



***Volunteering in criminal justice:  
findings from the seminar series  
and implications for research.***

**Dr Mary Corcoran**

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- Background: conflicting demands between inviting TSOs to be market ready service providers, and devolving responsibilities to local level.
- The debate: co-option or negotiation?
- How inclusive is volunteering in criminal justice?

# Profile: who volunteers?

- Volunteering fluctuates with age (35-49yo)
- Volunteering participation is higher in wealthier parts of the country
- White people (42%) were more likely to volunteer than BME groups (34%) except Black African groups (40%).
- More women than men volunteer.
- More 'able bodied' persons than those with a long-term illness or disability.
- Higher/ lower managerial and professionals most likely to formally volunteer (*2007/08 DCLG Citizenship Survey*).
- More educated and middle-class people responded to unemployment by volunteering.
- Difficult to isolate numbers and types of voluntary organisations working in criminal justice arena.
- Difficult to extract volunteer numbers in criminal justice arena.

***Source: UK Civil Society Almanac, 2010: 'Workforce' (formal volunteering per annum)***

# Barriers and unknowns

- Barriers: BME and minority disengagement
- Funding encouraged BME and other TSOs to compete with each other for resources and legitimacy.
- Expectations are unclear and uncertain: It is ambiguous because the role of the VCS to address the over-representation of black young people in the criminal justice system is emphasised without clarification or recourse to clear evidence about what it is being called on to contribute' (Mills, 2009: 11).
- 'Establishment volunteering'?
- Research on volunteering and volunteers are primary areas of investigation.

# Critical issues: The benefits fallacy?

- *Who benefits from volunteering?*
- *What is beneficial?*
- *Who defines what is beneficial?*
- Firstly, volunteering is offered as a panacea to complex needs/problems
- Secondly, that volunteering is universally beneficial for all participants (volunteers and clients)
- Thirdly, that little attention is given to potentially harmful or adverse affects of volunteering in criminal justice arena more broadly.
- Fourthly, as the demand for voluntary involvement with offenders increases, so also do the risks of managing the activities and behaviours of volunteers fall to individual agencies.
- **Who bears the risks and costs of a 'free' or 'troublefree' workforce?**

# Volunteering by offenders: views from prisons, community-based partnerships.

- Unique challenges which revolve around constraints on offenders as volunteers because of their status as probationers and prisoners
- Benefits of peer-to-peer work: trust; recognition; identity; bridge-building. Tracking autobiographical journey from client to volunteer to staff and beyond...
- **Challenges: The penal environment is the crucial distinguishing factor:**
  - Listeners share the closed environment of the prison with their clients?
  - Mentors are under constant demand, and cannot 'step out of the role'.
  - Listeners face suspicion of being 'grasses' from peers and have to depend on the good will of staff to discharge their role.
  - There is no private places for confidential discussions.
  - Volunteers face burnout and exploitation.
  - Many programmes have no exit strategy protocols for offender-volunteers who wish to stop volunteering.

# The need for critical research

- Harms as well as benefits from political steerage of the sector.
- **Criminal justice exceptionality?**
- Inclusion, representativeness, participation and the parity of the status remain deep-seated challenges.
- Volunteers who are offenders should have access to equal or comparable resources and levels of social investment and capital to those experienced by citizen-volunteers.
- **Is the TS inheriting responsibility without power?**
- Volunteering should never be just (or primarily) about reducing criminal activity.
- **Volunteering and working with offenders relies on strong volunteer management.**

# Drivers of adaptation

Marketisation

A light blue downward-pointing arrow with a white outline, indicating a flow from Marketisation to Professionalisation.

Professionalisation

A light blue downward-pointing arrow with a white outline, indicating a flow from Professionalisation to Penal drift.

Penal drift



- Research needs to be qualitative and processual as well as functional, innovative in method and approach, capable of capturing risk and change.
- ‘There may be a need for a completely different direction for research ... I like the idea of research on activity that is ‘under the radar’ – the concentration on organisations that really are innovative and pushing the frontiers forward. A kind of social anthropology at the local level – not the Robert Putnam-type data-gathering exercise, but aiming for a real understanding of the dynamics of what’s happening locally. It’s not something you can replicate mechanically but you can learn if you listen properly – (Nicholas Deakin, in Jochum & Rochester, 2012, 13)’.