

EDITORIAL

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Social and community justice are themes at the heart of this journal, with social justice being highlighted as the lynchpin of last year's volume of three journals of papers dedicated to the memory of Professor Brian Williams. De Montfort University, where Brian was working at the time of his death, also honoured his memory by holding a one day memorial conference. Held in June 2008, four of his colleagues and friends were invited to present papers on themes of their own choosing related to his work. These papers are published in this edition of the journal together with a piece by another close colleague, Gwyneth Boswell. Two of these authors also contributed to the inaugural edition of this journal which was edited by Brian. In that editorial he discussed the meaning of community justice and argued the need for critical debate and search for clarity about the issues. He would have been delighted that these papers did just that whilst also addressing the synergy and tensions of theory and practice.

The speakers at the conference were asked to speak on any topic they wished at the event, and although the focus of each is very different it is not surprising that there are common themes. Two stand out most strongly, and link with Brian's academic and practice interests. The first is victims and victimisation, and the second is the importance of recognising the individual and the impact of the particular context of their lives. Both of these issues are used by the contributors to raise and debate fundamental and ongoing questions about the nature of justice.

Sandra Walklate addresses both of these themes. She looks at different types of victimhood and highlights how the impact is very much dependant on the circumstances of the victim and the nature of the victimisation. She argues that the notion of victim is changing, and that this in turn calls into question our understandings of crime. On the one hand notions of victimhood are widening, to the extent that she can ask whether we are all victims now, and yet on the other the criminal justice system increasingly functions on the basis of the individual victim and the harm done to an individual, rather than the notion of the harm being done to the state. She draws attention to the increasing politicisation and 'mediatisation' of the victim, and at the same time poignantly illustrates how criminal victimisation can affect the individual, causing more suffering to those who are trying to cope with other issues in their lives – the relationship between personal troubles and public issues.

Alan Gray and Penny Whitford are both practitioners working in the Leicestershire & Rutland Victim Contact Team. From this perspective they mirror some of Sandra Walklate's concerns with their question about the extent to which their work actually empowers victims. They describe the development of their scheme to meet national and local requirements, and the legal limits of the work that mean they cannot provide a holistic service to victims. They are the formal criminal justice contact with victims after

the offender has been sentenced and describe how these limitations mean that victim wishes and expectations often cannot be met.. At the same time, however, this has enabled them to build strong working relationships with a wide range of local voluntary agencies who can provide support services. They also raise the thorny issue of dealing with victims who are offenders too, and the way in which the criminal justice system is built upon the notion that victims and offenders are two completely separate groups of people when the reality is a substantial overlap. The increasing role of the victim in the criminal justice system is again highlighted by their description of the involvement of victims in a local inspection, and a meeting with a local judge.

Loraine Gelsthorpe writes about the failure of the criminal justice system to address the needs of women offenders. One aspect of this work that she highlights is the extent to which female offenders have been shown to be victimised. Whilst acknowledging that this is not necessarily a direct cause of their offending, she argues that it is an important consideration when thinking about provision for women offenders and that there is a need to consider the individual circumstances of women offenders in the delivery of sentences, if not necessarily in the sentencing process itself. Questions about fair and equitable sentencing are long standing and continuing, and she makes the point that equity does not necessarily mean doing exactly the same thing. Equity is an essential aspect of social justice and the difference between equity and sameness needs to be recognised, again the counterbalance of public and personal raised by Sandra Walklate. In discussing how best to meet the needs of female offenders and reviewing the sorts of provision available, she argues for closer liaison between statutory and voluntary agencies, in much the same way as described by Alan Gray and Penny Whitford.

Hazel Kemshall and her colleagues at De Montfort University write about the criminal justice system and its treatment of another minority group – young offenders. They discuss the ways in which the criminal justice system increasingly focuses on the notion of risk with its assumption of a rational actor. It sees young people as responsible for their actions, and many of the interventions of the criminal justice system aim to re-moralise young people so that their behaviour becomes more prudential and acceptable. All this is done on the assumption that young offenders are the victims of their faulty cognitive processes, an assumption that denies the agency of young people and the sophistication of their understanding of their position and the choices they face. Based upon the notion of pathways or trajectories the prevention system is fraught with false positives because of a failure to appreciate that subtle differences in initial conditions can lead to large differences in outcome. They argues that perceptions of risk are individual and that the fatalism of many young people leads them to frame their risks differently, and that ‘pro-social mentoring and access to better opportunities’ will do this more successfully than ‘corrective thinking’ programmes.

Gwyneth Boswell and colleagues at the University of East Anglia identify with many of these points in their paper which describes the work that they did with Broadlands District Council to provide an evidence base for the development of a project that would

help offenders, particularly young offenders, avoid crime. They undertook a multi-stage, multi-method project to identify the most appropriate initiatives to meet the needs of local communities and the offenders and those at risk of offending who live there. The work identified three clusters of problems for people wanting to avoid crime: financial, emotional, and victimisation, which impact on individuals and families differently. They found that the most crucial factor for avoiding involvement in crime was a strong support system and illustrate how small things can make large differences as described by Hazel Kemshall and colleagues. The work has led to a range of initiatives being implemented, including support programmes in schools, an apprenticeship scheme for school leavers, and parent support. Multi agency work is an essential component of this project, reflecting the points raised by Gelsthorpe and by Gray & Whitford about the importance of multi agency working and the role of voluntary organisations.

All the authors, within their different topics, are arguing for the importance of the humanity of practice, of remembering that the people drawn into the criminal justice system, be they victim or offender, are individuals with their individual circumstances, contexts, opportunities and constraints, and need to be dealt with as such. Community justice is individual social justice.