

Research into Faiths and Offender Management in the East of England



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1. Introduction

It is difficult to ignore the recent resurgence of interest in and recognition of the contribution faith groups can make to community development in general, and offender management in particular. Significant moves have been made towards developing a more co-ordinated and strategic approach - both at national and regional level - which will harness this considerable potential (see section 2.1). Faith groups are seen by the current government as highly 'attractive partners for the advancement of its policy agendas'¹ and key to the delivery of their new system of 'end-to-end' offender management (see sections 2.2. and 2.3.). It is against this backdrop that the East of England Faiths Council (EEFC) commissioned this scoping exercise, which is intended to assess the current level of involvement in offender management among faith groups across the region (see section 3)². A wide range of projects was found, operating in various contexts – both within prisons and outside in local communities – and some pockets of real innovation and excellence.

However, it should equally be noted that the picture is not entirely unproblematic³. While there is considerable coordination at the national level and, to some extent, the regional level this is not filtering down to the local level, meaning that despite these pockets of excellence, coverage of programmes remains patchy. Moreover, while there are considerable benefits in faith communities engaging in this area of work, there are significant costs which they incur in doing so (see section 4). Nor are they always equal partners, and concerns have been expressed that Government is simply co-opting faith communities, and using them as a cheap or 'soft option' and an easy route into local communities – when they often face considerable financial constraints themselves.

2. National policy context

2.1 Offender management: developing a more strategic approach

The report *Reducing reoffending by ex-prisoners* published in 2002 by the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) identified reoffending as a major contributing factor to inflation of crime rates, and a clear need for coordinated and preventative 'action *in and after prison*'. It also identified a range of interconnected factors which placed people being released from prison at an increased risk of re-offending; experiences of family disadvantage (such as a history of care placements or family poverty), low levels of educational attainment, difficulties accessing employment, poor mental or physical health, high levels of debt or a history of benefit receipt, and problems with accommodation (such as homelessness and/or rough sleeping).

Since then, policy-makers have devoted an increasing amount of attention to devising and implementing strategies which will break this reoffending cycle. Thus in 2004, the Government published a National Action Plan in which they restated their commitment to 'reduce reoffending through greater strategic partnership and joined-up working', and which in turn fed into the establishment in 2005 of a coordinated National Offender Management Service (NOMS). NOMS is seen as having 'a key role to play in ensuring that the public are protected from offenders, that those who offend are punished and that fewer offenders re-

¹ Jochum et al. 2007: 51

² The majority of this was desk-based, and involved internet researching followed up with around 20 telephone interviews, and email contact with a range of faith groups (100 plus) subscribing to the FaithNeteast database. The research team was also directed to other faith groups involved in offender management by key offender management professionals as well as other faith groups themselves. One visit was made in person to HMP Norwich to find out about the multi-faith prison chaplaincy and the new Community Chaplaincy project being set up there (see sections 3.2 and 3.3).

³ Other concerns have been raised by secular organisations such as the British Humanist Society, who have argued that there is no solid 'evidence that religious organisations have better, measurable outcomes than inclusive secular organisations' to underpin the current agenda.

offend ... [making] our communities safer places to live in'⁴. In order to achieve this, it is envisaged that NOMS will provide a 'more coherent end to end service – managing offenders across the entire life of their sentence' and through the gate as well as in prison. Below the national level, there are Regional Offender Management Services (ROMS) headed by a regional director who is responsible for implementation of the national offender management strategy at regional level and implementation of regional reducing offending delivery plans, such as the one published for the East of England in 2006⁵.

The seven key reducing reoffending pathways set out by NOMS⁶ as part of this end to end, more coherent service delivery also correspond directly to the areas identified by the SEU report as major factors affecting reoffending rates⁷;

- accommodation
- education, training and employment
- health (mental and physical)
- drugs and alcohol
- finance, benefit and debt
- children and families
- attitudes, thinking and behaviour

In 2006, the Home Office also published a further five year national strategy which reaffirmed their commitment to delivering an 'end-to-end' offender management service, by working with offenders beyond the end of their custodial sentence, and addressing the 'complex, multiple and interrelated problems'⁸ they faced in a more coherent and effective way. From the beginning, partnerships – *including* partnerships with faith groups – were seen as key to delivering better offender management; 'When offenders are committed to changing, we want offender managers to be able to call on support for them in a very wide range of areas ... this needs strong partnership working ... partnership working is in everyone's interests because tackling the problems offenders have tackles social exclusion and helps make society better and safer for everyone'⁹. This echoes NOMS' pledge that it will 'draw on the knowledge and expertise of the public, private and third sectors to provide more innovative solutions to tackling offending behaviour'¹⁰. This message was further reinforced by the consultation document issued by the Ministry of Justice (2007) which aimed to build on progress made since the publication of the SEU report, and to develop the national offender management further still.

2.2 The role of faith groups as key partners of government

Faith groups have consistently been highlighted as key partners of government in delivering this offender management strategy, and engaging with these groups is seen as vital to the successful prevention of reoffending because of their specific expertise, local knowledge and longstanding engagement with local communities. Alongside the seven reducing reoffending pathways, NOMS also outlined three main alliances through which its objectives could be achieved; an alliance with civil society, with the corporate sector – and the Faith, Voluntary and Community Sector Alliance. The importance of this partnership has also been recognised at the regional level, with the statement in the Eastern regional delivery plan that it is 'clear that a reduction in re-offending cannot be achieved by the correctional agencies alone'¹¹. Again, this agenda was reaffirmed in the 2007 Ministry of Justice consultation about

⁴ NOMS web site: <http://noms.justice.gov.uk/about-us/how-noms-works/>

⁵ NOMS 2006

⁶ As will become clear, the regional and local projects identified by this research work across all seven pathways.

⁷ These also form the framework for the East of England Reducing Offending Delivery Plan.

⁸ Home Office 2006: 27

⁹ Home Office 2006: 28

¹⁰ NOMS web site: <http://noms.justice.gov.uk/about-us/how-noms-works/>

¹¹ NOMS 2006: foreword

future direction for NOMS¹². There has been further acceleration recently of the involvement of faith groups in community development work more generally, and an emphasis on *building capacity* to enhance their pivotal position in developing the current community cohesion agenda;

'By supporting faith and inter faith organisations to deliver community-led activities and to develop stronger links with others involved in similar work, community development contributes to community cohesion and integration'

(CDF 2006)

Face to Face and Side by Side, the recent report from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG), continues to emphasise the renewed importance of engaging with faith groups in the current context of increasing diversity and multi-faith affiliations. Faith groups, it argues, bring particular 'assets and opportunities' to this area of work and 'can help to build cohesive, active and empowered communities'¹³. Consequently faith groups are seen as having a major role to play alongside 'in encouraging individuals, communities and groups to come together and interact'¹⁴.

2.3 What faith groups bring to the strategic table

This potential has been further recognised by NOMS whose recent consultation exercise, *Believing We Can*, also highlighted the fact that 'voluntary and community organisations including faith-based organisations bring additional skills, knowledge and expertise and can offer advantages in dealing with the multiple disadvantages faced by offenders'¹⁵ and could both complement and significantly enhance their own offender management work. Yet what is it that is distinctive about the way in which faith communities work, and what do they bring to the strategic table?

- Faith group involvement in this area is often prompted by 'different drivers'¹⁶ such as compassion or the desire to secure social justice. The strength of this motivation among faith groups can distinguish their contribution to community work from that of other voluntary sector organisations.
- They are frequently seen as bringing a 'flexible, innovative and non-bureaucratic style, bringing fresh thinking to problem areas with the advantage of being less risk averse and able to put ideas into action quickly'¹⁷. This means they are often better able to respond quickly to individual need, and taking a more client-centred approach.
- Faith groups can be better at working across boundaries and dealing with the complications and 'messiness'¹⁸ of this type of work than is apparent in tightly prescribed statutory programmes. This was emphasised in the conclusions to EEFC's (2005) research into the role faith communities play in the social, economic and spiritual life of a region, which found that faith communities were better at taking the initiative to set up community programmes partly because they met with fewer legislative restrictions
- They can also help ex-offenders by signposting the various sources of support available to them, and may offer 'a more accessible and less daunting route to

¹² Both the Chief Operating Officer and Director of Commissioning and Operation Policy further reiterated the importance of partnership working with faith groups in their recent presentations to the Faith Matters Too conference.

¹³ DCLG 2008: 17

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ NOMS 2007: 7

¹⁶ James 2007

¹⁷ NOMS 2007: 7

¹⁸ Furbey et al. 2005

services and support¹⁹.

- Despite the current emphasis on partnership working, their relative independence from statutory agencies can help win the trust of the people they are working with, such as ex-offenders.
- Faith groups offer continuity of support where help from statutory agencies is often time-limited due to funding constraints or programme guidelines.
- Faith groups also have strong links into local communities and 'practical local understanding, developed through long-term engagement' which can smooth the path towards offender reintegration more effectively than a statutory agency²⁰.
- With faith becoming a 'increasingly sensitive issue' in relation to community cohesion, the involvement of faith groups in this area of work can be seen as a way of opening up a 'safe space' for balanced discussions about faith and promoting 'increased tolerance and respect' among different communities²¹.
- Faith groups may also be more 'likely to resist cooption'²², and maintain a critical voice with the potential to pose (constructive) challenges to government agendas. This 'freedom and independence' needs to be protected, otherwise faith groups may be prevented from acting as an important 'change agent' and critic of services²³.

2.4 Barriers, constraints and challenges faced experienced by faith groups

The 'extra dimension'²⁴ offered by faith-based projects *should* be celebrated for what it can potentially add to offender management work. However it is equally important to acknowledge that, despite this valuable contribution, faith groups are also faced with a series of barriers, constraints and challenges. Despite the current emphasis of policy on capacity building, many faith groups continue to be restricted by a lack of infrastructure or access to sustainable funding opportunities. National research (Fentener et al. 2008) has found that faith groups commonly cited lack of time and resources as a barrier to actively engaging with government (64% of the total surveyed), and also that this was not sufficiently appreciated by policy-makers.

Many faith groups are small to medium sized, and may simply not have the resources – either financial, or in terms of skills and manpower – to engage with government²⁵. As another recent piece of research noted, 'participation in governance is 'expensive' for faith communities: the number of people in faith groups in disadvantaged areas with the energy, confidence and commitment to be involved in local governance is currently small. Participation is restricted to a small minority²⁶. Moreover, restricted access to funding opportunities and the short-term nature of funding for projects increase these difficulties. This was a common theme highlighted throughout the literature²⁷ on engaging with faith groups, which suggests that this persistently short-term approach can mean that any positive gains from projects are soon lost.

However, it is also important to note the concerns which have been raised about the current emphasis being placed by policy-makers on faith involvement in offender management. It has been suggested by some that this is largely a tokenistic exercise, and that faith groups are valued purely as a convenient route into local communities - and to delivering the current community cohesion agenda, without any real understanding of faith as a motivating factor.

¹⁹ NOMS 2007: 12

²⁰ Furbey et al. 2005

²¹ Evison 2008

²² Furbey et al. 2005

²³ Faulkner 2002

²⁴ Evison 2008

²⁵ NOMS 2007 notes that capacity building has developed better in some areas and with some faith groups than others, meaning that while some progress has been made it remains distinctly uneven.

²⁶ Furbey et al. 2005

²⁷ And borne out by the interviews for this research

For example, Singh²⁸ argues that the current emphasis on faith involvement ‘allows numerous ‘boxes’ to be ticked in one go – age, gender and BME in the equalities grouping in addition to the ‘local’ engagement’, and that care will need to be taken if faith involvement is not to become merely a ‘synthetic re-engineering of the faith sector into an add-on facet of the voluntary/community/third sector’²⁹. Other concerns have been raised, for example that the aim of increasing faith-based involvement in offender management has been pursued without any sound evidence of its effectiveness. Hence the British Humanist Association has argued that ‘there is no hard evidence that “faith-based” interventions actually have any direct impact on re-offending rates. Neither is there evidence that religious organisations have better, measurable outcomes than inclusive secular organisations’³⁰. Further work needs to be done to assess the value of faith groups’ contribution, and this is something EEFC could usefully be involved in, as a follow-up to their 2005 study.

3. Local Activity and Examples of Good Practice in Offender Management

The ‘community spirit and engagement’³¹ which NOMS has identified as a particular strength of faith communities was certainly apparent in the wide range of projects which were identified by the research - even in such a relatively short space of time. Some projects ran inside prisons prior to (and in preparation for) release, while others worked ‘through the gate’ helping ex-prisoners to reintegrate into local communities after their release. Others focused more on prevention, and targeted groups which were potentially at risk of offending. Many did not work specifically with offenders, but with a *range* of vulnerable groups.

As anticipated, these projects worked across the seven NOMS reoffending pathways, particularly the attitudes, thinking and behaviour pathway (for example see sections 4.1, 4.4. and 4.5). Projects also incorporated a range of different levels of faith involvement. Some had a high level of targeted faith content, and some had an element of faith content although this was not the primary focus of the project - while others were non-faith projects which were simply *delivered* by a faith organisation³². Indeed, the Regional Offender Manager also pointed out that many of the people who work in a voluntary capacity with offenders both in prison and the community may well be motivated by faith, but are not always working for a specific faith group³³.

3.1 ‘Time Out’ (HMP Warren Hill, Suffolk)

This is a group run by the Quaker prison chaplain at HMP and YOI Warren Hill in Woodbridge which works with young offenders on addressing issues around their offending behaviour³⁴, such as emotional management. Participants are usually aged between 15 and 17 years, and are often seen as being particularly vulnerable within the prison environment. Many are serving their first custodial sentence, and may be subject to violence or bullying. Often they are either on remand or are serving short sentences, meaning that turnover among participants is high – and presenting particular challenges in working with them on their attitudes and behaviour. The work is shared with the Psychology Department, and sessions are staffed by three or four adults either from this department or the Chaplaincy. Prison officers are specifically not involved, partly to create a non-threatening environment where participants can feel free to discuss the issues affecting them. Up to eight young offenders participate in the group, with sessions running for around one and a half hours.

²⁸ (quoted in Rochester 2007: 43)

²⁹ (quoted in Rochester 2007: 46)

³⁰ <http://www.humanism.org.uk/site/cms/newsarticleview.asp?article=2489>

³¹ *ibid.*

³² This was noted as a key characteristic of faith community involvement in offender management work in their recent consultation document *Believing We Can* (2007).

³³ Although their work is still motivated and underpinned by their beliefs.

³⁴ This project fits in particularly well with the NOMS attitudes, thinking and behaviour pathway, but also touches on issues in other pathways - such as family relationships.

Each session opens with some sort of educational activity such as working on building self-esteem or dealing with negative feelings, usually for around twenty to twenty-five minutes. After a short break for refreshments the agenda for the remainder of the session is set by the participants.

While clear ground rules are set, the emphasis is on allowing participants freedom to speak, meaning that each session is different. Group discussions have focused on various topics, including potential triggers for offending behaviour, different coping strategies both while in prison *and* after release, and the importance of maintaining positive family relationships. Participants have also considered the difficulties of reintegrating into their communities, and the importance of managing unrealistic expectations about this process – with one participant coming to the conclusion that, because of the harm he had caused to members of his community, it may be better for him to move to a different area after release. The main benefit of the group is felt to be the fact that it allows young offenders a period of total, non-judgemental attention and an atmosphere of acceptance³⁵ – something which may well have been lacking in their lives, and is likely to have been a significant factor in their offending behaviour.

However, the commitment of statutory agencies such as the prison service to the project (as well as educational programmes in general) was seen as inconsistent, *despite* the potentially considerable benefits. For example, sessions could be delayed or cancelled due to staff shortages. Recently a ‘Time Out’ session was delayed for forty minutes *without notice* because it clashed with a meeting of the Prison Officers Association, leaving participants demotivated and discouraged. It was also felt that while there was a legal requirement for the Prison Service to have chaplaincy arrangements in place, the work was not always highly valued. It was also felt that initiatives such as ‘Time Out’ might not enjoy full support because of the difficulty of *quantifying* its results³⁶, when positive effects from the project (such as a reduction in offending behaviour or improved family relationships) may not emerge for some time afterwards. Although both the project and the chaplain involved are well supported by local Quaker meetings³⁷, an opportunity to meet and form networks with other people working on similar projects would be particularly welcome, especially as a forum for discussing and exchanging ideas and resources.

3.2 HMP Norwich Multi-faith Chaplaincy

The Prison Chaplaincy service has undergone a process of radical transformation in recent years, and can now be said to be ‘on the frontier of inter-faith relationships’³⁸. There has been an ‘important and conscious shift’³⁹ towards better recognition of the increasingly diverse needs of the prison population, and many institutions are now ‘setting an example for the wider religious community of the way in which we can work together while respecting each other and serving a common goal’⁴⁰. However, there are indications that national policy here does not always filter down to the local level; for example, the research team heard anecdotal evidence of chaplains being allowed access to prisoners only at the discretion of prison authorities, and suggestions that the commitment to a multi-faith chaplaincy was often

³⁵ The chaplain involved deliberately *does not* ask participants about their specific offences, although they are free to volunteer this information if they wish to do so. Some work is done on specific offence issues, e.g. sexual offences, but in a non-targeted way.

³⁶ It was suggested that there was more emphasis on the number of attendees rather than the quality of interaction.

³⁷ The chaplain concerned is employed (on a voluntary basis) by the Society of Friends rather than the Prison Service, meaning a certain degree of freedom and independence.

³⁸ Noble 2002: 89; see also Noble 2008

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

merely tokenistic⁴¹

This multi-faith focus was clear from discussions with prison chaplains from across the region, who now minister to prisoners from an increasingly wide range of faith groups and backgrounds. For example, in the week when the research team visited HMP Norwich, seventeen different faiths or denominations were represented among the prison population. 42% of the total prison population declared themselves as having some form of Christian faith, while 9.51% were Muslims. A wide range of other faith groups and backgrounds were also represented among prisoners⁴², including Buddhism, Paganism, Rastafarianism, Taoism, and Judaism. Consequently there are a number of part-time and sessional chaplains at HMP Norwich; these include a part-time imam and a part-time Roman Catholic priest, and chaplains from various free churches – as well as visiting Buddhist, Sikh, Jehovah’s Witness, Mormon, Jewish and Pagan chaplains, who will usually visit prisoners in their cells (often they are one of only a very few prisoners within that particular faith). The prison also welcomes volunteer visitors from a range of local faith groups.

However, the largest and fastest-growing single group of prisoners at HMP Norwich (44% of the total) were of ‘nil faith’⁴³, suggesting that providing opportunities for worship within these faiths was *just one part* of the chaplaincy’s work. Indeed, the chaplain was keen to stress that faith involvement is often still very important and valuable to this group of prisoners. Pastoral support is available to all prisoners, and forms a very important element of the chaplaincy’s work. A range of specific courses are also offered, some of which focus specifically on Christianity (such as preparation for Baptism in readiness for release, Bible study sessions and a Tuesday Christian group). Others have a wider focus and are open to prisoners of all faiths, such as the sessions on victim awareness or life skills. Recently the chaplaincy was involved in running a six week meditation course, in conjunction with a local church, which received some very positive feedback regarding its value in influencing and changing offending behaviours. One of the chaplains also runs a successful Sycamore Tree course to encourage victim awareness among offenders; at the final session a pebble is dropped into a glass bowl filled with water to demonstrate the ripple effect offenders’ behaviour has on those around them (such as their families, and the wider community in which they live)⁴⁴.

HMP Norwich is a short-stay prison, with prisoners typically remaining there for between six weeks and three months while they are awaiting deportation, sentencing or transfer to another institution (although there is a healthcare wing which houses older prisoners who are serving life sentences). This relatively high turnover in the prison’s population means that long-term engagement becomes an impossibility⁴⁵. Often the chaplaincy spends a great deal of time preparing a prisoner for Baptism, only for them to be transferred to either HMP Littlehey or Warren Hill before work is complete (meaning considerable upheaval and discontinuity for the prisoner).

3.3 Norwich Community Chaplaincy Project

The co-ordinating chaplain at HMP Norwich has also been involved in developing a new community chaplaincy project for the area (see section 2.3). This project is still at the formative stages; a charitable foundation (Community Friends) has been established, and at

⁴¹ This would need further investigation, and would be a useful piece of future research for EEFC to carry out (possibly as a survey of chaplains across the region).

⁴² 5% of the total

⁴³ There are strong indications that this is a common pattern across the national prison population (anecdotal evidence from Faith Matters Too conference).

⁴⁴ See Feasey et al. 2005 for a fuller evaluation of the national scheme.

⁴⁵ Moreover, prisoners’ ages range from between 18 and 87 years and therefore have a wide range of needs, presenting the chaplaincy with a particularly complex challenge.

the time of the research was in the process of recruiting trustees⁴⁶. The formation of the project was prompted in part by the chaplain's concern at the number of offenders who fall through the gaps of current statutory provision. In particular, those serving short sentences (twelve months or less) often fail to qualify for available services, leaving them at considerable risk of reoffending⁴⁷. Indeed, in the week when the research team visited HMP Norwich, statistics provided by the Chaplain showed that a significant proportion of the prison population were re-offenders who had been recalled on licence. The community chaplaincy therefore aims to provide a safety net for those ex-prisoners who 'no-one else will take'. The needs of this target group may be relatively simple and inexpensive to meet (particularly in comparison with the costs of custody) – for example, providing help and encouragement with getting to mandatory supervision meetings.

As is the case with many offenders, the target group for this project face a range of multiple, interconnected and mutually reinforcing problems which can raise their risk of reoffending, such as issues with substance misuse, poor physical or mental health, accommodation difficulties and poor levels of educational attainment⁴⁸. The community chaplaincy project aims to break this cycle by recognising the difficulty of making the transition to independent living, and addressing the need for quick, easily available and effective support for ex-prisoners in the crucial period immediately after release. It is anticipated that project workers/volunteers will begin working with offenders while in prison, and provide the continuity of support which is often lacking. It also means that ex-prisoners will not then be immediately confronted with the considerable challenge of finding a new congregation (still in a vulnerable state), and having to decide whether to disclose their offending history - but will be able to access 'a safe space where people already know [them]' and can support them in reintegrating into the local community. The project will provide mutual support, and a drop-in facility but will be available only in the short-term, as a transitional measure. Rather than creating another layer of institutionalisation, it will aim to help participants *move on* and rebuild their lives⁴⁹. It can also have considerable value in helping local communities to receive ex-offenders, and in removing some of the labels and reducing the stigma of offender management work.

While the project at Norwich is still in its infancy, it has already met with various challenges, including an element of conflict with the prison authorities over its ethos and formation which caused some funding difficulties⁵⁰. Concerns were also expressed that because the work involved is necessarily long-term – and the project is therefore unlikely to deliver fast, dramatic and easily quantifiable results, with a high turnover of participants and associated reduction in reoffending rates – it *may* be difficult to secure future funding in the current 'tick-box culture'. However, evaluations of other community chaplaincy projects such as the one in Swansea have shown the value of this brand of 'through the gate' working which can provide 'vital practical and emotional support for those who may otherwise receive very little'⁵¹ and help them reintegrate into their community. The fluidity of support provision and continuity of pre- and post-release work 'means the service is particularly well suited to fill the

⁴⁶ It would be worthwhile for EEFC to follow the development of this project, offering support where necessary – there is real scope here to see just how much of a difference community chaplaincy can make to offender management, as the project unfolds. There is also a similar project (CRISP) at HMP Bedford in development, which would be a similarly valuable initiative to follow.

⁴⁷ Also, in view of the high turnover of prisoners at HMP Norwich, the chaplain is looking to form links with HMPs Warren Hill and Littlehey – from where many offenders in the region will ultimately be released – to involve them in the project.

⁴⁸ See NOMS reoffending pathways, section 2.2

⁴⁹ It may also incorporate a scheme whereby mature couples 'adopt' an ex-offender and offer them mentoring and befriending – as well as the structure and support of a family environment which may have been lacking in their lives (for example, where offenders have been through the care system), and may also have been a considerable factor in their offending.

⁵⁰ Funding has now been secured in part by through private donation.

⁵¹ Grayton and Davey 2008: 87

gaps of existing service provision⁵² and meeting the specific needs of offenders. From small beginnings, Community Chaplaincy has now expanded nationally to include thirteen established projects with a further twelve in the formative stages⁵³. Since 2006/7, the initiative has supported 891 prisoners and ex-prisoners – with a further 478 reached as of September 2008.

Community Chaplaincy (good practice at the national level):

'He visits me on a weekly basis he's taken me out once into the home town where I know people will be giving me mucky looks and he's been with me, and we've walked the town together.'

'There has been fantastic support for me here... in actual fact he's taken me from the prison on a day release to where I'm going to live. And he's going to probation with me and he's also going to social services with me. I couldn't wish for more, and it's a first. You know in all the years I have been coming in and out of prison, this kind of support has never been there before. You know, so it will all help as part of my rehabilitation I would say'

(Grayton and Davey 2008: 84-85)

3.4 Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA)

This highly successful initiative, which originated in Canada in 1994 and was subsequently replicated in the UK by the Society of Friends, aims to 'plug a huge gap in the long term management of high risk sex offenders'⁵⁴ after statutory supervision has come to an end. CoSA is designed to aid the reintegration into local communities of a group which is commonly perceived as particularly high-risk (and consequently is often unwelcome and can easily inflame public sentiment), using 'principles of restoration and inclusion through positive human relationships'⁵⁵. The intention is to achieve a 'responsible engagement' with the issues, rather than maintaining a reactionary response - and instead of dwelling on past crimes, CoSA focuses on current behaviour and affirming the positives in ex-offenders' lives⁵⁶. Despite concerns about collusion and manipulation, there is a clear emphasis on a maintaining a realistic appraisal of the risks of working with this target group⁵⁷.

A circle consists of one core member (the ex-offender), who is supported by between four and six fully trained volunteers. Beyond this 'inner circle' is an outer circle of professionals and statutory agencies with expertise in working with sex offenders, and can act as an important resource and source of support to circle members. Volunteers meet weekly with the core member, taking time to build positive relationships, and to support that core member in not re-offending. A circle is based on principles of honesty, trust and open communication – the 'golden rule' is no secrets⁵⁸. It involves a 'clear and transparent contract'⁵⁹ with the core member held accountable to other circle members, and there are firm boundaries and sanctions which can be applied if the agreement is broken (for example, when a core member displays signs of re-offending). A core member may be suspended from their circle

⁵² Grayton and Davey 2008: 2

⁵³ information from a presentation made by Roger Howarth from Staffordshire Community chaplaincy at the Faith Matters Too conference.

⁵⁴ QPSW 2008: 11

⁵⁵ Wilson et al. 2008

⁵⁶ Address by Stephen Hanvey, Chair of Circles UK (umbrella organisation) at the Faith Matters Too Conference (15th October 2008)

⁵⁷ QPSW 2008

⁵⁸ Wilson et al. 2008

⁵⁹ Hanvey 2008

for a certain period of time, although support will be maintained throughout the suspension to ensure continuity. This initiative offers a 'powerful model of change'⁶⁰ – an evaluation of the Thames Valley pilot project found that out of 16 core members supported by circles over a three and a half year period, *none* had reoffended despite their high-risk status.

From an initially small number of pilot projects, CoSA has expanded nationally and there is also now a pilot circle operating in Norfolk which is run by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation. This circle has a good working relationship with statutory agencies such as Norfolk Probation Services⁶¹ (the outer circle), and has recently secured an agreement from all six Probation Services across the East of England to provide funding for a coordinator post at £10,000 per year for three years. This will enable more circles to be established in the region, and future funding opportunities to be explored.

3.5 Friends Therapeutic Trust (Glebe House)

This Cambridgeshire-based Quaker charity provides holistic support to young males who display a range of challenging behaviours, including offending, and aims to provide 'a constructive alternative for troubled and vulnerable adolescents'⁶². Many recipients will have had multiple care placements, and may also have experienced childhood abuse – indeed, some will also themselves have committed sexual offences. The main centre at Glebe House provides support for up to seventeen young adults on a two to three year programme, which aims to prepare them for independent living by equipping them with the necessary skills (both practical skills *and* techniques for emotional management). Finance was recently obtained to buy a second property in Suffolk for a smaller number of young men needing continued support after completing the initial project⁶³.

3.6 Langley House Trust

Langley House Trust is a national housing association established in 1958 by a group of Christian businessmen and women who had become increasingly concerned about the needs of ex-prisoners⁶⁴, and particularly the lack of suitable and secure accommodation. The organisation's web site notes the effect of this deficit on re-offending rates, stating that 'Prisoners leave behind a safe environment where food, warmth and shelter are provided and there is little incentive to think for oneself. Outside, especially when money is short, the temptation to resort to crime is huge and for many irresistible'⁶⁵. The Trust now runs a range of support projects across the country, falling into six types;

- Fresh Start projects (encouraging ex-offenders to learn independent living skills, such as finding local employment and moving into their own accommodation)
- Drug Rehabilitation Centres
- Residential Training Centres (for those requiring a high degree of support to avoid reoffending, with a structured work and training programme)
- Registered Care Homes (for those with longer-term needs and complex needs)
- Homeless Projects (for those who may have a previous history of offending, but also other marginalised groups)
- Resettlement Projects (including a number of Women's Projects)

⁶⁰ *ibid*

⁶¹ complementing rather than duplicating or replacing the work they are already doing

⁶² www.glebehouse.org.uk

⁶³ However, anecdotal evidence suggested that despite the considerable potential and successes of the project, it was felt necessary (because of the nature of the offences involved) to maintain strict confidentiality in order to protect volunteers, staff – and participants.

⁶⁴ The remit of the organisation has now expanded to include work with other marginalised and disadvantaged groups without any offending history.

⁶⁵ <http://www.langleyhousetrust.org/about/history.asp>, also presentation by Steven Robinson (CEO) to Faith Matters Too Conference

Within the East of England, Langley House Trust owns a number of properties (one bedroom flats or three bedroom houses) in 'good' residential areas of Bedford⁶⁶ providing semi-independent accommodation for men aged eighteen and over. Average length of stay for residents is between three and four months, although it can be longer (up to one year). There is an initial four week assessment period during which residents work alongside the Project Manager, Probation service and other local services to develop a Personal Support Plan, which is then reviewed monthly to reflect residents' achievements and their changing support needs – with the ultimate aim of achieving a crime- and drug-free lifestyle.

Residents are also encouraged to move into employment, education or training as appropriate, to prepare them for independent living. Numeracy and literacy training is also available, and help with social or domestic skills. While rules are kept to a minimum, residents are expected to comply with certain standards of behaviour, particularly maintaining self-respect and respecting others by their behaviour. Residents are expected to run the shared houses as a group, working together to maintain its condition and also respecting each others' needs (in other words, creating and sustaining a supportive family environment, often previously lacking in their lives)⁶⁷.

3.7 Street Pastors

Street Pastors, which was established in Brixton in 2003 as a response to rising levels of urban street crime, is an interdenominational project which aims to take 'practical hope to the pavement' and to engage with disaffected groups, *particularly* young people in urban areas, who might otherwise become involved in offending⁶⁸. The emphasis is on 'listening, caring and helping – working in an unconditional way' and on earning 'credibility in the community, so that people know that the Church is there for them in a *practical* way' rather than preaching. Fully trained volunteers from a range of local faith groups work in teams of twelve (subdivided into groups of four) to patrol city centre streets, usually on a Friday or Saturday night – or sometimes both. Working alongside agencies such as the police, Street Pastors are able to act as a calming influence in cases of alcohol-fuelled disorder, providing emotional support and practical help where necessary such, as signposting people to medical attention or transport.

"If somebody wants someone to talk to about something then we are prepared to listen - whether it is something related to religious questions or whether it is something to do with housing, or an addiction or whatever... we feel this is one of the things the church should be doing - it should be out on the streets and part of the community."

Norwich Street Pastors Volunteer (quoted on the project web site)

There are now over eighty Street Pastor schemes across the UK, including several in the East of England. A scheme was set up in Norwich city centre in March 2007, which sends out volunteer patrols on Friday nights between 10.00 p.m. and 3.00 a.m., and has now expanded to include Saturday nights. Further projects operate in Southend (since May 2005), Colchester (since December 2007), Chelmsford (since April 2008) and Bishops Stortford (since September 2008). In Norwich, around thirty trained volunteers from a range of faith groups, including Baptist, Methodist, Anglican, Kings, Proclaimers and Norwich Family Life Churches are now involved, and the scheme has since been rolled out in East Norwich (in the Thorpe St Andrew, Dussindale, Mousehold and Heartsease areas) following local concerns about antisocial behaviour. Their work has expanded to such an extent that a deputy co-ordinator has now been recruited, and interest has also been expressed in the

⁶⁶ away from old associations, and thus the risk of re-offending

⁶⁷ Langley House Trust (2004)

⁶⁸ Street Pastors web site: <http://www.streetpastors.co.uk/>

scheme by church groups in other areas of Norfolk, including Dereham, Great Yarmouth, Harleston and Diss. Norwich Street Pastors also work closely with the city council and the local police, who have stressed the value of this type of project;

“Street Pastors can provide maturity, experience, understanding and patience to the sometimes troubled individuals and difficult circumstances they encounter. They have made a difference and we are very fortunate in Norwich to have these dedicated volunteers.”

Police Inspector Peter Walsh (quoted on Norwich Street Pastors web site)

3.8 Other projects:

House of Genesis⁶⁹

The House of Genesis in Norwich is a relatively new⁷⁰ and small-scale Christian project providing safe accommodation and ‘new beginnings’ for male ex-prisoners on release (as well as men who are homeless but without an offending background) within a supportive family environment - residents share the house with the project leader and his young family. The current project leader has experience of working with offenders and of counselling work, particularly in relation to substance misuse issues, and his work is supplemented by input from a life and social skills worker and a psychologist. The project has recently acquired a second property for residents who have completed the first initial phase of the project but are not yet ready for wholly independent living.

Salvation Army

The Salvation Army have an extensive history of involvement with vulnerable groups such as ex-offenders (including a long-standing prison ministry) and provide a range of services both nationally and within the East of England which are relevant to the current offender management agenda. For example, social service centres such as the Ipswich Priory Centre (where community work experience has previously been provided for inmates from HMP Hollesley Bay) and Norwich Pottergate Arc often support ex-offenders, amongst other groups. The Family Tracing Service also has the potential to benefit ex-offenders, and to support the NOMS family relationships pathway.

St. Vincent De Paul Society (SVP)

This international Christian voluntary organisation focuses on helping the socially excluded in local communities, including ex-offenders - although most of its work (83%) is in supporting older people (compared with the 1% of their work which involves offenders)⁷¹. Besides their involvement in prison visiting and befriending/mentoring of offenders, SVP run a debt counselling service⁷² and also provide material assistance to families, who are often disproportionately affected by imprisonment of the main wage-earner. Nationally, the organisation also runs two approved hostels, providing supervised accommodation and support to over 200 probationers. Regionally, SVP run a several furniture schemes across Essex (in Woodford Green, Hornchurch and Dagenham), where individuals on unpaid work orders can complete their community service hours.

⁶⁹ Information from project web site: <http://www.networknorwich.co.uk/Publisher/Article.aspx?ID=50573>

⁷⁰ The project was established in 2004

⁷¹ Annual Report 2007 available at <http://www.svp.org.uk/docs/annualreport2007.pdf>

⁷² identified by NOMS as a priority area for reducing reoffending

4. Main issues raised during the research: strengths and weaknesses, successes and challenges

Much of the offender management work in which faith communities are involved is carried out in a more small-scale, informal, ad-hoc way, rather than through a specific, targeted project. As a recent NCVO study⁷³ of faith involvement in voluntary action suggested, the majority of work is carried out on a spontaneous basis rather than in formal, organised projects, and forms part of their 'way of life' - in other words, it is 'what people just do'. This level of involvement will not necessarily translate easily to wider (regional) models of delivery⁷⁴. Moreover, those being supported by faith communities may not necessarily be explicitly identified as offenders, but are supported in the same way as any members of that community - quite often simply with befriending (rather than more specific, practical assistance). One consistent theme emerging from the telephone interviews carried out for this research was that faith communities were open to (and tolerant towards) all those in need, which was highlighted by many respondents as a particular *strength*⁷⁵.

However this openness and expression of empathy, while in many ways the greatest asset of faith communities, was also seen by many as a potential weakness. Several respondents expressed deep concerns and anxieties about the risks to faith communities from this type of work, and their particular vulnerability to exploitation - as well as the risks to personal safety. There were several one-off stories of individuals who had been motivated to help an ex-offender who had been released into their community, where the involvement had not ended well - and that individual had been left feeling frustrated and helpless at the outcome. However, while it was equally noted that these failures could be as much the result of a lack of management on the part of faith communities as the greed of offenders, it was clear that negative experiences in the past often put faith communities off engaging in any future work with offenders.

'It came to my notice when he had come to church one day, as he sometimes did, in the hope of seeing his mother and getting another hand-out. On the day in question, I had chatted to him at the end of the service, and then turned to get myself a cup of coffee to drink as I chatted to others. I realised as I turned that behind me in a line, was the door, a pot of cash in which people were paying for some items we were selling for church funds, and this young man. When I turned round, he and the money were gone! By the time I caught up with him later that day, it had been used to pay off debts for drugs'

'At one time the word was out that _____ was a place to come for help. I have a very generous spirited and patient faith community. We have to be wise in our response to such needs as a minority of those that have received help have abused that help in one way or another. As a policy we do not give money'

Many other reasons were given for non-involvement in offender management work, particularly a lack of resources and infrastructure⁷⁶. Faith communities have other competing priorities to consider, and the needs of other groups of members (such as older people or young families) to consider and to balance against the needs of ex-offenders. As one respondent put it, many are living a 'hand-to-mouth existence' and may be too busy focusing on the 'bread and butter issues' to consider this type of work⁷⁷. There is some indication that

⁷³ Jochum et al. 2007

⁷⁴ Rochester 2007: 45

⁷⁵ As in the literature on faith involvement in community work and offender management discussed in section 2.2

⁷⁶ See also Senior (2004)

⁷⁷ For example, Fentener et al. (2008) found that lack of time and resources was a significant factor for 64% of the organisations surveyed in their study of faith groups and government, and acted as a barrier to more active

faith communities find it difficult to access funding opportunities, and that they may have little knowledge of the opportunities which are open to them. It was also felt that the tendering process for obtaining funds may well have a negative effect on faith communities, as the requirements for submitting a bid - especially since the recent introduction of reforms to the bidding process - may simply cost faith communities too much in terms of resources⁷⁸.

'As with so many ministries I would love to see such initiatives in place and I am sure that faith groups could be of service. The question does often come down to resources and managing volunteers. There are also issues of safety and child protection where our rehabilitation of offenders statement has to also take into account vulnerable children.'

Considering the current policy context and strong emphasis on the role for faith communities in offender management (section 2), there was also a real concern that this was not seen by Government as a soft or cheap option⁷⁹. Given the resource constraints already mentioned, it is crucial that any work in which faith communities are involved is sufficiently backed with the necessary funding. However, one respondent *also* emphasised the need for faith communities themselves to be more 'hard-nosed', business-like and 'professional' about their involvement in offender management, and to be clearer about what expertise and knowledge they could bring to projects, and what level of resources they would need to accomplish this - in other words, to 'sell' themselves better as key partners of government. Concerns were also expressed that faith organisations, because of their local knowledge and strong local links, could be seen as an easy way for Government priorities to be *parachuted* into communities⁸⁰. Once co-opted into delivering government agendas, the independent voice and critical eye which faith communities could bring to debates would then be lost⁸¹.

While some faith communities - such as the Society of Friends - have a long history and considerable experience of working on offender management projects, others have very *little* experience of this type of work. One particular difficulty, which has been found in several studies of faith involvement in community work, is the difficulty in involving minority faiths. A recent study of work in prisons⁸² found that the 'nationally significant organisations are largely Christian' - and it was certainly the case in this piece of research.

'There are many, many areas of work and interest that the church could get involved in as time and resources allow, but supporting ex-offenders has not been one that anyone has particularly had a passion for, so it has not happened.'

In many cases faith communities we spoke to were not involved in working with offenders because they simply did not feel that there was any *need* for this type of work. Many projects are reliant on the particular motivation and commitment - the 'passion' - of individuals, meaning that projects can develop in a rather uneven way (with pockets of real excellence). This dependence on individual drive and motivation can leave projects - and those they are working with - vulnerable when that individual moves on, and further work will need to be done around making such projects sustainable⁸³.

In several cases, respondents felt that because of the particular nature of their area - often

participation. Their respondents felt that the effort and resources required to 'keep up' with government agendas was not fully appreciated.

⁷⁸ communication with the Regional Offender Manager

⁷⁹ As one respondent expressed it, this work cannot be done properly on 'a wing and a prayer'.

⁸⁰ This concern has been a feature of other research, for example James' (2007) study of the involvement of the faith sector in community development.

⁸¹ Again James (2007) found that faith organisations were concerned that their participation could be on a purely tokenistic level, and were anxious not to become merely part of a tick-box exercise.

⁸² Grimshaw and Thomas 2004

⁸³ Bissett cited in Rochester 2007

small and dispersed rural parishes, with mainly elderly congregations - their involvement was not needed. However, while this will be true in many cases in other cases it will not, and it is important that these faith communities feel sufficiently supported and confident in working with offenders – several respondents voiced the need for properly structured and clearly signposted support.

'Why have we never been involved in the kind of projects you suggest? Probably because no one from local or national government has approached us and asked us; or we are not aware of the need; or we don't feel we have the expertise to approach the authorities and offer help; or we are wary because of the (probably) considerable red-tape, regulations, and liability-issues involved. But we do care, and would care if someone in such need landed on our door-step'

5. Conclusions: future directions and a role for EEFC

• *Engaging with minority faiths*

However, the main challenge experienced by the research team was in engaging with representatives of minority faith projects⁸⁴ - a situation which unfortunately reflects the general picture of explorations into offender management work. As NOMS acknowledge, 'there has been minimal exploration of a range of faiths beyond Christianity'⁸⁵ and addressing this should become a major priority for EEFC's future work. In the current climate of concern about radicalisation particularly among young male Muslim prisoners⁸⁶, EEFC could potentially play a major part in deflating some of these myths – perhaps with a piece of research which explored the experiences of this group in custody (and on reintegrating into their communities). It should not, however, be assumed that such projects do not exist and it should be a priority for EEFC's future work to consider the different ways in which minority faiths engage with ex-offenders, or even those at risk of offending.

• *Acting as a bridge between regional and local levels*

NOMS (2007) has acknowledged that 'maintaining a regional presence can be particularly difficult for smaller faith communities'. This research found that often the highly coordinated and strategic work which is happening at the national and regional levels is often failing to filter down to local level, meaning that the development of good practice is relatively patchy – and dependent largely on the commitment of a few highly motivated individuals. The main role for EEFC in the future should be to act as a *bridge* between regional level activity and smaller local faith groups⁸⁷.

• *Acting as a signpost and reference point*

Several respondents expressed the feeling that they, and the faith communities which they represented, would be happy to offer engage with offenders and ex-offenders if they knew it was being backed up by *easily accessible and structured support* from other relevant agencies and points of reference. Many were deeply concerned about the issues affecting offenders, but simply had no idea either of where and how to access the support they themselves would need in order to engage with that offender, or of where to refer the offender so that they could access the support they needed. Rather than adding extra layers of complexity, and duplicating work which is already happening, EEFC could act as a signpost, reference point and source of support for members of smaller local faith groups

⁸⁴ Although we did have communication with – or information on – a number of prison imams.

⁸⁵ (2007: 13)

⁸⁶ Which are often unfounded or exaggerated, as discussed in Spalek, B. and El-Hassan, S. (2007).

⁸⁷ Discussion with Nathan Dick (CLINKS Community Chaplaincy Development Officer).

who are struggling with these difficulties⁸⁸

- ***Providing opportunities for networking and sharing information***

Another theme of the research was the fact that faith communities sometimes work in isolation and do not always share information effectively – as one respondent expressed it, ‘we are not always good at telling people what we do’. This habit of ‘not opening up’ was seen by another respondent as a real hindrance to progress and effective partnership working. The majority expressed a desire for EEFC to provide opportunities for them to develop networks and share information (which would also have the added effect of enhancing inter-faith working and understanding) so that people did not feel as if they were flying solo.

- ***Publicity and celebrating successes***

Although there is a range of offender management projects operating across the region in a variety of settings and contexts, there is also a distinct impression that work which takes place – while excellent and innovative – is often ‘uncoordinated and hidden’⁸⁹. There is future scope for EEFC to be involved here in publicising the successes of faith groups across the region in engaging with offenders and ex-offenders, and in preventing re-offending. This would not only raise the profile of offender management projects, but could also be an importance influence in reducing the stigma often associated with this area of work – which often appeared to be a reason for non-involvement of faith groups. Such publicity could also help prepare local communities to welcome ex-offenders, and lessen some of their (often very natural) anxieties about the risks involved. Further more, the use of publicity materials could raise awareness of the professionalism of this sector among statutory agencies⁹⁰.

There is scope here for future research into the success of such publicity materials in changing attitudes towards this area of engagement – and even in promoting the appeal of faith communities to offenders themselves.

⁸⁸ for example by enabling them to access training opportunities to enable them to manage risk, a key concern for many people we spoke to.

⁸⁹ communication with Regional Offender Manager for the East of England.

⁹⁰ several respondents raised the issue of concerns about proselytising, and NOMS (2007: 16) has also acknowledged that the faith ‘label’ can be off-putting - and that consequently these groups are ‘often overlooked by funders and others who do not see beyond the ‘faith’ label to their community and social action role’ (NOMS 2007: 16)

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