Reintegration Services for Long-Term Dangerous Offenders: A Case Study and Discussion

ANDREW DAY
School of Psychology, Deakin University, Geelong, Victoria, Australia

TONY WARD
School of Psychology, Victoria University Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand

LYN SHIRLEY
Uniting Care West, Victoria Park, Western Australia, Australia

Successfully reintegrating long-term prisoners back into the community often presents significant challenges for service providers. Ex-prisoners typically experience high levels of social stigma; present with multiple needs; and can struggle to find meaningful employment, stable accommodation, and to maintain supportive relationships. There have, however, been relatively few published evaluations of the outcomes achieved by postrelease services on managing the risk of reoffending and, as such, it is difficult for service providers to meet these multiple and complex levels of need in ways that might be considered to be evidence based. In this article we describe a specialized prerelease support, reentry, and reintegration service that is offered to long-term prisoners, many of whom have been legally labelled as “dangerous.” The current model of service delivery is reviewed and discussed in the context of current theories of offender rehabilitation and reintegration. These are then used to discuss the way in which services for this group of offenders might best be conceptualized.

KEYWORDS long-term prisoners, offender reintegration, post-release services, rehabilitation
INTRODUCTION

Most human service providers aspire towards delivering services and programs that are evidence-based. Indeed, the idea of evidence-based practice has had a profound influence on the way in which many agencies conduct their business, particularly in the area of healthcare. In criminal justice settings, the idea of evidence-based practice is perhaps most evident in relation to what has been described as the “what works” approach to offender rehabilitation (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). This approach is based on applying the aggregated results of a large number of offender program evaluations that have led to the identification of a series of practice principles. These have subsequently been widely endorsed by correctional services around the Western world (Ogloff & Davis, 2004; Wormith et al., 2007), and include the frequently cited principles of risk-need-responsivity (RNR; the “big three” or major assumptions), as well as those of professional discretion and program integrity (Andrews & Bonta, 2006). In total, however, 17 different principles have now been identified (Bonta & Andrews, 2007).

These principles are well documented elsewhere but, in brief, the risk principle suggests that higher risk offenders stand to benefit more from rehabilitation programs than low-risk offenders; the needs principle suggests that programs should target individual “criminogenic” needs, or those dynamic risk factors that are directly related to offending behavior; and the responsivity principle refers to those internal and external factors that may impede an individual’s response to interventions, such as weak motivation or program content and delivery. The professional discretion principle refers to ensuring that program deliverers have a degree of discretion and a capacity to use professional judgment in assessing and managing offenders when necessary. Program integrity relates to reducing the gap that commonly exists between the program as it exists in design, and the reality of how it is delivered in practice.

The task of assessing the quality of a particular criminal justice program might then appear to be reasonably straightforward. First, ensure that there are programs and services to match the range of needs that the client group presents with. Second, determine that each of the programs offered are evidence-based and subject to evaluation to establish their effectiveness with the local client group; and finally, subject programs to an audit process to ensure that they are delivered according to a set of quality standards or practice guidelines, where these are available. The Correctional Program Assessment Inventory (CPAI-2000, Gendreau & Andrews, 2001) is one method that has been developed to do just this. The CPAI is a 131-item assessment or audit protocol that assesses a particular program against eight different domains of practice, each of which corresponds to the main principles of effective intervention outlined previously. The goal of the assessment
is to ascertain the extent to which the principles have been implemented, and the method represents a standardized way of assessing the quality of offender rehabilitation programs against a set of criteria that are empirically derived (Matthews, Hubbard, & Latessa, 2001). The tool has been used to assess literally hundreds of different programs across America, Canada, Europe, and Australasia (Morgan et al., 2007).

What is less clear, however, is how this type of approach might be applied to the range of through-care or reintegration programs that are commonly offered to offenders who are released from prison. Not only is there no robust evidence base from which to make definitive statements about what might be considered to be good practice in this area (in marked contrast to the offender rehabilitation field), but these programs and services typically aim to achieve multiple goals, of which a reduction in risk of reoffending is just one. Indeed, even describing what is meant by the term reintegration is a far from straightforward task (Borzycki & Baldry, 2003), although Taxman, Young, Byrne, Holsinger, and Anspach (2003) have helpfully described a three-stage process by which prisoners reenter the community: institutional (at least 6 months before release); structured reentry (6 months before release and 30 days after), and integration (31-plus days after release).

In the absence of any strong evidence base, it becomes important to consider the theoretical basis of reintegration practice. Rehabilitation theories provide a structure for the delivery of a variety of interventions with offenders in relation to a set of core assumptions about its purposes, underlying values, and what needs to be changed in order for such initiatives to be effective. A rehabilitation theory, then, is essentially a practice framework that contains a set of overarching aims, values, principles, justifications, and etiological assumptions that are used to guide interventions and help program staff translate these rather abstract principles into practice. One of the most widely known rehabilitation theories is the good lives model (GLM; Ward & Maruna, 2007; Ward & Stewart, 2003), a strength-based approach to offender reintegration which is concerned with assisting offenders to achieve their goals as well as managing their risk.

The GLM is a strength-based approach in two respects: (a) it takes seriously offenders’ personal preferences and values; that is, the things that matter most to them in the world—drawing upon these to motivate individuals to live better lives; and (b) it seeks to provide offenders with the competencies and opportunities to implement rehabilitation plans based on these preferences and needs, or primary goods. Primary goods are essentially activities, experiences, or situations that are sought for their own sake and that benefit individuals and increase their sense of fulfilment and happiness. Examples of primary human goods include knowledge, relatedness, agency, inner peace (emotional equilibrium), play, physical health, and mastery. Secondary goods are the means used to secure the primary goods, and it is in this area that offenders often experience problems.
In the GLM, criminogenic needs (or dynamic risk factors) are internal or external obstacles that frustrate and block the acquisition of primary human goods. The responses to these obstacles are learned and conditioned throughout the individual’s life, meaning that the individual offender typically lacks the ability to obtain important outcomes (i.e., goods) in their life and, in addition, is frequently unable to think about their life in a reflective manner. It is proposed that four major types of difficulties are often evident in offenders’ life plans: a lack of scope (i.e., important primary goods are neglected); inappropriate means used to secure goods (i.e., counterproductive methods used that result in failure to obtain goods); conflict evident in a person’s life plan (i.e., the pursuit of one good lessens the chances of another being secured); and lack of capacity (i.e., internal capacity such as lack of skills, or external capacity relating to a lack of support, opportunities, etc.). The GLM thus has a twin focus with respect to interventions with offenders—promoting goods and managing or reducing risk. A major aim of any GLM informed practice is to equip the offender with the skills, values, attitudes, and resources that are necessary to lead a life that is personally meaningful and satisfying and, importantly, does not involve inflicting harm.

In this article we describe the results of an external review of one particular offender reintegration program delivered by a nongovernmental agency. We discuss the need for programs of this type to be structured in ways that are theoretically informed, given the absence of any empirical research that could inform service delivery (indeed, it is difficult to envisage a research design which would allow the type of data required for this to be collected). There is, however, in our view a need for program providers to be accountable for the practices that they adopt and this requires them to articulate the theories that underpin their practice. Indeed, the purpose of the current review was to assist program providers to elaborate and articulate their model of practice and rehabilitation theory, and to relate this to current models and theories of practice (the RNR and the GLM). It is anticipated that the issues raised in this type of review will be of relevance to the large number of nongovernmental agencies who deliver offender reintegration services and programs.

METHOD

Case Study Design

An instrumental, descriptive, multiple case study design was used in this project given the small numbers of individuals available for interview (Willig, 2001). Each individual spoken to was viewed as a single case who was able to provide information about the nature and characteristics of the Outreach integration program, along with what they considered to be effective practice. However, the cases were viewed as thematically linked and thus
the case study design was an instrumental one, because the aim was to reveal to the researchers the overall features of the Outreach program rather than concentrate on the intrinsic qualities of the staff in question. Furthermore, the aim was to develop a description of the program and its function and to ascertain what was considered to be good practice in the domain of offender reintegration. A case study design is especially appropriate when relatively little is known about a phenomenon, in this case, reintegration programs. Case studies are also useful in research contexts because they often generate new ideas and ultimately may result in the construction of an integrated model and/or in the discovery of unique characteristics.

THE STUDY

In this article we describe the outcomes of a program review conducted by the first two authors in 2009. Information about the service was collected during a 2-day site visit conducted by the first author, and a review of documentation supplied by an Australian nongovernmental service agency. This included the agency’s grant agreement with the Department of Justice (Australia) and the agency’s strategic plan and annual reports.

As the agency’s Outreach program is a relatively small one, it was possible to interview all of the staff ($N = 5$) who were associated with the program at the time of the visit (director, program manager, program coordinator, and two case workers). Interviews were conducted in the office from which the program is coordinated. In addition, a focus group was held with three current clients of the service who had volunteered to participate in the review. All of the interviews were conducted by the first author who took contemporaneous written notes.

The interviews were semistructured, with questions based on the eight domains of the CPAI-2000 (see Table 1). By way of illustration, some sample questions on how clients are selected for the service (under the domain of client risk and needs) are reproduced in Table 2, although a full list of questions is reported by Howells, Heseltine, Sarre, Davey, and Day (2004).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1 Domains of the CPAI-2000</th>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational culture</td>
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<td>Program implementation/maintenance</td>
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<td>Management/staff characteristics</td>
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<td>Client risk/need practices</td>
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<td>Program characteristics</td>
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<td>Core practices (including relationship and skill factors)</td>
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<td>Interagency communication</td>
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<td>Evaluation</td>
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*Note.* Adapted from Smith et al. (2009).
In addition, and given the interest (expressed by the service director in commissioning the review) in the ideas articulated in the GLM, all of the staff were invited to comment on their understanding of the idea of primary goods, and the extent to which these domains were considered to be relevant to their practice. Clients were invited to describe their experiences of both the service and service providers, and to talk generally about what they found helpful and unhelpful.

RESULTS

The initial aim of the review was to assist program staff to describe their understanding of the nature of the program, such that a rehabilitation theory could be articulated. This involved eliciting a detailed description of the program, followed by an account of current service delivery under each of eight domains identified in Table 1. All of the staff expressed similar views in their responses to the questions and it was possible to formulate some core themes.

Program Description

The Outreach service offers institutional, structured reentry, and community integration support to long-term offenders who have been identified as dangerous offenders. Currently, there are approximately 50 men associated with the service, most of whom are over 40 years old. Of these, approximately half are still in prison, seven are in Outreach-supported accommodation, and 12 are living independently in the community. Nearly two thirds of Outreach clients have been convicted of sexual offenses, mostly perpetrated against children, and all are, or have, served over 3 years in prison. Clients include those who are “Governor’s Pleasure” (indeterminant sentence prisoners whose release is determined by the attorney general), and those who are subject to the Dangerous Prisoners (Sexual Offenders) legislation, which requires them to be monitored by the police on an ongoing basis. This legislation also requires each prisoner to nominate appropriate accommodation and an appropriate sponsor in order to be eligible for release.
ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

The nongovernmental organization that runs the Outreach service is founded on Christian principles and values and aims to “go where others are not prepared or able to go, understanding and fully responding to people most in need” (Strategic Plan, 2007–2009, p. 5). The organization has developed a working ethos that emphasizes their belief in the value of empathy, respect, inclusiveness, integrity, and commitment, and these act as a set of guiding principles for how those who are associated with the organization should approach their duties. In addition, the Outreach service has, over time, developed its own service philosophy as follows:

Underpinning the Outreach philosophy is the belief that relationships are the key to bringing about change. In relating to our people, volunteers are requested to make no attempt to impose views, beliefs, or values, just honestly share with people within the context of open dialogue. The skills of listening and reflecting are invaluable, in helping people work through issues and arrive at their own constructive solutions.

This philosophy is strongly client-centered and is considered by current Outreach staff and volunteers to be critical to their ability to work effectively with this particular client group.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION AND MAINTENANCE

The Outreach service aims to offer a largely confidential service, and does not routinely release any information about clients to other services. As such, the service currently plays a limited role in managing risk, although the relatively intensive nature of the client contact means that Outreach workers will often be more familiar with a particular ex-prisoner than any other service provider (including correctional case managers). As a result, they are well-placed to know when someone is not functioning well. Judgments about risk are currently based largely on disclosures made by clients that give cause for concern, but also if clients appear to disengage from the service (e.g., initiate contact less frequently, are unavailable to meet or appear to make excuses), or are suspected of engaging in behaviors that are considered to be inappropriate, such as drinking or gambling. The service discourages alcohol, drugs, weapons, pornography, and pets, as these are seen to create a number of problems that interfere with successful reintegration.

MANAGEMENT AND STAFF CHARACTERISTICS

Outreach staff members were able to articulate a number of strengths and concerns about the current model of service delivery. The concerns included difficulties in finding volunteers who were considered appropriate for this
type of work and how to manage the expectation that staff would be available to clients at all times. Increased client demand due to recent changes in the approach adopted by the Prisoner Review Board and the Dangerous Prisoner (Sex Offender) legislation has also resulted in more prisoners needing supported accommodation when released from prison, placing additional pressure on the service. Providing appropriate mentoring, debriefing, and supervision to paid staff and volunteers was also a challenge for the service. On the positive side, those interviewed commented on the ability of staff and volunteers to work collaboratively and support each other, and identified the personal qualities and commitment of those currently associated with the service as a particular area of strength.

CLIENT RISK AND NEED PRACTICES

At the time of the review, there was no formal assessment of risk or needs. However, if a risk situation is identified, then the service moves to a dual-worker model.

PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS

Outreach offers support to its clients by spending significant amounts of time with each person both prior to release from prison and in the first months following release into the community. Contact is initially made in prison at the client’s request, and then support is offered through regular fortnightly meetings in prison with Outreach volunteers and support staff. The service is also able to sponsor home leaves from prison prior to release. A minimum of 3-months’ contact is required before release, although a longer period is preferred (typically 6 months) to allow a strong relationship to form between the support worker and the client. Longer-term relationships are not uncommon, given that many men are serving lengthy sentences and do not know when they will be released. There is an expectation that the worker will come to believe that the client is both sincere and, to a large extent, trustworthy before he is offered services in the community.

The main postrelease service offered is in the form of supported accommodation. The agency owns a small number of properties that it is able to lease to ex-prisoners for a short-term period (up to 6 months, although longer leases are possible). Areas of postrelease support include assistance with transport, financial counseling, finding permanent accommodation, employment, education and training, and general support in establishing community networks and reestablishing family relationships where appropriate. The initial need for support in the period immediately following release is for practical support. This involves helping clients to organize welfare payments, banking, driving licenses, shopping, transport, and setting up home. Some clients may have already worked on a resocialization process
with Outreach prior to release. An important aspect of the model is the ability of the service to be flexible enough to respond quickly to needs as they arise. In the past, staff members have been available (on-call) on a 24-hour/7-day basis.

CORE PRACTICES (INCLUDING RELATIONSHIP AND SKILL FACTORS)

Since its inception, the service has developed a model of practice that might be characterized as strongly active participant. It is based on the premise that ex-prisoners are largely responsible for their own futures, and that many of the problems that ex-prisoners experience when released into the community are best addressed through the provision of practical, social and, at times, emotional support. Staff members who deliver the service, both paid and voluntary, are strongly committed to working in a nonjudgmental way with their clients, using methods which have been characterized as based on “compassionate listening”.

INTERAGENCY COMMUNICATION

On some occasions, Outreach staff work collaboratively with other agencies, including corrections and the police sex offender registration body (the Sex Offender Management Squad), although there are no explicit guidelines relating to when and how this might happen. At other times, some clients have been jointly case managed with mental health and drug and alcohol services.

EVALUATION

Although basic information was recorded in relation to the numbers of clients using the service, there had been no previous attempt to review the service. Indeed, it was considered beyond the resources of such a small service to conduct any rigorous evaluation of outcomes.

All of the interviewees commented on the potential for the service to integrate the framework offered by the GLM into their current practice. There was universal discomfort with the notion of moving towards a service-based practice on the principles of differentiated case management as recommended under the RNR framework, but interest in developing more structured ways of assessing and responding to client needs. This resulted in staff members subsequently developing a case management framework based on the GLM principles (see Appendix).

The clients who participated in the review were universally positive about the service. They identified the compassionate and nonjudgmental attitude of staff as a critical factor in their satisfaction with the program, and described a wide range of needs (both psychological and social) that they felt were being addressed by the program. They were unable, however, to talk
directly to the question of the extent to which the services effectively managed their risk of reoffending in the community.

**DISCUSSION**

It is clear that the Outreach program would not meet many of the evidence-based criteria enshrined in the CPAI-2000 audit tool. However, this particular program would not be alone in that respect. As Andrews and Bonta (2010) put it: “Unfortunately, in the ‘real world’ of routine correctional practice, adhering to the principles is a challenge” (p. 46). An illustration of this can be found in the results of a meta-analysis of the effects of community supervision conducted by Bonta, Rugge, Scott, Bourgon, and Yessine (2008). They concluded that there was little evidence that current supervision practices reduce recidivism, explaining these somewhat disappointing findings by reference to what were apparently low levels of adherence to the principles of risk and need, and an underuse of behavioral techniques and prosocial modeling methods.

A review by Morgan et al. (2007) of 374 correctional programs concluded that the majority (61%, N = 230) failed to reach even a basic level of adherence to the RNR principles, with less than 1% (n = 6) of the documents reviewed from forensic mental health services making any reference to targeting criminogenic need. They concluded that the majority of programs did not adequately assess offender risk, need, or responsivity factors, did not utilize effective treatment models, did not use behavioral strategies, and did not adequately train staff members or evaluate their performance. Smith, Gendreau, and Swartz (2009) have also noted that program effectiveness is often “compromised by staff drift and organizational resistance at both the frontline and administrative levels,” and that the issue of programme integrity is an “ongoing problem of major proportions” (p. 162). Such work points to the significant implementation gap that exists in many correctional programs.

The broader question, however, relates to the extent that these criteria can, and perhaps should, be applied to reintegration services such as Outreach. Although there is a body of research testifying to the needs of ex-prisoners, there is little evidence to support particular models of service delivery in meeting these needs (Shinkfield & Graffam, 2009). This is the case even with respect to the principle of differentiated case management according the level of risk of reoffense. In the absence of any clear evidence-based practice guidelines for working with long-term offenders who are released from prison, it is suggested that, at the very least, a reintegration service should be internally coherent, be based on a theoretical model that guides implementation, and devised in a manner that is consistent with current thinking and research in line with its stated objectives.

Ward and Maruna (2007) further argue that because of its focus on enhancing offender well-being and reducing risk, the GLM is able to
incorporate the principles of the RNR while adding additional value for clinicians, researchers, and policy makers. In effect, it is proposed as a flexible practice model that can help practitioners conceptualize and guide work with individual offenders. The GLM thus represents, in our view, a theoretically coherent approach to practice with offender that is not only consistent with the agency philosophy and current practices but also offers a rationale for the provision of support services that contribute to effective risk management. It is also a model that is compatible with current criminological thinking about the process of desistance as summarized by Porporino (2008). First, it seems clear from a number of these studies that offenders know when they are generally committed to desistance and/or if they are still uncertain or unwilling to try (e.g., Farrall, 2002). Second, desistance does not occur without active, offender-led resolution of social obstacles and it is this sense of agency experienced by the offender that seems to be key in strengthening motivation to desist (Maruna, 2001). A third important finding in the desistance literature is that early desisters seem, in a sense, to have more everyday concerns (e.g., employment prospects, dealing with substance abuse) than later desisters who seem to develop strong generative concerns following life events or turning points. A fourth finding, identified by Porporino (2008), is that desistance is not a linear process. Finally, and possibly the most important aspect of desistance, is the change to personal identity that occurs. In short, the GLM would appear to have the capacity to guide the development of an offender reintegration practice framework in such a manner that many of these key findings can be operationalized.

That is not to suggest that the service described in this article should necessarily be proposed to be a model of “best practice”. Clearly, it is essential that evidence is collected relating to the effectiveness of this type of service. Indeed, there are grounds for significant concern about the lack of attention that is currently paid to assessing and managing risk in the service, in relation to both the risk of reoffense and the risk of imminent harm to service providers. The service has developed a way of working with clients that is based around the relationship formed between the support worker (paid or volunteer) and the client. This is considered to be both a strength and a weakness of the current service—there is no formal assessment of need or case planning process, and the service operates in relative isolation from other services. For example, support workers are not always aware of a client’s parole conditions, although these are available if requested; communication with community corrections officers is ad hoc and often based on the relationship with the particular individual who is responsible for managing the client; and the service receives no information from the Department of Corrective Services about risk of reoffense (or identified risk factors), although many of the clients will have completed a “Stepping Off,” or relapse prevention plan when they attended the prison Sex Offender Treatment Program. In effect, the service also offers a level of confidentiality
to clients that conflicts with the information-sharing approach adopted by many offender services.

In conclusion, our hope in preparing this article is to encourage reflection on how the quality of offender reintegration services might be assessed. Recent years have seen considerable investment in offender reintegration programs, and this has occurred in the absence of any substantial empirical evidence that these programs achieve socially meaningful goals. The Outreach service was chosen for review in this article not because it is typical of most reintegration services, but because it illustrates some of the difficulties that face those who are interested in implementing “good practice” in their work reintegrating prisoners back into the community. In our view, similar issues face many services that offer either transitional or postrelease support to prisoners. It is suggested that, in the absence of evaluation data, these services should consider developing their practices in a manner that is consistent with current theories of offender rehabilitation, rather than relying solely on practice wisdom that has been developed over time.

NOTES

1. One volunteer staff member was unavailable at the time of the visit.
2. The terms client and offender are used interchangeably in this article. This is intentional and reflects the tension between working with people in ways that aim to give them control over the services they receive, while also recognizing the need to assume responsibility for their offenses.
3. A wide range of factors have also been identified as of critical importance to the reintegration process; for example, it has been suggested that vocational education and employment programs may be effective in reducing recidivism (Harrison & Scher, 2004; Taxman, 2004), as is stable housing (Graffam, Shinkfield, Lavelle, & McPherson, 2004), and family support (Naser & La Vigne, 2006).

REFERENCES


APPENDIX

Proposed Structure for Assessment and Case Management

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Valued Goods</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are the most important things for you to achieve in your life?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. What did you do on a day-to-day or regular basis to achieve these?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. What could you do differently to achieve these goals?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Are some goals more important to you than others? Which ones, and why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Where would you like to be in respect to these goals in one year’s time? Five years time? Ten years time?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

For each of these primary goods, ask the following questions:
I’d like to ask you about some specific experiences or goals. I’ll start with the experience/goal of ————————. It means: ————————

| 1. What does this mean to you, in your own words? |
| 2. How important is it for you to achieve this goal or have this in your life? |
| 3. What would other people say about how important this goal is to you? |
| 4. Has the importance of this goal changed over time for you—for example, is this a more (or less) important goal than it used to be? |
| 5. Would you like to have more of this goal in your life? |
| 6. What would your life be like without this goal? |

Secondary Goods (ways of obtaining primary goods)

| 1. What have you done in the past in order to achieve this goal? |
| 2. What do you do now to achieve this goal? |
| 3. Which strategies have worked best? |
| 4. Which strategies have worked least well? |
| 5. What do other people in your life (family, friends) do to achieve this goal? |
| 6. How could you achieve this goal in your life in the future? |
Implication of Goods in Offending

1. In the past, what has gone wrong when you have tried to achieve or attain this?
2. How have others been hurt (physically or otherwise) by your attempts to achieve this?
3. In your view, how could this be related to offending?
4. How is this linked to your offending?
5. How could you better achieve this goal without offending?

Flaws in Good Lives Plan

1. Do you focus too much on this goal, causing you to forget about other goals?
2. Do other people tell you that you focus too much on this specific goal?
3. Does this goal interfere with attaining other goals? If so, how?
4. Do you believe that this particular goal is realistic to achieve? Why or why not?
5. What obstacles might stand in your way of achieving this goal?
6. What has prevented you from achieving this goal in the past?
7. What prevents you now from achieving this goal in your life?
8. What things would you need to put into place in order to achieve this goal?
9. How could Outreach help you to achieve this goal?