

289 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, THE AFTER CARE AND RESETTLEMENT UNIT (ACU) IN THE INNER LONDON PROBATION SERVICE 1965-1990

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Abstract

This article focuses on the early history of the probation unit in Inner London that had a specialist function to resettle the homeless and rootless, particularly on their release from prison. I worked in this unit from 1984 to 1989 and was able to access material from its inception. I was involved in researching changes in its function and organisation and interviewed an Assistant Chief PO (ACPO) from the early days of the unit. This 'rich' history illustrates the changes that occurred in the wider service, from the time when individual officers were independent and could 'do their own thing'. It terms of the ACU it included setting up hostels, running volunteers and controlling their work. Senior staff worked alongside the main grade and offered casework supervision. They were not managers in the modern sense of understanding how management has quality control and accountability responsibilities. Conversely, the management of the unit became the senior managers of the service as a whole, including the late Sir Graham Smith who became Chief Probation Officer for Inner London and later Chief Probation Inspector. Initiatives from key staff within the unit led to specialist programmes in the wider service. Quoted material is from unpublished archive documents seen by me.

The ACU was born on the 1st of January 1965, the product of a union between Officers from the National Association of Discharged Aid Societies (NADPAS), that were already present working in the building, workers with the men's division of the Central After Care Association (CACA), who had also been working there, and a number of probation officers who moved into the building. NADPAS changed function to become the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO), a voluntary penal campaign organisation and provider of hostels and many other services. Initially there was an Assistant Principal Officer and two seniors. In February 1966 a further senior arrived with a particular responsibility for training.

This senior, Georgina Stafford, wrote an article a year later which described her experience in settling into the unit. She had assumed that her knowledge of "human problems" would be relevant in her new task of after care work, but she commented: "Now at the end of a year I know only too well how little I really understand of the problems of after care prisoners" (Stafford, 1968, 429). The Assistant Principal Probation Officer, in a report dated the 9th of May 1968, commented on the Service's inexperience in the after care field:

This is an area...which in the past has received only limited consideration; with continued support there is no reason why Borough High Street should not make a significant contribution in the field. We are becoming increasingly sure that far from after care being an 'easy option', an activity suitable for lesser qualified staff, it in fact demands from officers all the skill and expertise which is at the Services' disposal.
(Pratt, 1968)

Stafford gave a description of the building that accurately reflected its character throughout the life of the unit:

a dreary building near the Elephant and Castle. It has five floors with five long corridors with rooms opening on either side and a rather antiquated lift; we have no ground floor. Two large rooms house the Central Registry for (Inner) London. We...deal only with the homeless. Clients walk up to the first floor and are seen by a receptionist, and then go into a quite pleasant waiting room.
(Stafford, 1968, 429)

The factual account described above of how the ACU came into being, does not describe the tensions of assimilating the different working groups into one building and this is not commented on in the article by Stafford, which concentrated instead on the client group seen at the ACU, who had major personal difficulties in terms of mental health, drink and drug, and other social problems.

In 1968 the Assistant Principal Probation Officer, based in the ACU, circulated a paper around all the probation officers that detailed the changes that had occurred in the unit after it was taken over by the Inner London Probation and After Care Service (ILPACS). He mentioned that ILPACS did not finally take over the entire building until December 1967 when responsibility passed to the Receiver of the Metropolitan Police from the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works. On a purely practical level a new telephone system that allowed internal communication was installed along with internal security doors on each floor to close off officers rooms from callers. An automatic lift was also installed. However he mentioned a much more difficult issue, namely how to raise the status of the ACU both to external probation colleagues, and to signal to clients that there had been change in management and personnel:

We were well aware of the fact that in continuing to use these premises we were likely to carry over existing feelings which ex prisoners had about the help which had been available from those sources...One of our most important considerations has been to raise the status of after care in the Service and particularly to enable officers generally to see the value of the work being done at the Borough High Street (ACU).
(Pratt, 1968, paper).

In order to achieve this objective, Pratt mentioned that Dr Hyatt Williams, consultant psychiatrist to the Tavistock Clinic and at HMPs Wormwood Scrubs and Maidstone, had been engaged to give a fortnightly seminar to officers at the A.C.U. These seminars were also available for prison welfare (probation) officers. They continued until the late 1980's (with consultancy from eminent psychiatrists like Professor John Gunn from the Institute of Psychiatry and Dr Pamela Taylor, consultant forensic psychiatrist at the Maudesley Hospital and the Bethlem Interim Secure Unit.

In a report on the Unit by the three seniors, dated May 1970, it was stated that "At the end of 1964 the Inner London Service was instructed to take over part of the building...The London Service was given floors one and three and this meant that officers had to work under very cramped conditions." (ILPS ACU Report, May 1970).

The report also mentioned that in addition to workers from NADPAS, and the men's and women's division of CACA, four officers came from the Royal London Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society and two from the Holloway Society. The Prisoners Wives Service was based in the ACU but they operated autonomously. There was a part time probation Officer at the ACU responsible for liaison with Prisoners Wives, who would organise a visitor within 24 to 48 hours of receiving a referral to help the family of a man sent to prison. A very high percentage of the ACU clients would have lost their family support a long time ago.

The ACU report stated that the unit inherited the work patterns established by the hitherto separate groups, namely that NADPAS had encouraged people to call without appointments, whilst CACA worked by appointment with longer known clients. Thus from the outset the unit catered for two different client groups, the casual caller and the known client. These two groups had very different problems and a systematic way of dealing with them was not made until late 1984/5 when the Unit again split into separate functions.

The 1970 report detailed the fact that NADPAS clients would visit the office between 8.30 a.m. and 5.30 p.m., the common denominator was that the client would have been in prison at some stage in their lives, but they would not currently have been on any form of statutory supervision: "A policy had been formed that nobody should be turned away and it was customary for these people to be given a small handout of money or perhaps some second-hand clothing or bed vouchers and food tickets" (ibid).

The effect of this policy was that the After Care Unit was a very popular establishment for the itinerant population and as many as 80 clients a day called at the office. The report commented that this number of casual callers "imposed great burden on those who were trying to formulate a new policy and method of approaching the whole question of after care" (ibid).

The CACA worked with clients who were either on statutory licence, preventative detention or corrective training, or else were voluntary but had been known to the supervisor for at least five years in the case of males, or four years for females. Thus after care arrangements would have been made long before release. The 1970 report commented that the two women members of CACA were reluctant to extend their work more fully to cover the tasks of the entire unit. In addition to the above tasks of NADPAS and CACA, after 1st January 1965 the Inner London Probation Service became responsible for the supervision of homeless young men released from Detention Centres. In 1967/8 the ACU became responsible for homeless Borstal boys who wished to come to inner London on discharge.

When the unit started, the 1970 Report commented that all staff, together with the assistant principal probation officer who had an office in the building: "had only a hazy idea of what was expected of them. Consequently considerable burden was placed on the senior officers...to try to form a cohesive policy towards which everybody could work" (ibid).

The distinctions between NADPAS, CACA, and the London Probation Service ended at the end of 1966 when the Probation Service absorbed these separate organisations. Over the next two years a number of the (younger) officers left the unit to receive training in the wider aspects of probation work and they did not return to the unit. Their places were taken by probation officers from the London Service and by officers directly from courses. At the end of the first year the establishment was three senior officers, fourteen full time officers and one part timer, who were responsible for liaison with the prisoners' wives (voluntary) service. At the end of five years the complement had risen to three seniors and nineteen probation officers, and a part time ex probation officer who worked for the Southwark Diocese.

The report in 1970 had harsh words for their fellow colleagues in the Inner London Service when it stated: "While we have welcomed a number of officers direct from training, we deplore the constant turnover of staff and the unwillingness of experienced colleagues within the service to move to this more specialised kind of work. It should be remembered that this unit has been in operation now for over five years, and while we are grateful for an ever increasing measure of stability, this aspect needs even more and urgent attention" (ibid).

Thus it can be seen that work with homeless and rootless offenders was not popular with the majority of probation officers in the Inner London area as a work specialism. The

1970 report commented that after the amalgamation into the A.C.U. there was a "considerable change in the work performed in the unit" (ibid). This was characterised by a "marked decrease" in the number of casual callers seen and a "corresponding increase" in the numbers seen who were on statutory licence, or who were described as "ongoing" cases. This shift in emphasis "necessitated considerable increases of staff over the last five years" (ibid).

What the report failed to comment on, was why this change had occurred. Was it because the change of workers at the ACU (the moving out of ex NADPAS workers to be replaced by ILPS probation officers who had been on a course of training)? An implication of this was that providing a 'hand to mouth' service of handouts to casual callers was less professional and therefore not to be encouraged. Cook, whilst commenting that the probation service was seen by vagrants as a source of providing money, or a bed voucher, mentioned that a refusal was seen by the alcoholic as a cause of stigmatisation. He gave an example about the ACU that could not have occurred under the old NADPAS regime:

The officer at Borough High Street refused to give me any money because he said that I would drink it. They never give anything there they know you'll spend it on drink. Mind you, they'll give money to a boy out of Borstal. But once you've got a name for yourself once they know you're an alcoholic that's it, you're stigmatised. Everywhere they treat you the same. (Cook, 1975, 122)

It was Cook's experience that the probation service was viewed by many alcoholics as a source of "nothing but handout" and this was not restricted to the ACU:

I asked another dossier where the probation offices were? But I only managed to get two bob off them. I thought that I might get ten bob the woman who gave it to me asked if I drank, and then tried to smell my breath. She made me sign for the money, bought five woodies, but it wasn't worth the bother. Being skint is a problem I think that I'll give Borough High Street a try tomorrow maybe I'll have better luck there (ibid, 122).

The Professionalisation of the ACU Records

When the unit was taken over by the London Service in 1965, it inherited a number of files maintained by NADPAS and by CACA. An original idea was for the building to house all the files of after cases in London but this was rejected. The Service as a whole was investigating the possibility of setting up a Central Index, which later occurred at the Headquarters building. The Unit started its own Registry on the first of January 1965 and after five years had grown to 35,000 records. The NADPAS records were seen as having "little value" and were duly "sent away for pulping". The CACA records were kept but

not incorporated into the new records, and the Royal London and the Holloway Society records were never sent for.

Finances

The previous accountant from CACA was appointed as an accountant and bookkeeper to the unit with an imprest account from the 1st of January 1965 of £1,500 provided by the Receiver of the Metropolitan Police. Having a finance officer on the premises was a resource not found in ordinary probation offices where accounting was the responsibility of the senior probation officer. The money was provided for clients and was called the befriending fund. In addition there was a voluntary donations account, a memorial fund and a sub imprest account of £600 to enable officers to have an advance on their expenses. This represented an acknowledgement that officers at the ACU incurred larger expenses than field unit colleagues, as they visited far off institutions on a regular basis.

Clothing - WRVS

Historically the ACU had a room for second hand clothing, but this was used haphazardly, and individual officers were responsible for bringing in articles of clothing. When this room was empty, clients had been given a voucher to a second hand clothing store at the Elephant and Castle. However it was noted that vouchers had been exchanged for cash, not clothing. In 1967 the WRVS opened a large clothing store on the fourth floor which was open from 10am to 4 p.m. Monday to Friday. This had been collected by the WRVS and was cleaned and pressed at probation expense. In addition the store had a stock of new clothing that was cheap and could be paid for from the Befriending Fund (a fund available to all offenders). Clients could also be supplied with extra items like soap, towels, razors, and alarm clocks. All clients had to be referred to the WRVS by a probation officer and a chit had to give authorisation, the WRVS did not have the discretion to provide new articles of clothing etc. This facility for new items and the provision of a WRVS store on probation premises was unique to the ACU and could not be used by clients from other field offices.

Community Service Volunteer (CSV)

In 1966 the ACU obtained the services of a CSV recruit, typically a school leaver who stayed for approximately a year. This post anticipated the later introduction of untrained ancillary workers into the probation service some years later. This post was used to support clients when they were vulnerable, e.g. when moving into accommodation or sorting out problems with the National Assistance Board. The role was much clearer than the later ancillary workers, which could be viewed either as an untrained helpers post, or as a source of obtaining pre training experience.

The Operation of the ACU at the Time of its Inception

Stafford stated that all the prisons in England and Wales were divided between all the probation officers, this included the senior probation officers and she had responsibility for more than one institution. These officers were responsible for all enquiries and correspondence with their institutions, there wasn't a central mechanism for monitoring individual referrals. Some institutions rarely received a probation visit, whilst Goudhurst Detention Centre in Kent had two officers and was visited weekly to see all the homeless boys about to be discharged to the London area. Officers visited the London prisons weekly. This aspect of the probation task resembled the work of the old CACA organisation, and the NADPAS casual caller was also being catered for. Stafford stated that a minimum of four officers were on duty each day. Although the front door was shut at 3.30 p.m., there was a duty officer available until 7 p.m. each evening. There was a Saturday morning office duty session. Clients were defined by the Service as being eligible for voluntary after care support in the first year after discharge. Stafford defined the ACU casual caller as: "people who say that they have been in prison some time between that morning **and the previous 20 years**, who come of their own volition with some presenting problem" (Stafford, 1968, 430 my emphasis). The numbers of clients seen reflected this liberal policy of entitlement to seek help and also what was offered to them, in practical terms. Apart from Saturdays a minimum of 15 callers were seen in one day, the maximum was a staggering 79. The average was between 30 and 60 a day.

Analysis of Casual Callers in 1966

Stafford gave the following figures (Stafford G., 1968), from 1966, when 2575 male and 42 female casual callers were seen in Inner London. The ACU saw all but 192 men and 13 women of this total, which was further broken down into age brackets and previous sentences:

33 were under 20
395 were between 25 and 29
736 were between 30 and 39
633 were between 40 and 49
363 were between 50 and over.

The Early Years of the ACU

The early years of the ACU were characterised by striving to define the task of the work of the unit and the article by Stafford typified this. The unit closed down on Fridays between 2 and 4.30 p.m. for a staff meeting, attempting to knit the unit into a cohesive group. A vast number of papers were written on the different client groups and the perceived deficiencies in service provision. A role call of the officers that staffed the unit demonstrated that a number of them went on to run key units along the lines of the perceived deficiencies e.g. the Hostels Department, Sherborne House Day Centre etc.

On the 2nd of February 1971 one of the officers from the unit, John Croft, wrote a paper entitled 'A new bottle from old wine'. This paper commented that the traditional way of working with ex offenders was not suitable for the "grossly deprived, rejected, under privileged and damaged". He believed that the probation service was at the end of their sphere of influence with this client group as the offenders saw their criminality as fully justified. In order to overcome this, he proposed that with the necessary finance, a centre should be set up "where ex offenders could be stimulated physically, emotionally, and intellectually". He wanted the client group to be involved in the planning and construction from the outset and he believed that this would not only have an appeal to the client group, but it would also appeal to the workers in the centre and it would "give meaning to the knowledge that has been accumulated at this unit over the years and to be an inspiration to others in the service and the wider community".

Croft did not see this as a pipedream, and he commented that "His Honour Judge Hines has indicated that he has resources to substantial funds if a practical scheme could be put forward". Croft envisaged a place where the ex offender "could identify and feel at ease and where after an initial brief interview he could bathe to wash off his feelings of contamination that imprisonment has engendered..." Croft envisaged food, medical services, DHSS, employment, and recreational facilities being available, as well as emergency hostel accommodation. The description of the "stately pleasure dome", as he described it pre dated the philosophy of the Day Training Centre as it would allow the ex offender to "play and act out his fantasies in a secure, tolerant, understanding atmosphere and where his creative, intellectual and spiritual capacity can be appealed to and stimulated through developmental activities such as music art and drama...". Croft wrote a further paper dated 29th April 1971 which provided more detail of what he described as "An intensive care unit for recidivist offenders." He envisaged a residential complex that was an extension of the ACU with a senior probation officer having responsibility for the development and use of the unit. The complex would have three main components, namely:

1. An assessment unit with probation support on the premises.
2. A self contained hostel for eight men and one emergency place.
3. A community centre with creative and workshop facilities. Further accommodation for four men who were less independent and a housekeepers flat.

In a paper dated 18th of May 1971, David Hancock wrote a paper that attempted to synthesise the opinions of the "project group" that had been set up in the unit. He commented that in the notes of 30th of March 1971 the project group listed four priorities, one of which was accommodation and facilities for Borstal girls. He stated that this was being pursued adequately in other channels and focused on the need to improve residential facilities for rootless recidivists; "especially for very damaged and unmotivated clients who are presently unacceptable to all specialist hostels in London." The ethos of the hostel he envisaged that was needed was not to be based on "success" but rather endeavoured to meet the residential needs of the client group. To this end he felt that

there was one fundamental principle, that the "accommodation is set up and administered by the probation service itself. If this aim is lost we fear that we would not retain sufficient control over the facilities to enable us to fulfil the aim for which they were designed."

The project for ex Borstal girls, referred to by Hancock, was written up in a paper dated 27th of May 1971 by Miss Bickerdike, the ACU officer for homeless Borstal girls. This paper was the result of discussions between the APPO, SPO and Miss Bickerdike. It recommended that there should be in Inner London a pre release hostel for when girls first left Bullwood Hall (secure) Borstal. This hostel was intended to provide support and "preparation for working and living in the community" (Bickerdike, 1971). The young women could then move on to a post release hostel, which was seen as having more independence, before obtaining an eventual bedsit. Thus release from borstal could be in easy stages, however the paper envisaged that "Drug taking, refusal to work, stealing from other girls might best be dealt with in many cases by the girl being demoted from a single room to the 'emergency room'" (ibid). The emergency room was envisaged as being of inferior standard to the single rooms and this was seen as a way of encouraging girls to find employment. The paper read many years later could be described as "parental" in outlook, with its description of the Warden who "might well be a married woman who would need to be kindly, firm and understanding...Her husband would go out to work and to some extent he would be seen as a father figure by the girls" (ibid). The paper was written at a time when female officers supervised women and men, male officers, only men. The thrust of the paper was to point out the lack of provision, and to make a plea for after care residential facilities. It made the point that the writers didn't care whether the hostel was run by either the probation service or by the voluntary sector. It envisaged probation support at liaison level, probably by a SPO.

The following year, in a short paper dated 2nd of June 1972 three probation officers at the ACU wrote a paper entitled: "Short Term Hostel Project". This paper was an attempt to convey the feelings of the Unit as it stated that all officers' opinions had been canvassed. The proposal was to set up a hostel with a very short term facility for prisoners at the point of discharge from prison and in times of crisis i.e. for those immediately out of prison and for those most in danger of returning. The residence was envisaged for a period of not more than four weeks and should be for a maximum of ten to twelve men aged 21 upwards. Young offenders were already catered for, it commented, but there was no mention of a need for emergency accommodation for women. It was not thought necessary for this hostel to have a resident social worker, but for somebody to live on the premises to be responsible for "security, cleanliness and physical management of the house but with minimal involvement with the residents themselves...possibly an ex offender". The above paper was at variance with another paper written at approximately the same time signed by the four seniors, which although arguing in a similar way for residential/day care facilities, also stated that this must be under the control of the Unit itself with its director/SPO belonging to the ACU.

The Formation of a Hostel Run by a Probation Officer

The concern that traditional ways of working and the usual levels of community support were not sufficient for the average After Care Unit client was also being expressed by the main grade officers in the office. Mark Rankin in a paper dated the 16th of December 1977, described the reasons why he set up a self help organisation called SHOP, for ex prisoners who were not acceptable in any hostels apart from the "bottom end" Salvation Army type accommodation. He commented that the "main aim is the creation of a sanctuary in which severely disturbed men and women are encouraged to support each other, with minimum interference from either a statutory service or an external group of volunteers". It was his contention that the client group could support each other without needing to be dependant on a probation officer. When Rankin joined the ACU in 1970, he wrote that he found that the probation officers had specialised in the type of institution that they visited, with an emphasis in areas like young offenders, lifers, problem drinkers who were serving comparatively short sentences etc. He had three dispersal prisons and was faced with the problem of resettling no fixed abode men who had served long sentences. Rankin described his philosophy as having main planks, namely that "prison after care is largely meaningless unless it has been preceded by a major investment in through care while the offender served his sentence". Secondly that he felt that "a strongly personal relationship with people in trouble was not enough".

He had a caseload of approximately 70 serving and released prisoners, and he concluded that with this number he was unable to develop relationships beyond a superficial level. He decided to link the majority of his clients with volunteers whilst they were still serving their sentence, a manageable task as he already had an active group of volunteers at his disposal (the ACU was unusual in this respect). After a period of approximately two and a half years of intensive use of volunteers, Rankin discovered that he still had a number of problems, although different to his initial ones. Firstly was the problem of client dependence, clients were dependant on him even after he felt that they could cope with their problems. Secondly clients became dependant on their volunteers, and the converse of this was also likely. Rankin's caseload continued to rise into the eighties and this made the level of his involvement with clients "increasingly patchy and diluted". As the referrals came directly to him from the prison probation departments, his attempts to establish boundaries by reducing the number of new referrals succeeded in straining his previously good relationship with the prison welfare officers. The moral pressure to accept more and more referrals was compounded by the problem that he had a hard core of clients that were so difficult that volunteers did not want to become involved with them. These clients, mostly drawn from the psychiatric wing of one of his dispersal prisons, were also impossibly difficult to place as they could exhibit bizarre and dangerous forms of behaviour.

In the Spring of 1973 Rankin floated the idea to his group of volunteers of establishing a house for eight or nine people who would only be able to find Salvation Army type accommodation. The aim was to make the group mutually self-supportive, although one

volunteer was to live on the premises with a mandate to collect the rent, liaise with the DHSS and deal with any severe crises. Rankin was very much on his own in starting SHOP: "My paid colleagues were unwilling to become involved in such an entrepreneurial method of working, and I was unable to obtain hierarchical support. I was only too aware that I required support from somewhere...I was therefore determined to draw upon the volunteers, as the only group readily available to me, for support". He admitted to an immediate conflict with his volunteer group as they wanted a mix of a few disturbed clients to mostly reasonably stable ones, whilst Rankin wanted a predominance of disturbed clients in the house.

The first SHOP house opened in October 1973 after Rankin succeeded in raising £500 and a rent free property was obtained in North London by a volunteer from a property company. He listed the problems that followed the opening with a client group that included a schizophrenic who believed that he was an opera singer, a chronic heroin addict, a withdrawn man who had just completed a term of fifteen years in prison. Rankin admitted that he made no attempt to involve the probation service in the house and furthermore the distance from the ACU to the house meant that he was too far away "to defuse the rising level of anxiety experienced by the community leader". The result of this was that:

the rent was rarely paid. Violence and drunkenness coupled with deep depression comprised the normal pattern of the residents' behaviour at that time. Far from providing each other with mutual support, residents had to lock their possessions away because internal thieving was common. Sexual and drug abuse was also prevalent. There was also no effective liaison with the local D.H.S.S. office, and local people became increasingly hostile towards the house.

Clearly a fraction of these problems should have been sufficient to sink the project for good. That this did not happen presumably meant that the unit at some stage recognised that SHOP filled a gap in service provision. This may not have occurred until after Rankin left the ACU. Although SHOP had not received official management backing above senior level, the management committee included a number of the ACU staff and the four houses in SHOP in 1984 received weekly support from approximately ten ACU probation and ancillary workers. In the same year a full time project worker was employed. In 1987 two further workers were appointed. ILPS senior management investigated the level of ACU input into SHOP and the result was a decision to cut back on probation officer involvement. It was a great pity that no records existed to explain why the project became a central part of the unit, but one explanation could be that the ACU senior probation officers plans for hostel provision developed into the ILPS Hostels Department, which serviced the whole of ILPS and ironically refused to accept the more 'damaged' ACU type client, the inspiration for this innovation. After this, the unit as a whole had the problem that hitherto had perplexed Rankin – where to put unplaceable offenders. Rankin felt that the strains imposed by SHOP had ruined the relationship that he had enjoyed with the volunteers. By 1976 there were three houses and the chair had been taken over by a senior probation officer from one of the London prisons. The structure

became more formalised and residents were given rent books. However the principle that SHOP would take residents rejected by other hostels remained, as did the commitment to have volunteers on the management committee.

It is interesting to note the number of hostels that the ACU liaised with and on whom it had representatives on the management committee. After joint consultation between the ACU and NACRO, the 134 Project was set up at the Oval and this hostel traditionally received nearly all of its residents from the ACU (NACRO was the successor to the old discharged prisoners' aid societies). In addition a probation officer from the ACU was the chair of Penrose Charity hostel accommodation and this resource was largely filled by ACU clients. The need for the ACU to initiate and maintain extra resources over and above those available to most field units was a reflection of the different client group, i.e. the homeless and rootless, typically short term recidivist or petty persistent offender and the long term prisoner who wished to start afresh in a new area where the anonymity of London could overcome the stigma of a serious offence that may have achieved national prominence or would make resettlement in a small community impossible. In this respect the ACU was therefore a nation-wide resource.

The Maintenance of the Voluntary Tradition in Probation

The theme, that the ACU was different from other units in ILPS was investigated by Ms Raya Levin, an ACU PO, in a long paper written in the Autumn of 1974 entitled "The After Care Officer". She commented that voluntary involvement with the disadvantaged was a tradition in England. She believed that the tradition bequeathed by the voluntary organisations to the probation service after the take-over of voluntary after care in 1966 left a positive legacy, despite the condescension felt by some probation officers to the previous system of "handouts and a non professional approach". She also saw it as significant that there was a move back to community involvement in the field of care for offenders. It was Levin's belief that the old voluntary agencies:

contributed a very important tradition to the probation service mainly in the unknown areas such as the understanding of institutions and their staff, greater flexibility in dealing with and generally personnel being more readily available to the client, even though on a more superficial level...Another contribution of the voluntary societies was to introduce a new class of clients to probation officers who until then were concentrating on statutory supervision only...
(Levin, 1974, 1).

Whether Levin had more than anecdotal evidence of her belief that the probation service started with a condescending attitude to voluntary work is unclear. She believed that this air of condescension extended to the probation officers that worked at the ACU. Certainly a management review in the North East Division of the Inner London Probation Service in 1979 found that the attitude of officers to dealing with casual callers

to field offices was a desire to get rid of the caller quickly to get back to the "real work". I have already commented that the seniors in a report had complained of a reluctance of officers to come and work at the ACU.

Levin described the "distance" between field probation officers and casual callers to probation offices as "a professional coldness". She felt that the legacy of NADPAS and CACA was still present in the ACU in that the unit did not subscribe to the traditional probation values that she listed as follows:

1. Tradition of selecting clients one feels able to help (by the preparation of an SER).
2. Tradition of using the authority of a statutory relationship.
3. Tradition that change is possible.
4. Tradition of attempting change through the examination of the psychopathology of the individual.
5. Tradition of not using material aid.
6. Tradition that tasks can be confined to a particular time scale.

Levin was adamant that the ACU was not a specialist unit, in the same tradition as other units in the probation service that did not do the mainstream of work including court duty, preparation of social enquiry reports for the Courts, (civil court) custody and access reports etc. Rather the concentration on resettling ex prisoners, visiting clients in prison and seeing casual callers, forced the ACU officers "to stick their necks out more almost anything goes, because they have not got the answers" (ibid, 2).

Levin commented that officers arriving at the ACU typically felt deskilled, this was because of the set up and the irrelevance of traditional casework methods. The paper, written nine years after the absorption of CACA and NADPAS into the London Probation Service commented that the ex voluntary sector "personnel [were] still identifiable but rather as individuals than as a style of work" (ibid, 3). Individual personality was seen by Levin as a significant and dynamic variable in the unit, testing out new methods of working. When Levin considered the particular problems of the homeless and rootless offender, she concentrated on the theme of rejection. She looked at the common perception of the problems encountered by the client group, as viewed by the client and the probation officer and it was her opinion that there was a gulf between the expectations of the two groups:

What the officer may regard as rootless may not appear so to the client at all, because he may have roots which to him are meaningful whereas to the rest of society they appear as unacceptable...an increasing number of people are driven either by necessity or choice to live away from the traditional family and there is no official housing provision made at all for single people...Rootlessness can also be described as an alienation from all norms that keep people going...sometimes this rejection of roots might hide deeper painful feelings which are protected by this attitude" (ibid, 5-6).

The problem of rejection was not just present in the casual callers to the office. A former ACU probation officer, now back in a field unit, explained to me the problems in seeing prisoners in the segregation (for rule 43's) wing in HMP Maidstone. His client group had been people with very serious records who would probably have qualified, he thought, as personality disorders in early assessments, and pretty well unhelpable at the age of 19 or 20. Many had ditched or had been ditched by their families; they had been ditched by earlier probation officers as being pretty helpless. However he felt that with a number, they had significantly reached a point in their lives where they wanted to do some work on themselves. He could not tell what it meant in terms of results, but he felt that they were at a much more helpable point in their offending career than they had ever been before. The wing also contained sex offenders who had to be separated from other inmates for the sake of their physical safety. These men were unable to return to their family homes or neighbourhood either because their family had rejected them or else the Social Services would not allow them back into the family, or indeed it was unsafe for them to be anywhere in the area. They might be incarcerated for the first time in their lives and would require time to talk about the offence and the strain of resettlement and being on their own for the first time in many years.

Levin differentiated between those clients who had an ability to change and those who were incapable. The former group required physical care and involvement in their sub culture. The latter, liaison with the institutions whilst they were in prison, and the investigation of "feelings and personality". The responsibility to help the client survive was an essential task and in this respect she believed that the client should be aware of how much entitlement they had under the befriending fund. "Without completely abdicating the officer's discretion, the client should have some say in the manner in which this amount is spent towards the satisfaction of his needs" (ibid, 9). (In Levin's time the client had a lifetime allowance of £100, this amount became an annual allowance with the same proviso that the probation officer could decide to spend £25, the sum could be up to £50 with the permission of the SPO, and £100 with the permission of the ACPO). This emphasis on money was due to Levin's hypothesis that clients needed to be "fed" and then "weaned". Paternalism or client manipulation were other forces that she described as being potentially involved in financial transactions within the unit. The material emphasis for Levin served one important task, namely that the probation officer was seen as a "person" and not as a "therapist". Levin commented that working at the ACU "makes one particularly aware of the injustices of Society as a whole and sometimes makes individual officers feel guilty at being part of the system" (ibid, 20).

The regular prisoner contact meant that a more accurate picture of the offender could be presented to the prison and the client could be helped to express complaints about their circumstances within the prison. Whether the ACU officer should act as a safety valve for the prisoner, allowing them to ventilate emotions in safe surroundings was a debatable point. Levin saw this as a valid role for the officer, but absorbing the prisoner's stress was draining. Her solution to this was for "anxiety groups" for officers.

Finally the question of what is success was considered by Levin, who largely had a minimal expectation of what the client was likely to achieve. At the minimum she saw it as the responsibility of the probation officer to ensure the physical survival of the client. "This responsibility should not be relegated to other agencies, the very fact that the clients capacity to survive has been undermined by imprisonment makes him the responsibility of the probation service" (ibid, 12). She saw it as a difficulty for some officers that they had to adopt a controlling attitude as they needed "to see some change or at least some signs of his work bearing fruit" (ibid, 13). This laissez faire attitude was acceptable in the 1960's and even in the 1970's, however it was no longer appropriate for the 1980's when cost effectiveness became a key priority in the probation and many other arenas in the public sector.

The Evaluation of the After Care Unit by the Home Office Research Unit

If Levin saw officers arriving at the A.C.U. going through a form of "culture shock", it could be hypothesised that similar units in other probation areas had similar problems. In 1971 the Home Office Research Unit Report (9): Explorations in After Care was published which looked at the ACU's set up in London, Liverpool, and Manchester. The report, the result of fieldwork undertaken in 1967, was essentially exploratory in nature, and it attempted to answer the following four points:

- (i) What were the declared aims and objectives of the ACU's studied?
 - (ii) How did after care actually operate in them?
 - (iii) Was there a gap between their declared aims and their concrete achievements?
 - (iv) If so, is it possible to identify structural elements which obstructed the achievement of the declared objectives?
- (HORS (9), 1971, 1).

The research worker assigned to the London ACU was an ex member of the Royal London Discharged Prisoners Aid Society and he analysed 200 case records from the registry by looking at every tenth file "to see how far they revealed the problems of clients, and the measures adopted to deal with them. He also talked to various probation officers employed at the office, and so gained a more general perspective of the problems and tasks involved in their work" (ibid, 3). The report conceded that the fieldwork research was undertaken in London within 18 months of the Inner London Service taking over responsibility for the ACU, and in Liverpool and Manchester the period was much less than a year. Manchester, unlike London and Liverpool, did not take over an already functioning unit.

The HORU report found that there were differences between the three units, Borough High Street, London, had an older client group than the two Northern ACUs. It postulated that this might be for the following four reasons:

- (i) The London A.C.U. had a longer tradition than the other two units.
- (ii) The London A.C.U. had more "old lags" that attended on a casual caller basis.
- (iii) The London A.C.U. gave out more clothing and this might have attracted older people.
- (iv) Older people might have migrated to London.

One major difference was in the client group that the units catered for, all three units worked with single men, but in Liverpool the majority of clients were married. This could be accounted for by the fact that in London and Manchester men with homes were dealt with by other probation offices, whereas they were considered to be legitimate clients of the Liverpool ACU.

The HORU report detailed the presenting problems, given by the clients post discharge and they were as follows:

- (i) Immediate practical needs, such as money and clothing.
 - (ii) Accommodation requirements.
 - (iii) Employment problems.
 - (iv) Legal problems, non payment of debts, and domestic problems.
 - (v) Other problems, such as 'inadequacy', 'ill health', 'mental illness', and 'emotional problems'
- (ibid, 20).

The HORU report commented that discharged prisoners frequently were not able to manage on their social security allowances. Although the clients were given the rhetoric that the probation service was not there to provide a subsidising 'safety net', when the social security allowance was used up, this was in fact a major task of the ACUs. Cash grants were typically given for the following items: accommodation, clothing, collection of property, fares, food, household debts, rent and tools. Vouchers were also on occasion used for accommodation, fares, clothing, food and tools (ibid, 24).

The HORU report devoted an entire chapter to the London ACU and came up with the very depressing conclusion that:

As a casework agency the unit would have liked to help its clients by concentrating effort on the underlying problems and the provision of the material means required for their treatment or amelioration, whereas in fact the treatment of basic problems was left more or less in abeyance while much effort was spent in deciding on the allocation of inadequate means for day to day ends. Insofar as his basic problems were concerned the client of after care remained unsupported (ibid, 42).

This statement would appear to negate any benefits of the take-over of CACA and NADPAS by the Inner London Probation and After Care Service, for if the ACU was replicating the "hand to mouth feeding" syndrome of NADPAS it was not maintaining the longer term through care contact of CACA. The research failed to analyse the frequency and content of pre discharge work with prisoners and whether this contact led to successful after care. This pre discharge contact might have been different in nature depending on whether the prisoner was serving a short sentence, e.g. the petty persistent type, or a long sentence where there was time to form a 'meaningful' relationship with the prisoner. (This latter group was the province of the defunct CACA organisation that had operated from the ACU building, working with men sentenced to 5 years and over, and women sentenced to 4 years and over).

There is one paragraph that commented that the "regulars" were seen as having better prospects for rehabilitation and these clients were given regular appointments "by the same probation officer who may also have had pre release contact with them" (ibid, 37). However the concentration by the researcher with the financial side of the unit persisted and he commented that these clients were assumed to be not merely interested in material assistance, (as was the duty of the Service to provide it), but also that they "warranted a greater expenditure of time and attention; their chances of receiving material help in form which took greater account of their sensitivity may also have been somewhat better than those of casuals" (ibid, 37). The report commented that clients were divided into "casuals" and "regulars", although this latter group could have been attending the unit from the time of NADPAS. The author commented that many of the casuals were suffering from long term alcohol problems and years of neglect. By specifically commenting that probation officers were more prepared "to make allowances for their conduct" (ibid, 37), the researcher was making some qualification to the general principle quoted by one probation officer that "the casuals had their asking price" (ibid, 37).

Files in the ACU were described as having inadequate information in them and this could be explained by the fact that the old records from NADPAS, CACA, and The Royal London Prisoners' Aid Society (RLPAS) were not incorporated into the ILPACS records. The author of the survey on the London ACU was an ex RLPAS worker and he would have been aware that the old records were not seen as being of a sufficiently high quality for ILPACS. It is difficult to read the report and know quite how the researcher reached his conclusions as they were based almost purely on his subjective assessment. The researcher examined the records "to see how far they revealed the problems of clients, and the measures adopted to deal with them" (ibid, 3). He also talked to various probation officers employed in the unit, and so gained a more general perspective of the problems and tasks involved in their work. However, the researcher drew on his previous experience of the work of the Discharged Prisoners' Aid Societies. What is conspicuously absent is any participant observation of interviews or direct client interviews by the researcher. Yet the researcher, with confidence was able to say:

Clients often asserted that they were ready to make a fresh start in life, yet many case papers contained notes of disillusionment on the part of probation officers (ibid, 39).

This lack of direct evidence by Silberman led him to speculate on how the client operated:

One gained the impression that they (the clients) opened their interviews with a gambit of some kind or another, presumably in an attempt to represent their current situation as one that entitled them to receive the assistance asked for (ibid, 40).

That case records on occasion failed to mention what type of help had been requested by the client, forced the reader to guess from the result of the transaction that was almost always recorded.

Having established to his satisfaction the adversarial nature of the contract between probation officer and client, the researcher could then comment that the client was sophisticated enough that:

The clients need for material help may have discouraged them from mentioning problems of great concern to them, if they thought that to do so would have prejudiced their chances of obtaining help (ibid, 40).

It could be hypothesised that the client would "invent" personal problems, if necessary, to hook the probation officer's professional desire to offer more than material help, but the researcher ignores this possibility to postulate whether the "social welfare function" obscured rather than clarified the cause of the clients' problem(s). If clients saw meetings with probation officers as "contests" where questions were "parried" and evasive answers were given with the intention of obtaining the assistance asked for, the question could be asked whether there was role for the unit at all? This question was not posed, instead the researcher commented that the level of funding available was too small for anything other than "relatively small fringe benefits" to supplement social security grants. Thus the performance of the unit by and large "depended entirely on the co operation of other administrations" (ibid, 43).

In the summary and conclusions to part one of the HORU study (chapter 5), on the three ACUs, the researchers attempted to answer four questions, namely:

1. What were the after care units trying to do? (Aim of the ACUs).
2. How were they trying to do it? (Operation of the units related to their aims).
3. Did their methods match their aims? (Structural problems).
4. If not, could one identify anything in the way the units were organised which may have prevented this matching? (ibid, 44-46).

The conclusions to the three separate ACUs were applied generally and were therefore applicable, according to the researchers, to each ACU. In answer to the first question it was postulated that clients and probation officers had different views of immediate material needs and long term solutions. The ACUs could be evaluated either as immediate "welfare agencies" or as "social casework agencies", or as a mixture of them both. In addition there was the need to distinguish, according to the reports authors, the aims of the "community at large", from the aims of the probation officers in the units and the aims of the clients themselves.

From the statistical tabulations, acknowledging the limitations of the research methods, the authors commented that the general trends were that the units functioned mainly as "welfare agencies", dishing out money and clothing. This had profound implications in how the ACUs operated with regard to their aims. The clients called at the ACUs mostly when they wanted this immediate service. Probation officers undertook little pre discharge contact with prisoners and, perhaps in consequence of this, the quality of information on the clients was often inadequate. The sample of clients files that were considered in the research did not remain in contact with the probation officers for very long, approximately 75% for 3 months or less and "very few" for longer than 6 months. It would thus appear that the majority of the client group that were examined in the survey were of the old NADPAS group rather than from CACA. Why this should be to the extent shown in the survey is unclear, although numerically "casuals" would vastly outnumber the "regulars". For at least the period of the 1980's probation officers kept their "live" files in their own offices. It was not clear the filing system was organised when the survey was taking place. It was possible that "live" files were kept in officers' rooms and consequently the results might under represent long term clients being seen in the unit.

In conclusion the report commented that administrative control could not affect the "unreliability of clients", or the "urgency of clients' immediate material needs". However "lack of material and treatment resources", "lack of pre release visiting" and "lack of information on clients" could be positively changed. It questioned whether after care could have an impact until more resources were forthcoming (e.g. hostels, more training and employment facilities). The final paragraph of the report demonstrated the psycho analytic bias of the authors, when after contrasting the "discrepancy" between "concern and goodwill" and the "lack of fundamental knowledge as to how best help discharged prisoners"; it argued that if casework was to have a chance to work in the field of after care then the "means test oriented service" had to be replaced by one that focused on the "assessment and treatment of the conditions preventing the clients of after care from becoming productive and law abiding members of society" (ibid, 46).

The HORU report was at considerable variance with the 1970 report of the senior group which had described the changes in the unit after the take-over by ILPACS. The fact that by 1970 the ACU in London was increasing the number of clients on statutory after care and decreasing the numbers of casuals that were calling at the unit would imply that the findings of the survey rapidly became out of date. After the 1971 HORU report there were

no further surveys undertaken of the work of the unit by the Home Office, although the Inner London Probation Service carried out two Divisional Reviews on how through care and after care was being implemented by the service.

Conclusion

A number of interesting themes emerge in the above. Firstly the idiosyncratic nature of probation practice and the almost complete absence of any control on how main grade probation officers worked with offenders by probation management. Officers' caseloads were not controlled either and were allowed to vary according to the work generated by the institutions. Work was a mixture of welfare considerations, traditional casework or whatever else the officer wanted to do. Seniors led 'from the front' and had responsibility for some institutions, like main grade colleagues. Their role was to offer leadership (which might be declined) and casework supervision. The ACU represented a further example of trained workers taking over from the old voluntary sector, a phenomenon that had been played out in local offices in the 1930's. What had gone on before was largely disregarded by the new probation and after-care service as it sought to absorb these new tasks. There appeared to be more than a hint of evangelical zeal attached to working with a client group that was not seen to appreciate the new casework methods. However the seniors had a great deal of sympathy to the clients of the unit and proposed radical new solutions including hostels and day centres. The seniors in the unit, in the transition to a professionally qualified unit, went on to become very influential in the probation service, becoming chief officers in several different areas, including Inner London and the Chief Inspector of Probation. From the ideas generated in the unit came a hostels department and the growth of day centres, including the Day Training Centre in Inner London. This could be seen as the golden era of the unit, before its stabilisation and later decline.

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