

## SCRUTINY REVIEW: RESPONDING TO DRUG USE

### NOTES ON PANEL VISIT TO H.M. PRISON LA MOYE

18th JUNE 2004

In attendance: Deputy J. Dorey (Chairman), Constable M. de la Haye, Deputy G. Southern, Mike Haden (Scrutiny Officer),

The Panel met six female prisoners together with Alan Kearney (Prison Officer). They also separately had brief conversations with Clive Russell (Health Care Manager) and Teresa Rodrigues (Counsellor).

The following notes record the views expressed by the prisoners in a general discussion. The sections in italics represent direct quotations from prisoners. The sentences in bold represent the key messages.

#### Alcohol and Drugs Service (ADS)

- There were a number of positive comments about ADS. They provided help to deal with physical symptoms, through detox or through substitution programmes. They were also helpful in dealing with the police. Some spoke highly of the assistance they had received from individual counsellors.
- **However, it was felt that ADS didn't do enough to address the psychological problems behind addiction.** ADS provided opportunities to detox time and again but it's too easy to relapse or not complete the course.
- *"Detox is the easy part but the drug stays in your brain."*
- One girl spoke of her own experience with ADS. She had gone there for help after relapsing into heroin use and was given advice about cutting back on use of the drug. She didn't find this much use as, she said, it was not possible for an addict to control their use of the drug. She had tried a 10 day detox programme but this had failed after a few days as she was back in contact with friends still using. She was very reluctant to go on to a methadone programme and preferred subutex but was told she would have to wait for ten days. But when the time came she was unable to go on to Subutex because she had in the meantime taken valium.
- It was suggested that one of the greatest problems for ADS was the huge number of people they had to deal with. This meant that there was a long waiting list for attention. **They often had to tell people who might need urgent assistance to come back in a few weeks' time.**

#### Silkworth

- Silkworth on the other hand demanded total abstinence, which some felt was not appropriate to them. Silkworth insist that if someone is addicted to heroin, for example, they should abstain from all other substances including alcohol. This approach is right for some people but others are not ready for the 12 steps abstinence approach. Some people, particularly young people, needed to treat other emotional issues before they could face an abstinence programme. Insisting on total abstinence only increases a sense of resentment and frustration. **Other treatment choices should be available**

### to meet varying needs of addicts.

- Silkworth was only available to a few. The problem was the cost which was beyond the reach of most addicts unless they help from families. Some people were subsidised and it was felt that there should be an open and consistent method of applying such help. **States funding should be provided to enable more people to access this treatment.** This would be far more cost effective than sending people to prison for lengthy sentences.
- One girl explained how she had completed the rehabilitation programme at Silkworth after a previous prison sentence for importation of drugs, having heard of this option through drug awareness courses in prison. This had only been possible, however, due to financial support from her parents to meet the costs.
- After this, she had remained clean for a period of several months but, having been offered heroin again by an old friend, found herself straight back in addiction. People who are not addicts, she said, can't understand the force which pulls them back towards the drug. Anyone who wants to stay clean has to cut themselves off from friends still using, otherwise they will inevitably be dragged back into use.
- **There was a strong feeling that ADS and Silkworth were not working together and that different and confusing messages were being given out to addicts.**

### Impact of Prison on drug users

- For drug addicts a prison sentence is **not a real deterrent** to further offences. Drugs take away any concern for consequences. People inside the prison walls for the first time generally don't want to come back inside but they are not always aware of the pressures that will face them once they get outside. The shock of finding yourself inside prison is rarely strong enough to stop people relapsing into drug use and re-offending.

*"You become institutionalised through a long sentence - this increases the risk of relapse when you get outside."*

*"When I started get messed up again with drugs I wanted to go back inside as I felt accepted there, safer, even though I had a family outside who wanted to look after me."*

- In prison there is no alternative to staying clean - it's easy - but once someone is released there is every probability of a speedy relapse into old ways with old friends. It is easy to get caught up in further trouble without meaning to. In addition, once someone has served a sentence there is an increasing likelihood that further trouble will lead to custodial periods.

### Deferred sentence options

- **Currently a prison sentence is the only option available for serious drug offences.** Importation, in particular, carries a heavy sentence, with the result that some people are facing long periods of their life behind walls for the mistakes they have made.

*“Four or five years is a long time just to teach someone a lesson because of their use of drugs”.*

- A prison sentence is both a waste of a young life and a serious drain on financial resources due to the high costs of keeping so many prisoners locked away. **Deferred sentence options should be tried out in order to discover those who could really benefit from treatment.**

*“Nothing is solved by a long sentence - the result is that you come out hating the world even more. It doesn’t help you to deal with the real problem.”*

### Temporary release scheme

- **It is most important for a prisoner to have goals to aim for on their release.** Individuals need to look at the broad picture of their lives, including what they have going for them on the outside and what might bring into drugs.
- The decision to stop the temporary release scheme, because of the escape of one or two individuals, has had a profound de-moralising effect on those prisoners who were making positive use of the opportunity to rebuild relationships and a life outside. They feel they have been punished twice.

*“I broke the rules by taking cannabis while I was on release - but for me the fact that it wasn’t heroin was a big step forward”.*

### Half-way House

- The key problem for many people leaving prison is finding accommodation. Unless someone has a family to go home to, many have to go to the Shelter. There is a pressing need for a half-way house to support those who need to find their feet again.

### Drug awareness programmes in prison

- Many felt that the prison counsellor was easy to relate to because of her own experience of addiction. **Others felt it was also important to have greater individual choice** as one counsellor could not possibly meet the needs of all the prisoners with drug-related problems.
- Alan Kearney (Prison Officer) told the Panel that he was personally aware of further drug awareness programmes, already in operation in prisons on the mainland, and that he had become qualified on his own initiative to run these programmes. However, lack of resources and personnel in the prison had to date prevented their implementation.

### Younger people using drugs

- **One girl warned that the use of hard drugs was affecting younger and younger sections of the population in the Island.** She had started using heroin at the age of 11 and had then started stealing in order to pay for the drug. She had been detoxed at the age of 14 in St. Saviour’s Hospital, the only option because of her age. This had been a devastating experience for her. Neither Silkworth nor ADS were able to assist because of her age.

- It was essential, she felt, to offer the right kind of help to young people. At present there was nowhere for them to go which was appropriate to them - the only option was Greenfields which was within the punishment system. Many young people weren't ready to accept a message of abstinence. They needed beforehand a lot of work on self esteem.

## **Conclusion**

- Most people in the Island don't realise the seriousness of the levels of heroin use. However, drug-related problems will inevitably escalate once crack becomes more widely used - and this WILL happen. The effects of crack are much more aggressive. Addicts will do anything to get money for their next fix.

***“Jersey's not ready for a heroin problem - but you've got one. It's not ready for a 'crack' problem - but it will come.”***