

RJ Online – Communities of Restoration – Thinking Biblically, Speaking Secularly

For more than five years, Prison Fellowship New Zealand has run a 60 bed faith based unit at Rimutaka Prison, near Wellington. He Korowai Whakapono¹ (HWK) is a 60 bed unit based at run in a partnership agreement between Prison Fellowship NZ (who provide the programmes staff, programmes and volunteers), and the Department of Corrections, (who provide the facilities and custodial staff.) It is a Christ-centred, transformational approach, based on a programme of spiritual teaching and prayer, with an emphasis on mutual accountability, and positive social engagement. Prisoners serving their last two years of a sentence can volunteer for the programme, which lasts around 18 months. Eight months before release, prisoners are matched with a mentor who will prepare them for release, and continue to mentor them for up to two years following release.

What is unusual about He Korowai Whakapono, is that it continues to operate in a country which is predominately secular. About 15% of the population are regular church attendees, and that number is steadily declining. Secondly, recent governments have stressed that government supported programs or initiatives must be supported by empirical evidence, which shows that a programme works – and in this case, reduces reoffending.

Local criminologists have studiously ignored the indigenous evidence for faith-based approaches to offending over the last two decades. In the broader social service arena, religion targets antisocial values, emphasizes accountability and responsibility, changes cognitive approaches to conflict, and provides social support and social skills thorough interaction with religious people and communities.^{2 3 4} Such emphases are consistent with what many rehabilitation workers call principles of effective treatment.^{5 6}

And yet, what local evidence there is, points us in the right direction. In one New Zealand study,⁷ the researcher interviewed fifty offenders who had been sentenced to supervision in 1987, and not reoffended three years later. Over half of them said that religion was important to them. Sixteen belonged to or were drawn to a specific religion, with nine of them active church members. A further eleven people spoke

¹ A Maori phrase meaning 'A Cloak of Faith'.

² Bergin (1991) *supra*

³ Levin and Vanderpool (1987) *supra*.

⁴ Martin, J.E. and C. R. Carlson, 1998. "Spiritual Dimensions of Health Psychology". Pp 57 – 110 in *Behavior Therapy and Religion: Integrating Spiritual and Behavioral Approaches to Change*, edited by W. Miller and J. Martin. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

⁵ Chaiken, M.R. 1989. *Prison Programs for Drug-Involved Offenders*. Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice.

⁶ Gendreau, P. and R.R. Ross, 1987. "Revivification of Rehabilitation: Evidence from the 1990's". *Justice Quarterly* 4: 349 – 407.

⁷ Leibrich, Julie. 1993 "Straight to the Point – Angles on Giving up Crime", University of Otago Press.

about a general belief in a God or Higher Power, or about the benefits of a spiritual life. Several made a connection between their belief in God and their resisting further offending.

In two recent New Zealand research papers, the role of religion in motivating people to leave gangs was considered. One researcher⁸ found that half of his participants were strongly engaged with some form of religion at the time interviews took place. They acknowledged that religion played a part in their departure from the gang lifestyle. A separate report on female prisoners reported that many of the female participants gave credit to religion for the life changing experiences which led them to leave gangs.⁹

Given the attitude of many parliamentarians and public servants toward faith based programs, Prison Fellowship has taken a double pronged approach to describing how the unit works. Firstly, it relies heavily on a substantial body of evidence known as 'desistance theory'. 'Desistance' refers to the alteration of criminal behaviour through a process of personal transformation. Secondly, it uses the language of restoration to describe how the theory operates in practise – it is after all, a prison unit that focuses on peace making, conflict resolution, and the restoration of relationships.

Theoretical Principles – 'Desistance Theory'

The underlying principles are linked to a body of knowledge known as 'desistance theory'. 'Desistance' refers to the alteration of criminal behaviour through a process of personal transformation. Sturdy correlates of desistance from crime include a 'good marriage', a stable and legitimate occupation, and the transformation of self-identity and maturation. Desistance occurs through;

- a) The Formation of Social Bonds;
- b) Transformation of Identity
- c) Construction of Identity through Narrative

⁸ Dennehy, Glennis, "Troubled Journeys: An Analysis of Women's Reality and Experience within New Zealand Gangs" A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for an MA thesis in Sociology. University of Canterbury. Unpublished. 2000.

⁹ Lala, G., 'My Life in the Gang – the Gang in my Life: Using Self-Categorisation Theory to Understand the Role of the Gang in Former Members' Lives'. A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Social Sciences in Psychology at the University of Waikato. Unpublished. 1996

Formation of Social Bonds

The formation of conventional ties causes prisoners to alter or terminate their criminal careers.¹⁰ Satisfying love-relationships motivate the decision to renounce crime.¹¹ In Meisenhelder's study, the pull of normality begins to outweigh the lure of an anti-social life.¹² An increase in pro-social activity and involvement - family, church, community)- is a significant factor.¹³ Labour and employment bonds are significant.¹⁴ Sports, hobbies, education and cultural pursuits provide an effective means of exiting a life of crime.¹⁵ ¹⁶ Education *per se* may not be that important; changed attitudes toward education and school may be the key.¹⁷ Attachment to a church or religious life (i.e. developing a personal relationship with God or conventional others within a religious community) is a key factor.¹⁸

Transformation of Identity

Desistance from crime is also attributed to changes in self-identity.¹⁹ Such transformation includes (a) acquisition of an altered perspective on their youthful self and activities; (b) growing awareness of time; (c) a refiguring of goals to include "peace and harmonious interpersonal relationships. Graham & Bowling,²⁰ Irwin,²¹ Maruna,²² and Mulvey & La Rosa²³ all found that change in identity and self-concept are critical to

¹⁰ Shover, N. 1996. *Great Pretenders: Pursuits and Careers of President Thieves*. p. 129 Westview: Oxford. P.129

¹¹ Maruna, S. (2000) *Making Good: How Ex-convicts Reform Their Lives*. London: American Psychological Press. p.27

¹² Meisenhelder, Thomas. (1977). An Exploratory Study of Exiting from Criminal Careers. *Criminology*, 15, 319-334.

¹³ Sommers, I., Baskin, D. and Fagan, J. (1994) 'Getting out of the Life: Crime desistance by female street offenders'. *Deviant Behaviour*, 15, pp. 125-149.

¹⁴ Sampson, R.J. and Laub, J.H. (1993) *Crime in the Making: Pathways and Turning Points through Life*. Cam, Mass: Harvard University Press. pp 217-20

¹⁵ Irwin, J. (1970) *The Felon*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall. P.203

¹⁶ Loeber, R., Stouthammer-Loeber, M., Van Kammen, W. and Farrington, D>P. (1001) "Initiation, Escalation and Desistance from Juvenile Offending and their Correlates.' *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 82 (1)

¹⁷ As above- pp 71 - 73

¹⁸ Sampson, R.J. and Laub, J.H. (1993) *Crime in the Making: Pathways and Turning Points through Life*. Cam, Mass: Harvard University Press. p.219

¹⁹ Shover, N. 1996. *Great Pretenders: Pursuits and Careers of President Thieves*. p. 129 Westview: Oxford.

²⁰ Graham, J. and Bowling, B. (1995) *Young People and Crime*. Home Office Research Study 145. London: HMSO.

²¹ Irwin, J. (1970) *The Felon*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall.

²² Maruna, S. (1997) 'Going Straight: Desistance from Crime and Life Narratives of Reform.' *Journal of the Narrative Study of Lives* 5, pp 59-93.

²³ Mulvey, E.P. and La Rosa, J.F. (1986) 'Delinquency Cessation and Adolescent Development: preliminary data' *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 56 (2) pp 212-24.

the process of offender reform. The path toward psychological adjustment, maturity and religious growth involve similar processes.²⁴

Construction of Identity through Narrative

Prisoners make sense of changes to self-identity through narrative, and biographical reconstruction, often in interaction with others.²⁵ Self-stories are major supports for human identity.²⁶ When a personal crisis ruptures self-identity, coherence can be re-established through narrative. The prison can view his/her life as one that has positive value, a sense of personal continuity over time, and a sense of connection to others .

The Operational Reality

He Korowai Whakapono comes from the position that stigma is one of the key factors that makes ex-prisoners likely to re-offend. To combat this presumption, the restorative reintegration or 'strengths based' paradigm calls for ex-prisoners to make amends, demonstrate their value and potential, and make a positive commitment to their communities. The goal is to transform receivers of help (such as welfare beneficiaries), into dispensers of help. It holds prisoners accountable in a variety of ways and challenges participants to "earn their way back ".

Turning Theory into Practise – The Practise of 'Restorative Reintegration'

How do you accomplish this in practise? The operating environment of HKW has been structured to reinforce the values and beliefs of the prison unit on a daily basis. Apart from regular scriptural teaching and opportunities for personal and spiritual development, the following operating principles, part of a model of 'restorative reintegration', exist to encourage positive living.

Family Meetings: Each weekday evening, participants meet in four groups of 15 men, to discuss the days activities. As in any family (or whanau) , prisoners experience there is conflict, disagreements and hurt. Participants are encouraged to accept responsibility for their choices and actions and work collectively solve problems. Each participant is responsible for his behaviour and conduct to the rest of the group. In that setting, they also learn to express love, concern, trust, commitment and support for those who are going through difficult times. It is a place for participants to share and feel safe, knowing that each persons' hurts, joys, achievements and victories are about that person's

²⁴ Rambo, L.R. (1999) 'Theories of Conversion'. *Social Compass* 46(3) pp. 260-171.

²⁵ Rubin, D. (Ed.) (1995) *Composing Social Identity in Written Language*. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Association Publishers.

²⁶ McAdams, D.P. (1996) Personality, Modernity and the Storied Self: A contemporary Framework for studying persons. *Psychological Inquiry*, 7, 295-321

journey. Information is shared so people in the group could build each other up and encourage each other in their journey.

Conflict Resolution : Many of the inmates had been raised in families where the fist ruled, and are victims of physical and sexual abuse. Prison Fellowship have introduced a conflict resolution model, by which interpersonal and disciplinary issues can be resolved. Prisoners are taught how to resolve conflict among themselves, through a process that can be replicated when they re-enter society.

Taking Active Responsibility: Passive responsibility means holding someone responsible for something they have done in the past. Active responsibility means taking responsibility for putting things right in the future.²⁷ HKW is not concerned with the past - the focus instead, is on monitoring, recording and assessing what the prisoner or ex-prisoner has done to redeem himself or herself through victim reparation, community service, volunteer work, and mentoring. Participants are constantly challenged on this front. Mistakes are mostly regarded as “teachable moments”.

Active responsibility also requires prisoners to take responsibility for their ongoing development – skills, education, and recreational activities. Productivity is a key value. Prison volunteers run arts classes, choir, music, literacy programmes, and provide one on one support. Volunteers provide up to 10,000 hours of additional programme time annually, in supporting prisoners.

Offender Reparation: Central to the concept of restoration is the notion of ‘making good’ or ‘earned redemption’.²⁸ This is won by actively making positive contributions to one’s community in a reparative fashion, in recognition that the wider community is often the primary victim of many of the crimes in the justice system. Examples of such initiatives in the United Kingdom include Community Service Volunteers.²⁹ community service outside the prison,³⁰ and restorative practise within prisons³¹ At HKW, two work teams leave the unit daily to do community work at churches, and public facilities.

²⁷ Braithwaite, John and Valerie Braithwaite. 2001. “Part One.” Pp 3-69 in *Shame Management Through Reintegration*, edited by E. Ahmed, N. Harris, J. Braithwaite, and V. Braithwaite. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press. p.11

²⁸ Marshall, T. E. (1999). *Restorative Justice: An Overview*. London: Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate

²⁹ Edgar, K. and Talbot, J. (2005). *The National Day Release Volunteering Pilot Project*. London: Prison Reform Trust.

³⁰ Culver, R. (2004). *Employment Inside and Out*. London: Inside-Out Trust and Hooper Walker.

³¹ Stern, V. (2005). *Prisons and Their Communities: Testing a New Approach*. London: International Centre for Prison Studies, King’s College London.

Victim – Offender Reconciliation: Prisoners are where possible, engaged in a mutual effort at reconciliation, where offender and society work together to make amends - for hurtful crime and hurtful punishments – and move forward” The Sycamore Tree programme runs regularly at the unit, and every effort is made to facilitate restorative justice conferences between victims and offenders.³²

Strengthening Families: The strengths based approach provides the framework for prisoners and ex-prisoners to develop as parents. Active engagement in parenting programmes provides a stability zone for offenders that softens the psychological impact of confinement, and may help reduce recidivism and transmit pro-social attitudes to a future generation.³³

Helping Behaviour: The helper principle simply says “it is better to give than receive”.^{34 35} The benefits of assuming the role of helper include a sense of accomplishment, grounded increments in self-esteem, meaningful purposiveness, and a cognitive restructuring toward responsibility.³⁶ Participants are turned to pro-social behaviour through involvement with activities that utilize their strengths. It is the difference between compliance and growth.³⁷

Mentoring: Prisoners are provided with a mentor eight months before they leave prison, and up to two years after they leave. Released prisoners in time, become mentors themselves. Support that involves community volunteers befriending a returning prisoner reinforces the direct support and assistance to the families of offenders before and after imprisonment³⁸

The Effectiveness of He Korowai Whakapono

The Unit has yet to be formally evaluated by the department. We know that one useful measure of the effectiveness of a prison unit to rehabilitation is the level of prisoner misconduct. Gendreau and French have established that prisoners released from those units with a low level of prison incidents, are more likely to achieve significant

³² Johnson, Robert. 2002. *Hard Time*, 3rd ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. p.238

³³ Toch, Hans. 1975. *Men in Crisis: Human Breakdowns in Prisons*. Chicago: Aldine.

³⁴ Pearl, Arthur and Frank Riessman. 1965. *New Careers for the Poor: The Nonprofessional in Human Service*. New York: The Free Press.

³⁵ Cullen, Francis T. 1994. “Social Support as an Organizing Concept in Criminology: Presidential Address to the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences.” *Justice Quarterly* 11:527-559.

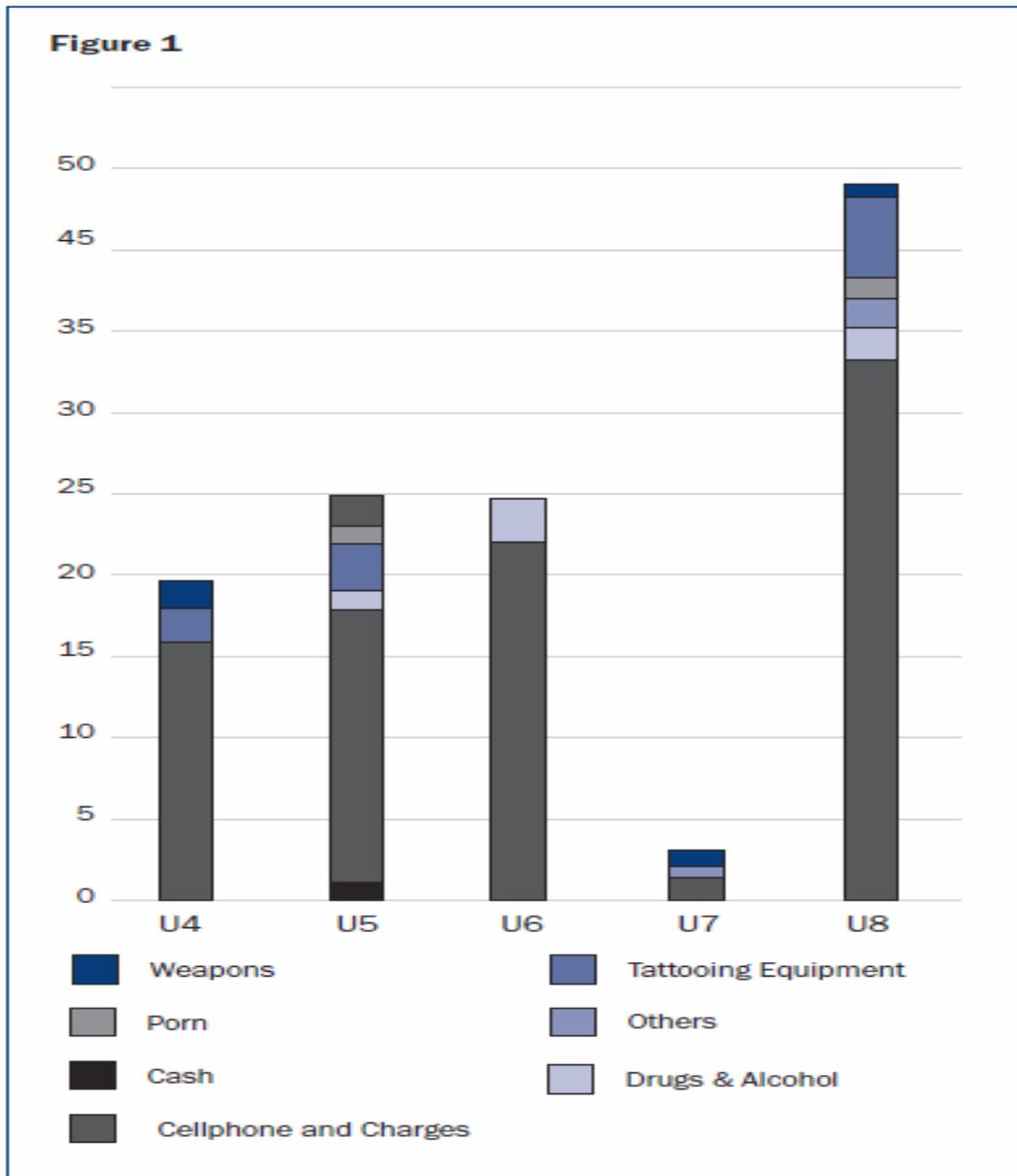
³⁶ Toch, Hans. 2000. “Altruistic Activity as Correctional Treatment.” *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 44:270-278.

³⁷ Lanier, Charles S. and Glenn Fisher. 1990. “A Prisoners’ Parenting Center (PPC): A Promising Resource Strategy for Incarcerated Fathers.” *Journal of Correctional Education* 41:158 -165. p.164.

³⁸ Newburn, T. and Shiner, M. (2005). *Dealing with disaffection*. Cullompton: Willan.

reductions in reoffending.³⁹ As can be seen from the graph below covering the period 1 May 2007 – 30 April 2008), the faith unit (Unit Seven) fared well in comparison with the other residential 60 bed units at Rimutaka.

Once the evaluation is complete, we will be able to see the impact of the programme on the reduction of reoffending.



³⁹ French, Sheila A & Gendreau, Paul (2005). Reducing Prison Misconducts: What Works! *Clinical Justice and Behaviour*, Vol 33 (2), Apr 2006, pp. 185-218.

