

# EDITORIAL

## MAKING SENSE OF COMMUNITY JUSTICE

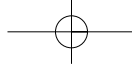
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The five papers in this edition of the BJCJ, although covering very different themes, make useful contributions to the ongoing task of establishing the scope of community justice. Although born rather artificially, at least in the UK, as a pragmatic and politically focussed response to the late Conservative government's threat to remove probation training from higher education, the term has since gained a currency and an accumulated body of writing such that the newcomer would have the impression that it has always been around. It is perhaps the time now to ask what all this amounts to.

Corcoran and Bowen-Smith describe the use of advanced geographical techniques to inform holistic multi-agency responses to crime and disorder, through providing information on community dynamics. Their model merits further testing and development. However, the issues surrounding community justice are brought into the sharpest possible focus in Keenan's critical description and evaluation of work in Northern Ireland, undertaken by the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO), to develop restorative justice initiatives in alienated communities as an alternative to the 'community justice' meted out by the paramilitaries. Issues he highlights, surrounding the uncertain relationship of the state and communities, are ones which all community justice workers would do well to bear in mind. In a climate where clarity, certainty and the avoidance of risk at all costs are constantly sought, Keenan makes a strong case for the need to acknowledge and accept ambiguity, compromise and imperfection if change and progress are to be achieved.

The theme of public involvement in criminal justice is addressed from another perspective, that of the victim, in Newton's study of the views of victims contacted by the probation service under its statutory obligations to victims. While the research, reassuringly, reveals a high level of satisfaction among those who respond to the initial and, in this case, only offer of contact, the paper raises important questions about the hidden majority who do not respond. I wonder whether the dynamics of alienation, so clearly highlighted by Keenan, are at play here too. A more vigorous commitment and approach to active community justice might bring in some of those left, or choosing to stay, outside. Corcoran and Bowen-Smith's geographical model might offer further productive lines of investigation.

In a research based paper, Fletcher shows how policies to encourage the employment of offenders are undermined by contradictory practices. On the one hand they purport to promote the provision of jobs but on the other act to reinforce attitudes and practices in



both the public and private sectors which discriminate against offenders. Like Keenan's article, it shows how tenuous is the basis of progressive reform, however strident the rhetoric. However, this paper has further significance for understanding the scope of community justice. There are signs in criminal justice policy making circles of a return to concern about material and practical issues in relation to the prevention of reoffending – to jobs and accommodation – and some disillusionment about the return on the current investment in psycho-behaviourist approaches. I welcome such a reorientation, albeit cautious about the assumptions on which it may be grounded. This paper provides useful material for the forthcoming debate.

Indeed, Fletcher's paper is given added significance by Martin Narey's 'Challenge to the Correctional Services' to reduce imprisonment and maximise the rehabilitative impact for those who must be 'inside'. In his address, reproduced here, at the inauguration of Sheffield Hallam University's Community Justice Portal, the new Under Secretary for Prisons and Probation makes a particular case for the prison education service as a gateway to employment for offenders.

Thus, in covering community structure, community involvement in various forms, employment and education, these five papers add a little more to the developing research and theory base of community justice and signpost the critical debates in which we need to engage.

