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THERAPEUTIC COMMUNITIES
FOR ADDICTIONS
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Readings in Theory, Research and Practice

Edited by

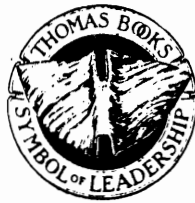
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CHAPTER 18

THERAPEUTIC COMMUNITIES WITHIN PRISONS

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INTRODUCTION

THE THERAPEUTIC community (TC) approach has significant value for prison rehabilitation efforts. Some central reasons that TCs are effective for prison inmates and can function in prison environments are outlined below.

Prisons are usually highly conservative institutions, primarily concerned with order and control and opposed to anything that disturbs the status quo. The general authoritarian orientation of TCs is not at variance with the conservative prison outlook. The TC's strong emphasis on following rules, clearly delineated roles and responsibilities as well as a hierarchical authority structure is not contrary to general prison life.

Although inmates usually volunteer for TC programs there remains a basic contradiction between the general involuntary inmate status and the need to establish therapeutic conditions (e.g., trust, honesty, openness, etc.) for positive growth. The prison TC facilitates the development of a therapeutic environment by utilizing counselors with drug and criminal histories as primary role models and change agents. These parprofessional counselors are often successful graduates of TCs and display a degree of inspiration since they have experienced the benefits of the treatment. A certain amount of inspired dedication is necessary to motivate apathetic inmates and is highly preferable to the more typical bureaucratic attitudes (e.g., boredom, ineptitude and helplessness) found in traditional correctional counseling units.

Therapeutic communities do not simply deliver services. Rather,

they elicit inmate involvement in several important ways. Since participants usually live together in a segregated unit there are many experiences of sharing and working out problems that lead to the development of meaningful relationships. Since values of honesty, responsibility, caring and helpfulness are integral to the TC experience inmates begin to internalize these values over the course of treatment. Changes in value structures are essential to meaningful and lasting rehabilitation.

Prisons are depressing environments and the inmates' culture engenders survival concerns, pessimism and cynical attitudes. In contrast, the TC communicates a sense of optimism; for example, if participants work hard and develop competencies there are few limits to ambition. There is a strong implicit (staff role models) and an explicit message that it is possible to rise out of the mire of social deprivation, prejudice and personal inadequacies. Participants are trained to tolerate frustration and develop persistent work habits which are necessary for positive achievements.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

The most extensive review of the outcomes of various prison-based rehabilitative efforts for criminal offenders was produced by Lipton, Martinson and Wilks (1975). The overall conclusion was that ". . . the field of corrections has not as yet found satisfactory ways to reduce recidivism by significant amounts" (p. 627). Other reviews (e.g., Bailey, 1966; Adams, 1975) do not contradict this pessimistic conclusion.

Reasons for the lack of documented notable effectiveness of correctional treatment include: a limited number of relevant studies which are of generally poor quality; the present narrow range of treatment techniques; the fundamental incompatibility of punitive correctional environments and rehabilitation programs seeking to facilitate positive client change; and a lack of connection between both treatment and evaluation with theory (Lipton, et al., 1975).

A theoretical rationale for the establishment of TCs within prison is derived from outcome research on community-based TCs. An important finding is that successful outcomes (reduced crime and substance abuse and increased employment) are related to the time spent in treatment (De Leon, 1984; De Leon et al., 1979; Simpson, 1979, 1980). In fact, residents who were sent to the program by the courts had a better

success rate than volunteers. However, community TCs produce excessively high dropout rates which limit their effectiveness to the relatively few clients who remain at least six months in the program (De Leon, 1979). One of the justifications for the establishment of the "Stay 'N Out" program was to test the efficacy of the time-in-program variable within an environment where residents are likely to stay at least six months. It was expected that inmates would find the program unit considerably more desirable than regular prison units.

Although a number of TCs within prison settings have been established in state and federal prisons (NIDA, 1981) there has been almost no outcome research conducted. A study conducted by Lynn and Nash (1975) assessed changes in arrest rates for a total of 173 inmates who attended seven prison-based programs. Four of these programs were TCs based on the traditional Synanon model, two were counseling programs and one was a drug-free residential program. The study did not find significant differences in arrest rates between any of the programs and a comparison group. However, a more extensive analysis of the data (Des Jarlais and Wexler, 1979) found that two of the four TCs did significantly better than the comparison group. Within the community, TCs have been shown to be effective with clients who have extensive criminal histories (De Leon et al., 1972, 1979; De Leon et al, 1981; Nash, 1973, 1976; System Science, 1973; Sells et al., 1976; Wilson and Mandelbrot, 1977).

The remainder of this chapter will focus on the "Stay 'N Out" TC which is a model of a successful prison-based rehabilitation program. A program description will be followed by a summary of evaluation research conducted a "Stay 'N Out" and a discussion of how the program has developed important conditions necessary for effective rehabilitation within the prisons.

"STAY 'N OUT" PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The "Stay 'N Out" program was founded in 1977 as a joint venture between New York Therapeutic Communities, New York Department of Correctional Services, New York Division of Substances Abuse Services, and the New York Division of Parole in 1977. The successful cooperation between these agencies is a primary reason for the success and longevity of the program. A male program (capacity of 62) is located at the Arthur Kill Correctional Facility on Staten Island and the

female program (capacity of 31) is housed at Manhattan based Bayview Correctional Facility.

Inmates selected for the programs are recruited at State correctional facilities. The criteria for selection are: history of drug abuse, at least 18 years of age, evidence of positive institutional participation, and no history of sex crimes or mental illness.

The programs at Arthur Kill and Bayview are TCs modified to fit into a correctional institution. "Stay 'N Out" clients are housed in units segregated from the general prison population. They eat in a common dining room, however, and attend morning activities with other prisoners. The length of treatment is from six to nine months. Most program staff are graduates of community-based TCs as well as ex-offenders with prison experience who act as "role models" demonstrating successful rehabilitation. The course of treatment is viewed as a developmental growth process with the inmate becoming an increasingly responsible member of society.

During the first phase of treatment, the major clinical thrust involves observation and assessment of client needs and problem areas, and re-education and orientation of the client to the lifestyle of the therapeutic community. Re-education and orientation occurs through individual counseling, encounter sessions and seminars.

During the second phase of treatment, participants are placed in positions of increasing responsibility. Encounter groups and counseling sessions are more in-depth and focus on the areas of self-discipline, self-worth, self-awareness, respect for authority, and acceptance of guidance for problem areas. Seminars take a more intellectual nature. Debate is encouraged to enhance self-expression and to increase self-confidence.

The re-entry process includes close cooperation with the Department of Social Services, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, and private agencies. This is intended as a bridge for the residents in achieving economic, personal and social adjustment. Upon release, participants are encouraged to seek further substance abuse treatment at cooperating community-based TCs.

"STAY 'N OUT" EVALUATION FINDINGS

Since the inception of "Stay 'N Out," the New York State Division of Substance Abuse Services Bureau of Cost Effectiveness and Research has been monitoring the programs and conducting evaluation studies

which are summarized by Wexler and Chin (1981). Data is collected on basic client flow, client background characteristics, types of termination, psychological testing, environmental assessment and outcome. Selected results of these efforts are summarized below.

An extensive battery of psychological tests has been utilized to assess client changes in treatment. These include the MMPI and the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale. Clients were tested within one month of admission and again approximately six months later. Overall, the psychological results indicated a variety of improvements in psychological functioning for males and females who experienced approximately six months of therapeutic community treatment while in prison. Earlier research (De Leon, 1984) in community-based TCs has shown that positive changes on psychological measures are related to successful client outcomes. For example, improvements in self-concept and decreases in depression were related to decreases in crime drug use as well as improved employment status.

A standardized instrument which assesses staff and client program environmental perceptions (Moos, 1974) is administered twice a year to monitor the quality of the treatment environment and provide feedback to staff and clients. Previous studies have shown that positive perceptions of program environments are related to positive client outcomes.

Overall, the treatment environments of both programs are perceived as highly positive and treatment oriented. The test scores were significantly more positive than results reported for typical prison units and resemble TC data reported in the literature (Wexler and Lostlen, 1979). These data demonstrate that TC environments have been successfully implemented and maintained with the Arthur Kill and Bayview prisons.

One of the "Stay 'N Out" program goals is to encourage clients to continue treatment in community-based TCs after release. A study of 109 positive male program completions showed that 59 entered community TCs. The six-month drop out rate for these clients was 49 percent which was considerably lower than 72 percent six-month average drop out rate for all TCs within New York State (New York State Division For Substance Abuse Services, 1980).

Parole outcome data were obtained for all clients who terminated from the Arthur Kill (N = 110) and Bayview (N = 43) programs prior to 12/31/79 and have been placed on parole status. Data were also ob-

tained for two comparison groups, consisting of individuals who had been on the Arthur Kill (N = 115) and Bayview (N = 16) waiting list but were never admitted to the programs. Comparisons were made between program and comparison groups to ascertain their degree of similarity. There were no significant differences found between program and comparison groups for "time at risk" (average range from 18 to 21 months), age, ethnicity, religion, education, marital status, occupational level, narcotic and alcohol abuse history, number of prior arrests and convictions, and severity of crime leading to current incarceration.

The parole revocation rate for the Arthur Kill program males was 6 percent which was significantly lower than the 19 percent found for the male comparison group. In addition, none of the Bayview program females had their parole status revoked, as compared with 6 percent of the comparison females. These data indicate that participation in the "Stay 'N Out" program leads to a reduction in the incidence of parole revocation. These preliminary findings, however, need to be replicated with larger samples over longer periods at risk.

CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL REHABILITATION

The "Stay 'N Out" prison TC meets five important conditions for a successful rehabilitation outlined by Dr. Douglas S. Lipton (whose 1977 comprehensive review of the literature is often cited in defense of the "rehabilitation is impossible within prisons" position) at the 1983 Bellevue Forensic Psychiatry Conference. The conditions include: an isolated treatment unit; motivated participants; a committed and competent staff; adequate treatment duration; and, continuity of care that extends into the community. Discussion of how these conditions were met by the program should be useful in developing effective rehabilitation programs within other correctional settings. In addition, several important program developments will be discussed which help illuminate the difficulties of instituting and maintaining effective rehabilitation programming within prisons.

One of the major reasons "Stay 'N Out" has been able to provide conditions for an effective program is its independence. The program is an autonomous organization which has been successful in gaining cooperation and support from other important agencies (e.g., New York State Division of Parole, New York State Department of Correctional Services, New York Division of Substance Abuse Services, many large

therapeutic communities and the national organization of Therapeutic Communities of America).

Independence has allowed the program to enhance its negotiating position with other agencies through the formation of alliances. For example, although funding is exclusively provided through a contract with corrections, the considerable support received from other agencies improves the bargaining position of "Stay 'N Out." Conversely, support received from corrections helps the program negotiate issues, with other agencies.

Independence also enhances program credibility with inmates. Since a basic therapeutic task is to gain credibility and trust it is mandatory that counselors are not perceived as employees of corrections. In fact, inmates and program staff show the common concern of maximizing their independence from the values and coercive authority found among the general population. Pride is taken in program membership.

Isolated Unit

"Stay 'N Out" is located on isolated units within the prison. The program is a show place for the prison administration. Most important visitors to the prison are taken on tours of the units. Upon entering one of the units visitors are immediately impressed with how neat and clean it appears. Each bedroom is attractively decorated and looks well cared for. All program participants are clean and well mannered. They are very willing to discuss their personal lives and/or program. Their perceptions of the program are consistently positive although they don't hesitate to mention deficiencies.

An issue of trust was provoked by the placement of a program, administered by an outside group, onto an isolated unit within the prison. Inmates and correctional personnel were suspicious and disturbed by the intrusion of a positive program which created a bright and attractive environment that was a glaring contrast to the surrounding poor prison conditions.

The mistrust of prison inmates and staff was handled in several ways. Close working relationships were developed with the prison administration. Several higher echelon administrators who were honestly interested in rehabilitation were invited to identify with the program accomplishments. These administrators were proud to show visitors and their correctional superiors the good programming taking place under their auspices and guidance.

The support of correctional officers was earned by involving officers assigned to the units. These unit officers were deeply impressed by the dedication of program staff, clarity of program values and positive observed changes among participating inmates. Over time, officers who were exposed to the program communicated their positive impressions to the rest of the prison staff. In addition, the program fielded sports teams, sponsored events (e.g., Christmas parties) and encouraged its inmate members to participate in other positive prison programs (e.g., college courses).

Gaining the trust of general population inmates within the host prison and other prisons was necessary to provide a pool of future recruits. That the program was very successful in winning inmate confidence was confirmed by a continuous long waiting list. Inmates have a well established informal communication network ("grape vine") that extends throughout the entire New York State correctional system. The specific ways that the program gained a positive statewide reputation among inmates is described in the recruitment section below.

Motivated Participants

The primary reason "Stay 'N Out" was highly popular among inmates was that it demonstrated an ability to deliver on its promises. Inmates, who are generally quite cautious and cynical, scrutinize a program very carefully before committing themselves. The program has been able to keep the most important promise which is favorable review by the Parole Board for its members. Through continuous efforts "Stay 'N Out" has maintained a high degree of positive visibility among the Board members. These efforts have included presentations to the Board, cooperative relations with Institutional and Field Parole Officers and good communication with the Executive Officer of Parole.

The promise that "Stay 'N Out" is capable of successfully rehabilitating inmates has also been publicized. Research that has demonstrated successful outcome has been actively disseminated. Several successful graduates have returned to the program as paid staff and other successful clients have returned to visit.

Since motivation is very low or entirely absent among prison inmates, it is not a requirement for admission. However, the program considers the inspiration and maintenance of motivation for success a primary objective. Explication of how motivation is encouraged is offered in the following sections which discuss program staff and the need for a six month minimum of immersion in a treatment process.

Committed and Competent Staff

Ex-addicts and ex-offenders who have successfully completed TC treatment comprise most of the program staff.

An essential requirement for an effective treatment staff is the personal strength and integrity gained from completing treatment and succeeding. Counselors who meet this requirement are inspired and deeply believe in the treatment process and their own power to facilitate and guide positive development.

Staff members who are willing to work for relatively low pay and remain committed to the program for significant durations are usually people who are still actively involved in the rehabilitation process. They have recently completed treatment and need to consolidate their gains and altered identities by helping others achieve similar growth. Often, these counselors lack the skills and experience to demand greater pay in other forms of employment. Although these staff members are talented and highly committed, care must be taken not to continue employing them when they outgrow the job. If ex-addict/offenders stay too long it usually reinforces negative dependencies which hinders their effectiveness.

The fact that staff members come from similar backgrounds to the inmates enables them to serve as credible role models. The successful rehabilitation demonstrated by counselors is a strong impetus to client motivation. The staff provides undeniable proof that the treatment can work if one fully participates in the process.

Adequate Treatment Duration

Program staff strongly believe that a minimum of six months of treatment is necessary for the establishment of significant client changes. Adequate time is needed in the various program structures (e.g., encounter groups, seminars, job assignments, etc.) to break down negative self concepts (e.g., tough guy) and facilitates the development of social maturity. Clients are continually involved in program-induced cycles of stress and adaptation (new learning) designed to foster increasing levels of competency. Over time participants hopefully internalize values of honesty, integrity, responsibility and concern for others. The course of treatment is designed sequentially so that clients earn reinforcements (privileges and status) for demonstrating increasingly mature behavior. Client success and subsequent reinforcements serve to promote and maintain motivation.

A central therapeutic component is the formation of a positive network of staff and peers that forms the bridge into the community. It is truism in penology that inmates who return to the old environment are likely to also return to prison. The formation of a new network that extends from the prison program to the community helps decrease recidivism. Description of the program aftercare network is presented below.

Continuity of Care

Programs that simply refer ex-inmates to community service programs such as job training have very little success because they ignore several critical realities. Criminal justice clients generally suffer from overwhelming social defenses and need to undergo a great deal of training and development to become socially adequate and earn a decent living. The problem is that very high levels of fear and anxiety are elicited by the difficult tasks facing ex-inmates and most individuals strenuously avoid situations that engender such feelings of weakness. A great deal of personal integrity and support is needed for these clients to achieve successful integration into the community.

"Stay 'N Out" has developed a network of cooperative community TCs that recruit their clients. Community TC staff regularly visit the program and develop personal relationships with clients. Community programs that are most successful with "Stay 'N Out" clients have modified their procedures to meet the special needs of ex-inmates. Clients who complete "Stay 'N Out" and enter the community TC network are provided with the integrity support system needed to enable successful passage into the community.

CONCLUSIONS

The effectiveness of TC treatment within prison, as exemplified by the "Stay 'N Out" program, directly challenges the wide-spread belief that it is impossible to implement effective prison-based rehabilitation programs. It is hoped that the discussion of how the "Stay 'N Out" program developed will suggest strategies for the development of other effective prison TCs. Some of the conditions that increase the likelihood of success include: isolation of the treatment unit; inspiration and maintenance of inmate motivation; staff who are committed and competent; adequate treatment duration; and, continuity of care that helps the client re-enter the community.

The TC model holds great promise for effective rehabilitation of felons. The approach is one of self-help that employs credible role models (ex-addicts and ex-offenders) who have successfully helped themselves. The national network of TCs within the field of substance abuse comprises a competent staff who are experienced with criminal justice clients. The TC provides a well defined, structured program that engages participants in pro-social behaviors and strongly discourages negative values and conduct. The hierarchical authoritarian TC approach is uniquely compatible with correctional environments. Careful attention to the special needs of inmates and creative approaches to the inherent difficulties of prison rehabilitation will result in more extensive utilization of prison-based TCs.