drugs and crime
Stop going to school
Single parent
Prison, and back to prison

Emergent themes

The following section summarises the key emergent themes from the work with the men and from conversations and interviews with staff and key stake-holders.

Key themes from the offender perspective

The impact of early childhood experiences

- Separation from one or both parents
- Some people entering the formal care system.
- Clearly recognised differences between their own experiences and those of people of the 'blue side'

'I remember going to other people's house and seeing their 'blue life' and knowing that I didn't have that'

Having someone who loves you

- How key relationships set a good or bad example and moderates behaviour
- The weight and importance placed on often fragile relationships to provide the key to not re-offending
- Insight into how they were repeating the cycle of separation with their own children and partners

'Its going to be different this time because I've got my girlfriend and my daughter. It has to be different.'

A home

- having a 'home' as opposed to just accommodation
- A place to feel safe and 'loved' rather than just a roof over their head
- The perceived correlation between living on a 'council estate' and offending behaviour

- 'Getting out of the estate:' breaking ties with unhelpful peers, getting out of the 'benefit culture' and the hope of a fresh start

'If I don't get out …. If I just go back there then I know how it will be. There's no chance it can be different. What can I do?'

- The common experience of being homeless and anxiety about this, including a frustration about lack of timely support to find somewhere safe to live on release
- The negative experience of living in hostel accommodation (although all participants acknowledged that spending time in a hostel may be a necessary stage to release). Hostels were unanimously viewed as a negative experience and the men often felt vulnerable to re-offending at this stage

A job
- A culture of worklessness and a dependency on benefits often across generations in the same family
- Low aspirations and lack of qualifications
- The only real chance for work through family connections or friends
- Formal support such as Job Centre Plus was not seen as helpful

'I'll get a job with my Uncle. I'll have to. I'll probably leave it for a few weeks; have a break. Then I'll get a job.'

Training and skills
- Most of the offenders had effectively left school by age 15 years (some earlier) usually following increased truanting
- Some described a lack of support for educational difficulties like dyslexia and behavioural problems

- Negative reputations and labels that they had acquired from childhood such as 'aggressive', 'stupid' and 'idiot'

  'I hated school and the teachers hated me. They said I was stupid and a waste of space. One day I just threw my book on the floor and walked out. No one came after me and I never went back. I was 13.'

- Very positive opinions about the range of training at HMP Everthorpe (particularly 'building trades' like scaffolding, plumbing etc) but some disappointment that some couldn't access them because their sentences were too short, they did not have the basic skills for entry, or they had to prioritise other learning or programmes

Offender management and planning

Although this was not a key theme in relation to 'blue' and 'orange' life discussions there was significant criticism about the process of offender management at various stages. Key issues were:

- Inaccessible paperwork

  'I didn't understand it so I just tore it up and threw it in the bin.'

- Lack of clarity about the planning process; who their Offender Manager was, which members of staff to go to for what
- Lack of clarity about the range of services and supports available in prison, e.g. SOVA

  'I didn't know anything about it until X told me. It was on a poster in the corridor but I don't look at that stuff.'

- The importance of those who work within the criminal justice system having and demonstrating insight into their personal circumstances. One participant described his resentment of his probation officer saying,

'Its OK for her she goes off back to her blue life and doesn't know what its like.'

- The role and representation of prison officers was an underlying conversational theme in a number of the sessions. The participants were overwhelmingly positive in their views about prison officers in general and saw them as supportive and able to change things:

'A lot depends on personal officers. If would make a real difference if you could have 10 minutes, once a week with your Personal Officer. But they're really busy; its not their fault.'

Key themes from the staff and other key stake-holder perspective

Reducing re-offending
- The potential within Personalisation to tailor support and interventions to improve rates of re-offending.
- Moving away from a 'one size fits all' approach, with little room for innovation or flexibility.

'I can see how a small Personal Budget could enable someone to secure the decent housing they need and that might have a significant affect on reducing his re-offending'

Service design and delivery

- The potential impact of the Personalisation agenda across all departments and sectors of the criminal justice system, including a fundamental shift in thinking and ways of working

- Potential significant impact on the Offender Management function and its resources.

Making a difference and a connection

- Success seen as being about, 'making a difference' and having a positive and supportive relationship with an offender and a recognition that the personalisation agenda offer the opportunity to address this

  'You know when you have that connection - something just clicks.'

- Observations about the barriers within the current system to achieving this positive relationship:
    - other people's (staff) attitudes
    - the low self-esteem and low motivation of many offenders
    - issues relating to performance management and the feeling of been 'constantly audited' which takes time and attention
    - resource issues and constant budgetary pressures
    - quantitative 'tick-box' exercises and perceived lack of concern by the authorities about the quality of the work
    - 'red tape'

  'The trouble is, no matter what you do or say, they think they're not worth it'

- A real optimism and energy from people interview to help offenders and improve their experience of prison

'We don't want to be a warehousing organisation'.

Taking personal responsibility and constructing a 'positive identity'
- The hope that working in a more personalised way could enable offenders to take responsibility for their behaviour, 'remove the excuses' and foster better discipline and self control
- Some observations that the current system allowed some offenders to abdicate responsibility for their criminal behaviour and 'blame' others for not understanding or helping them in the 'right way' (e.g. Probation)
- The prison system as a way of causing and exacerbating dependency, rather than challenging it

'Particularly for the long-termers or the lads who keep coming back - I think they're frightened to go out. They know the routine inside and ironically its safer than what they have on the outside'

- The positive use of 'good and credible mentors' to help offenders address these issues and that ex-offenders would be well placed to fulfil such a role.

Improving quality of life and taking an individual approach
- Using the Personalisation agenda to consider the quality of offender's lives and their general health and well-being, in particular ensuring that offenders' full range of health needs are met including needs their mental health and problems relating to alcohol and substance use

'We are aware that things might get missed. We don't always see the big picture'

Potential barriers and problems

Some things were identified by some people as potential barriers to fully embracing the Personalisation agenda within the criminal justice system:

- Offenders' lack of experience in taking or accepting responsibility for their own actions
- The need for significant support around basic skills like budgeting
- The need for careful supervision of resources

'There is going to be a huge temptation to spend the money on the wrong things and even on drugs and alcohol'

- Lack of supportive networks for offenders; the people in their lives often being part of the problem not the solution
- Concerns about how the general public and the media would perceive the initiative

Whilst overall there was a positive attitude to personalisation it was tempered with a view that it might not be useful for all offenders.

A focus on Personal Budgets

An exercise was undertaken with the offenders to explore the concept of 'spending the money differently'. Having discussed how services and support is currently funded, the men were asked to consider what they would do if they had control of the finances, e.g. if they could spend the money differently to get a 'blue life' (not to re-offend) what would they do? They were each given a small budget and place their money on the things that they thought would make the most difference. These included:

- A mentor - 'someone to help me stay in the blue life'
- Support around 'family and friends'
- Driving lessons and driving licence
- Youth clubs
- Health support – psychologists, GP, CPN etc
- More education
- Money to pay a bond on housing
- Training and skills such as plumbing
- Practical help to get a job like help with CV and interviews

Conclusions and recommendations

- It was clear from the group work that there were several stages of the offender journey where a more personalised approach could be taken and where the foundation for implementing the elements of Personalisation could be prepared

- At the start of the project it was anticipated that the time 'post release' would be where most work could be done to promote and operationalise the Personalisation agenda. However, as the work progressed it became increasingly clear that the time that offenders were in prison was the key to starting the process and 'preparing the ground' for Personalisation. This bore striking similarities to the experiences of 'taking a person centred approach' within social care and particularly the preparation required to enable people to leave long stay institutions and campuses

- The discussions with offenders, staff and stake-holders revealed significant opportunities to 'do things differently' with little or no resources within the prison setting that may prepare offenders more appropriately for a 'blue life'

'Induction could be a great opportunity" (to do things differently) but at the moment it is a waste of space.'

Specific suggestions for next steps

- Focus current activity to progress the Personalisation agenda on changing the experience <u>inside</u> prison to give offenders the best possible chance to affect positive change outside the gates

- Place a particular focus on the Induction process and on positive and proactive sentence planning

- Explore training and support options; for offenders and to the full range of prison staff around person-centred thinking and working and building positive and effective relationships with offenders

- Explore the effectiveness of the current range of peer-support models (working both outside and into prisons)

Much of this is about developing and supporting positive relationships within and out-with the prison setting and therefore entirely consistent with the core feature of the current offender management model which states,

'It is a human service approach because the main impact of the correctional services is considered to arise from the personal relationships developed with the offender.'

The NOMS Offender Management Model Home Office (2006).

Figure two overleaf summarises the proposed approach.

Debra Moore
Tricia Nicoll
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Figure two

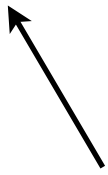**Sentence planning:**
Education
Support Programmes
Work

General planning:
Getting a job
Where I will live
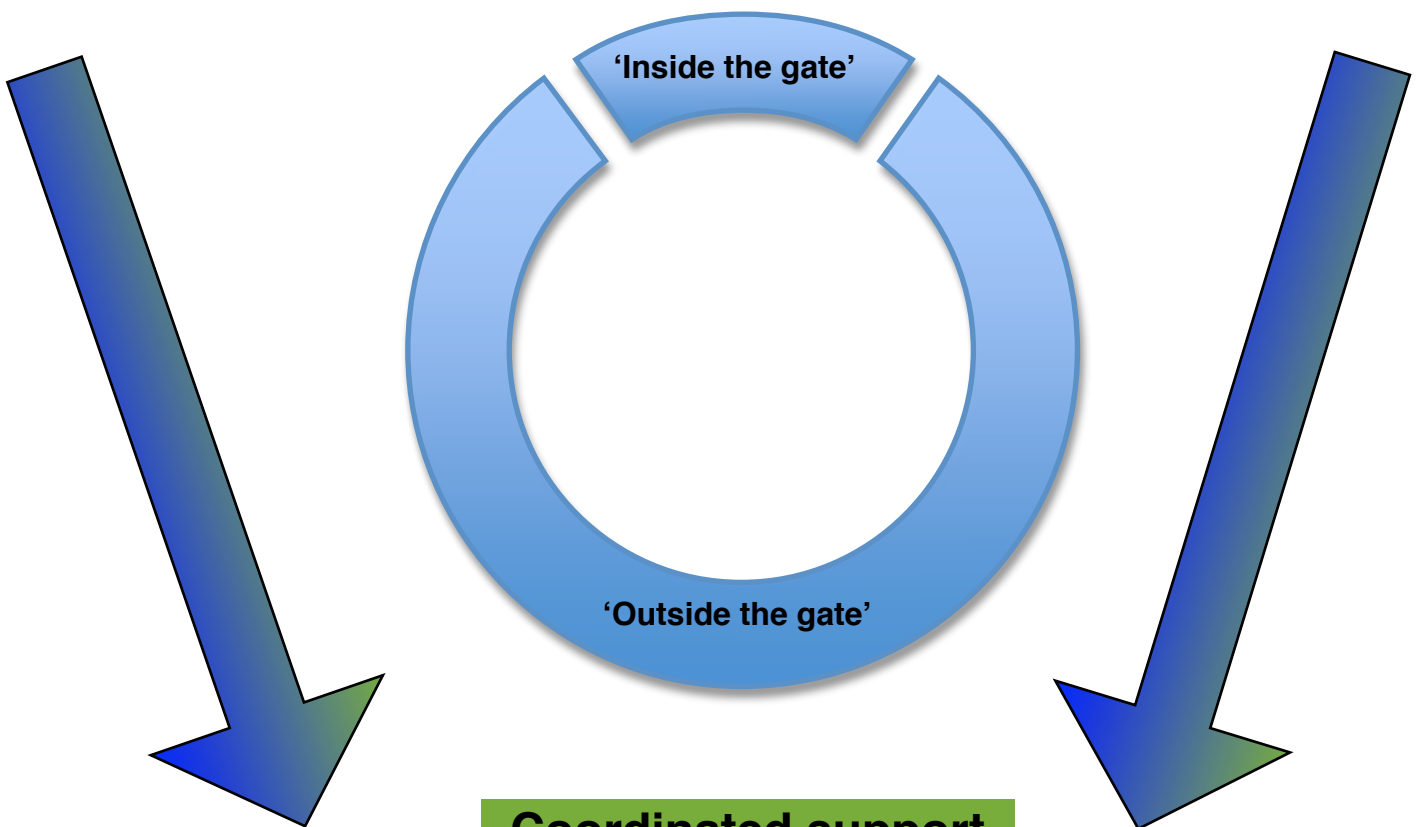Building strong relationships
Addressing offending behaviours

Key relationships:
Personal Officer
Offender Supervisors
Peers

Making it different this time

Induction: 'They've got to get you before your eyes shut'

'Inside the gate'

'Outside the gate'

Coordinated support
Peer support
Self-directed support