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## **BRINGING COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING TO JUSTICE: BACK TO A MUTUAL FUTURE FOR PROBATION?**

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### **Abstract**

In this think piece and position paper we consider mutual and cooperative solutions to key resettlement challenges, we believe to be germane to a focus on the future of probation post 2020. We argue that Senior *and colleagues'* (2016) identification of the relational co-production of rehabilitation within local communities as key to successful probation can equally well be understood in terms of 'mutuality' and cooperation in service delivery. We argue that this essence of probation can be re-captured in contemporary rehabilitation services by integrating probation practice more with the community, ideally in a context of broader efforts towards achieving economic fairness within localities. We report on one such initiative tied in with the distinct form of new municipal local economic development, defined as community wealth building being pioneered in Preston in the North West of England. This 'Preston Model' provides a context for discussing particular cooperative development work designed coproductively to better support offender resettlement. Our work in 'bringing the Preston Model to Justice' arguably has great potential for wider application in the quest for successful community re-entry and a positive impact upon desistance.

### **Keywords**

Community wealth building; Cooperatives; Prisons; Probation; Desistance.

## **INTRODUCTION**

A clear lesson of the recent reversals of the Transforming Rehabilitation (TR) reforms (MoJ, 2013) is that ideologically driven, ill-thought out privatisations of functioning public services represent a stark failure of the neoliberal project (Dominey & Gelsthorpe, 2020; Ludlow, 2014; Roberts, 2018; Walker *et al.*, 2019). Yet, before those of us, from an opposing ideological perspective, get carried away with this returning of vital services to the public realm we might consider a more sophisticated view than that offered in sometimes simplistic insourcing-outsourcing debates. Our deliberations in this regard might address questions of efficacy and worker and service user experiences within the public sector and, if we are honest, acknowledge various shortcomings. Whilst we remain committed to state funding and responsibility for probation and offender resettlement services at scale, we note that equivocal outcomes alongside staff and service user dissatisfactions are not the sole monopoly of organisational forms associated with neoliberal ideologues. We contend that the means by which we organise this work is an essential dimension of realising better results for all stakeholders. In this paper, we present a workable, cooperative, democratised organisational form for offender resettlement allied to alternative approaches for realising fairer local economic justice.

To make this case we marshal ideas that connect appreciation of cooperative models of employment to ideals of coproduced relational care and support within a more mutual approach to offender resettlement and desistance. We have taken up these ideas in a place, Preston in the North West of England, which is becoming known for its efforts to refashion a more equitable local economy and have levered this into a specific through the prison gate project. We describe progress to date on our development work to establish cooperative enterprises offering employment and support through co-ownership to groups of individuals associated with the Offender Personality Disorder pathway and we argue that this specifically mutual approach to working with offenders builds on Senior *et al*'s (2016) identification of 'relational co-production' as the essence of probation and, as such, mutuality in offender rehabilitation services constitutes a contemporary reframing of the traditional probation mission to 'advise, assist and befriend'.

## **Mutuality and cooperation**

Arguably, a grave error of neoliberal privatisation programmes is that these have been driven by both an atavistic desire to dismantle a mistrusted public sector, and an understanding of society, which overly privileges supposedly self-interested independent individualism over inter-dependent social relations between individuals who hold a wealth of regard for others. It seems more than obvious that if we view people engaged with the criminal justice system and striving to escape an offending identity as atomised individuals within a singularly self-centred society, then they, and we, are in some trouble. Desistance from offending only occurs in a relational context of inter-dependence (Weaver, 2012; 2014), not as a decision of some lone 'sovereign individual' of neo-liberal imagining (Davidson & Rees-Mogg, 1996). Senior *et al* (2016) see a key element in the 'essence of probation' as being the support and enabling of people involved with the criminal justice system to escape offending and an offending identity through such inter-dependent social relations, hence their restating of 'relational co-production' as key to the traditional probation mission.

Another way of looking at this key element in the essence of probation is through the lens of 'mutuality' (Buber, 1947; Yeoman, 2019). For Senior *et al* (2016) 'relational co-production' is, in the probation context, a 'shared endeavour' of professional and offender in enabling desistance, reflecting a broader conceptualisation of mutuality as:

"...concerned with the values, principles and practices which specify the conditions under which we are prepared to join our efforts to those of others in order to secure together what we cannot secure alone. Mutuality is therefore fundamentally relational, where mutual inter-relations possess the normative features of mutual respect, mutual esteem, dignity, equality, fairness and care" (Yeoman, 2019).

Insofar as joining '*our efforts to those of others in order to secure together what we cannot secure alone*' constitutes 'relational co-production' then mutuality can be seen as being an essential quality of probation. If mutuality is thus the essence of probation for commentators such as Senior and colleagues; for foundational figures in the humanities, it is the essence of humankind itself:

"...in the unfolding of the question about the essence of man...it is by beginning neither with the individual nor the collectivity, but only with the reality of the mutual relation between man and man, that this essence can be grasped" (Buber, 1947).

"The essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of social relations" (Marx, 1845).

Cooperation exists as both an historical form and organisational structure for the practice of mutuality with potential for future benefits at individual and social levels. Thus, echoing Buber and Marx, the capacity for mutuality through cooperation has been posited as a basis for human evolutionary advantage and the formation of complex society (Whiten & Erdal, 2012). Erik Erikson's (1964) theorising of child development identifies cooperation as a pivotal factor; individuals are not formed in isolation. For Erikson, it was clear that 'we learn how to be together before we learn how to stand apart' (Sennett 2012: 13). These psychosocial and philosophical tenets have been evidenced in a variety of social, practical and organisational developments across human history and different cultural backdrops.

In the industrial age, cooperative responses to the estrangement of working people under capitalism saw the establishment of successful cooperative enterprises initiated by the Rochdale pioneers; ideas and practices which have taken root, arguably even more successfully than in their birthplace, across Europe and parts of North America, notably the Basque Country, parts of Italy and Quebec. Indeed, most countries of the world have witnessed some degree of cooperative enterprise development. There is also a neglected history of the formation of black cooperatives post slavery in the US, operating in the teeth of racist obstruction and interestingly pointing to workable alternatives to the malaise of mass incarceration under an effective prison-industrial complex (Du Bois, 1907; Nembhard 2014). In these times when we are compelled to face up to the mattering of black lives, such

alternatives and the potential which they hold speak to the sort of democracies we would prefer to inhabit; those that explicitly value, not devalue, the lives of all of our fellow citizens (Davis, 2005).

There is growing evidence that more cooperative communities are healthier communities. They experience less inequality, more supportive networks, less conflict, greater satisfaction and happiness, less stress, enhanced life expectancy, and increased civic and democratic engagement (Erdal, 2014; Manley & Froggett, 2016; Ziersch *et al.*, 2005). In contrast, society under neoliberalism is riven with increasing levels of disadvantage, including stark inequalities of income and health, more conflict, more stressful work and lives, more unhappiness, mental distress and suicide, various adverse social impacts, increased crime, diminished educational achievement, and a pervasive loss of faith in institutions of democracy. Progressive commentators have noted how these deficits and crises of legitimacy are more pronounced in the most unequal societies and, importantly, how economic inequality is profoundly associated with health inequalities (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Conversely, fairer distribution of wealth leads to better health outcomes (Erdal, 2014). As Sennett (2012, page 280) puts it, our cooperative impulse is difficult to suppress: 'Modernity's brutal simplifiers may repress and distort our capacity to live together, but do not, cannot, erase this capacity. As social animals we are capable of cooperating more deeply than the existing social order envisions'.

### **Mutuality and desistance**

Mutuality as an organising principle and philosophy underpinning social and economic institutions is by no means new and neither is it a novel way of working with people who have committed criminal offences to support their desistance. Many traditional and pre-modern societies were based on mutuality and their influence and philosophy continue to this day (Mangaliso, 2001; Nussbaum, 2003; Venter, 2004) including in mutual approaches to desistance as a way of dealing with criminal behaviour (Bianchi 2010; Christie 1977; English 1996; Mokgoro 1998; Skotnicki 2019). There is also resonance in ideas of 'relational justice' (Burnside & Baker, 1994). Historically and across the world today there have been a wide range of forms of social and economic organisation based on mutuality that have worked with or been set up by people who have committed criminal offences (Bissonette, 2008; Hickey & Sharf, 1980; Skotnicki, 2019; Toch 1994.). They have been organised both by people in contact with the criminal justice system themselves as well as by people and institutions working with them (Cosgrove, 2011; Darke, 2013; Haslam & Reicher, 2012; Innes, 1980; McEvoy, 2001; Morris, 2003; Perrone, 2015;).

While Senior *et al* (2016) couch desistance in terms of 'relational co-production', others talk in terms of co-producing change as a mutual enterprise requiring the democratisation of resettlement services (Weaver & Nicholson, 2012). Such calls for democratisation in the public realm and criminal justice settings are not new, though the institutional vehicles by which this might be achieved may be less obvious to practitioners, managers and service users, wrapped up in the ongoing delivery of services beset with getting by on limited resources and subject to the vagaries and vicissitudes of rapidly cycling policy imperatives. That said, it is perhaps even in straightened economic times that cooperative and mutual

solutions come into their own, and these approaches may also offer ways to combine a valuing of the relational with a positive impact upon desistance.

## **Cooperatives and desistance**

The belief that relational co-production is most effective when the organisational arrangements of probation are integrated into local communities (Senior *et al.*, 2016), may be best served by co-operative structures of employment and service delivery (Weaver, 2016; Weaver & Nicholson, 2012); again, these are not necessarily new notions:

‘The evils which co-operation is intended to combat, are some of the greatest to which men are liable, viz. the great and increasing difficulties of providing for our families, and the proportionate danger of our falling into pauperism and crime’ (King, 1828).

‘The discipline of co-operative labour has no attraction for the rabble, and for those who join its ranks in a depraved condition it is the best school for the recovery or reformation of character’ (Kaufman, 1879).

These quotes from two nineteenth century co-operators neatly sum up the potential of cooperatives as the organisational basis for mutuality, personal growth and desistance support. Thus King (1828) implies that co-operatives help overcome structural barriers to desistance, specifically poverty and unemployment. Kaufman (1879) on the other hand points to the transformative learning potential for individuals of working in a co-operative, engendering a sort of redemptive personal development which might sustain desistance from future offending.

Such personal change – the ‘*reformation of character*’ - is also at the heart of modern theories of transformative learning (Freire, 2000; Mezirow, 1992). Democratised and cooperative personal transformations can subsequently contribute to social transformation in a specifically *mutual* process:

‘Personal transformation leads to alliances with others of like mind to work towards effecting necessary changes in relationships, organisations and systems, each of which requires a different mode of praxis’ (Mezirow, 1992, page 252).

Such mutuality can be institutionalised by setting-up and working in a co-operative, a mode of praxis which turns co-operatives themselves into sites of transformative learning; effecting both individual and structural change (Elias, 1997; Maruna, 2004; Vieta, 2014; Wilson & Reuss, 2000). Personal and social transformation is effected through the process of democratisation central to cooperative organisations, whereby participation in membership of the economic mutual-aid programme, that constitutes the co-operative, has analogues in other mutual-aid or peer supported programmes like Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous (Lavoie *et al.*, 1994).

Personal perspective transformation leading to social transformation is also at the heart of modern theories of desistance (Maruna, 2004) and co-operatives in the criminal justice context are similarly claimed to provide an institutional structure, that enables such transformations to take place (Cosgrove & O'Neill, 2011; Nicholson, 2011; 2019; Piacentini *et al.*, 2018; Weaver, 2012; 2016; 2019; Weaver & Nicholson, 2012). Co-ownership through membership is what distinguishes co-operatives from other forms of socio-economic institutions, and it is this that is held to constitute the 'co-operative advantage' (Mayo, 2015). Co-production through co-ownership is similarly held to be the means by which a multi-stakeholder co-operative of people who have committed criminal offences and those working with them can support the co-production of desistance (Weaver, 2013; Weaver & Nicholson, 2012).

Co-operatives with these objectives are a feature of many jurisdictions across the world but are only recently beginning to emerge in the UK (Armstrong & Maruna, 2016). We have taken up these ideas in a place, Preston in the North West of England, which is becoming known for its efforts to refashion a more equitable local economy and have levered this into a specific through the prison gate project. We describe below our progress to date on our development work to establish multi-stakeholder cooperative enterprises, offering employment and support through co-ownership to groups of individuals associated with the Offender Personality Disorder pathway, as both staff and service users engaged in a mutual endeavour to co-produce desistance.

### **The co-production of desistance in the offender personality disorder pathway**

Various commentators have pointed out the potential to transform public services across the board and respond to identified systems failures by the adoption of forms of workplace democracy and cooperative approaches that do justice to ideals of both employee and service user voice (McKeown *et al.*, 2018; Randall & McKeown 2014). In the particular case of criminal justice work, a persuasive case can be made for democratised and cooperative approaches having a positive impact upon the resettlement of offenders, most powerfully present in cooperative solutions to providing employment opportunities (Nicholson, 2016; Weaver & Nicholson, 2012). Ultimately, the mutuality and relational dimensions of these approaches offer potential to support significant desistance from offending (Weaver, 2019), and arguably this is even more so in the case of offenders with personality disorder where a breakdown in mutuality and the relational field lies at the heart of their criminality (Benefield & Haigh, 2020).

The notable evangelist for co-production, Albert Dzur (2019), has remarked upon a wealth of imaginative innovation to establish co-produced public and community services, often created from seemingly unpropitious circumstances or within highly challenging settings. The OPD Pathway presents such a challenging setting. The obvious tensions between ideals of care and imperatives of control (Dominey & Gelsthorpe, 2020) perhaps render probation and other criminal justice work at the sharper end of challenging a potential for genuine co-production. Notwithstanding this rather obvious fact, this work has been a locus for numerous creative and innovatory relational and democratic practices responses. The offender personality disorder pathway through prisons and out into resettlement services,

with an aim of successful, risk minimised community re-integration, has been responsible for organising some notable developments that have in turn been informed by broader critical thinking and philosophies and practices of mutuality. For example, Psychologically Informed Planned Environments (PIPEs) (NOMS & NHSE, 2013; Preston, 2015; Turley *et al.*, 2013) and a broader commitment to enabling environments (Haigh *et al.*, 2012) have their roots in the therapeutic community movement and build upon older developments such as the Grendon Underwood therapeutic community (Bennett & Shuker, 2018).

Clinicians and commissioners involved in the proselytization and operationalisation of these ideas have also called for a wider adoption of relational practices across society as a whole; underpinned by improved understandings of human development (Haigh & Benefield, 2019), all of which harks back to ideas of mutuality as the essence of probation and of humankind itself discussed above. For Benefield & Haigh (2020), it is a breakdown in the relational field – a breakdown of mutuality – that underlies the personal problems which attract a diagnosis of personality disorder and its criminogenic consequences and it is consequently the development of broader co-productive therapeutic alliances that will restore mutuality and repair relational breakdown.

The principles and practices of mutuality and co-production are congruent with such broader critical thinking, concerning therapeutic alliances and the possibilities for organising care and public service work on a more democratic and cooperative basis (Conaty, 2014; Mori, 2014). Hence our interest in the potential role of co-operatives in the restoration of mutuality and repair of relational breakdown in offender personality disorder services specifically, but also wider criminal justice systems. The democratic social relationships available to individuals within cooperative settings such as PIPEs or fully-fledged cooperative workplaces might be thought to impact desistance at the level of identity (see Preston, 2015). Arguably, we might anticipate that building a sustainable cooperative business from within the PIPE system, authentically coproducing its formation, affords opportunities to claim substantially positive worker and citizen identities which otherwise might prove elusive to this client group.

### **Community Wealth Building – the Preston Model**

The Mondragon networked cooperative ecosystem in the Spanish Basque Country, is arguably the most well-developed blueprint for a cooperative community, and has informed later developments in the US, especially Cleveland and Cincinnati but also further afield, and, indeed, within Preston where our work is located. But Mondragon is not alone, and countries such as Italy have their own well-developed cooperative systems, not least the unique development of social cooperatives within the Emilia Romagna region (Ecchia *et al.*, 2016; Picciotti *et al.*, 2014). In different ways and at different times such community-wide development of cooperatives has been strongly associated with a need to furnish solutions in times of economic downturn, austerity, disadvantage and unemployment. The approach has been successful in both rural and urban environments but, latterly, has been advocated as a response to patterns of urban decline in particular, such as in the adoption within the aforementioned US cities and amidst the interest in so-called new municipalisms in the UK, including Preston, where the approach targets local community wealth accumulation and distribution.

Community Wealth Building (Democracy Collaborative, 2020; Guinan & O'Neill, 2020) is a new approach to community economic development with advocates right across the party political spectrum (Preston City Council, 2020; Kruger, 2020; Scottish Government, 2020). Like mid to late twentieth century probation it is rooted in the European Social Democratic tradition, in which the state works to protect public values and promote the common good. But it also draws inspiration from mutual approaches where the community works to protect public values and the common good through co-operative structures of employment and service delivery (Weaver & Nicholson, 2012). Community Wealth Building puts the two traditions together by using local government procurement and the spending of other key organisations rooted in the city to stimulate the local economy and cooperative development. There has been much media interest, particularly in the pugnacious dynamism of this analysis of economic issues and how progressive ideals of cooperation and mutuality, can be advanced within a localism framed by new municipal politics (Chakraborty, 2018; 2019; Manley, 2017; Wainwright, 2018a, b).

The Preston Model was built upon a desire for a fairer local economy, with alternative approaches sought following the abject failure of more traditional urban and regional development initiatives to deliver for smaller municipalities, amidst some notable withdrawals of promised private sector investments. Led by Councillor Matthew Brown's Labour Party in the City Council, structural problems in the local economy were diagnosed by CLES (the Centre for Local Economic Strategies) and ideas for constructive solutions were solicited from allies in the local community and from as far afield as the Basque country and Ohio in the US. CLES made the case for a strategy led by efforts to ensure anchor institutions enlarged the extent to which procurement was sourced from local businesses (CLES/Preston City Council, 2019; Schaefer, 2018). This also enabled identification of key gaps in the capacity of the local economy to respond to procurement opportunities, in turn making the case for new cooperative enterprises to fill these gaps, to be supported by a new collective, Preston Cooperative Development Network.

The Open Society Foundation, focused on a broader democratisation mission, is funding ten start-up worker cooperatives and there is growing trade union interest, including development of fully unionised worker cooperatives (Bird *et al.*, 2021; 2020a, b). One of the planned new cooperatives will be a Cooperative Education Centre and this is being organised as a union cooperative with early support from the Trades Council and a variety of unions. Inspired by ideas from Mondragon, attention to education is a crucial dimension of an aspired for Preston ecosystem, aiming to inculcate an enduring culture of cooperation and mutuality and empower citizens and workers to be full agents in their own communities and workplaces. The explicit objective of securing and expanding democratic participation is an important goal, but also forms part of a broader resistance to perceived failings in the public realm which have resulted in a crisis of legitimacy of governance systems and democracy itself (Guinan & O'Neil, 2018; 2020). Key to the ongoing strength and sustainability of the Preston Model will be the establishment of a cooperative Regional investment bank, anticipated to come on stream in 2022. The ultimate aim is for a fully scaled-up co-operative economy to the benefit of all (McInroy, 2018) that, in many ways, revisits earlier prescribed but neglected blueprints for social change (Doherty, 2019; Wainwright, 2018).

### **Community Wealth Building: back to a mutual future for probation?**

Where this is of relevance to the future of probation is that firstly 'wealth' in this context is not used solely in a narrow economic sense but is increasingly thought of in terms of community wellbeing (Nicholson & Mills, 2021). Probation is a key part of building community wellbeing insofar as it protects public values and promotes the common good by enabling desistance from further offending by people who have committed criminal offences. Secondly, for proponents of Community Wealth Building, community wellbeing, like probation, is best co-produced relationally from a local community base. Community Wealth Building does this through co-operative structures of employment and service delivery, making the most of the people, talent, skills and ideas that already exist in every community (Cooperative Party, 2020). And thirdly, it uses the spending power of state and other 'anchor' institutions to stimulate the development of these co-operatives that protect public values and promote the common good.

Our contention is that probation should do the same by acting as an 'anchor' institution itself, and by using the co-operative structures of Community Wealth Building as the community base for the relational co-production of the rehabilitation of people, who have committed criminal offences which is essential for effective probation (Senior *et al.* 2016). This is nothing new for probation. As we have argued, probation's foundational mission to 'advise, assist and befriend' is a fundamentally mutual approach to enabling desistance and supporting rehabilitation. But throughout probation's history across the world there have also been proposals and practical pilot initiatives to enable desistance and support rehabilitation – to advise, assist and befriend – through membership of cooperative commercial enterprises and mutual structures of service delivery. Some international examples are discussed in Weaver & Nicholson (2012), while others are to be found in the Israeli Kibbutz movement and Italian social cooperatives referred to above. Similar to the aspirations for Preston, networked cooperative communities have been developed elsewhere and worked with offenders as community members co-producing their desistance and 'reform through community' (Fischer & Geiger, 1991). The Israeli Kibbutz movement, inspired very much by Buber (1947) ran 'resocialisation programs' throughout the 1980s and 90s with offenders in the Kibbutz, and designed to restore mutuality and repair the relational breakdown underlying their criminality by using membership of a working cooperative community as the modality of change (Fischer & Geiger, 1994; Fischer & Teichman, 1985; Shoham & Timor, 2006).

Numerous international examples of cooperative solutions established in a criminal justice or probation context include the following: In the Philippines probation officers actively encourage the formation of probation/parolees' organisations and ex-offenders' associations, for the purpose of mutual assistance in their rehabilitation efforts and advocacy in improving probation programmes and services. Probationers are encouraged to organise cooperatives or join an existing cooperative or credit union to secure loans and gain access to markets to support their economic rehabilitation (Hamai *et al.*, 1995). In the United States there are a number of high profile cooperatives set up by 'returning citizens' actively supported by probation and other rehabilitation professionals. Like King (1828) and Kaufman (1879) their express purpose is to overcome the structural barriers to desistance and effect personal change through membership of an enterprising co-operative. Core

staffing (<https://www.corestaffing.us/home>) is a cooperative staffing agency for returning citizens (previously incarcerated individuals) that uses temporary work, open occupational-focused education, and shared ownership to achieve the entrepreneurial, educational, and career goals of its members while delivering affordable talent to its clients. ChiFresh Kitchen (<https://www.chifreshkitchen.com/>) is a new worker-owned food service contracting cooperative on the West Side of Chicago. All its founding worker-owners are formerly incarcerated Black women who face disproportionate levels of formal and informal discrimination in the labour market. As cooperative business owners, they now have a chance to rewrite not only their own futures, but also create a space of opportunity and empowerment for other women. Second Chances Farm (<https://secondchancesfarm.com/about>) is a commercial, hydroponic, indoor vertical farm that grows chemical - and pesticide-free leafy greens, herbs and pharmaceutical-grade hemp. Its worker co-owners are all formerly incarcerated people whose job prospects are limited by their prison records.

In the UK similar initiatives have long been advocated and piloted by progressive leaders in probation. John Harding, Community Service pioneer in the 1970s and later Chief Probation Officer for Inner London saw co-operatives as a '*higher*' form of supported employment offering access to the mainstream labour market for people on probation and creating permanent opportunities where exclusion from the mainstream persisted (Harding, 1978). Bridge (1976) advocated co-operatives as similarly *superior* forms of supported employment promoting individual change. Sikking (1986; 1987) records her and colleagues' success in putting Bridge's and Harding's aspirations into practice, clearly demonstrating in Calderdale and Greater Manchester how to operate commercially competitive co-operative enterprises which simultaneously maintain a supportive environment providing resettlement support for people with a criminal record and people in recovery from substance use and mental health problems.

Construction and housing co-operatives have often been the focus for initiatives like this. Bagghott One Housing Cooperative described itself as '*perhaps the only self-supporting housing co-operative in Britain which was set up by ex-prisoners for ex-prisoners*', addressing that other key enabler of desistance, access to affordable and habitable accommodation. It also ran a building and specialist plastering co-operative which specialised in renovating properties for housing associations and ran prison programmes on how to cope with life after release through mutual aid (Winfield & Riddick, 1983). Giroscope (<https://giroscope.org.uk/>) takes a more multi-stakeholder cooperative approach to building a desistance-supporting community around its ex-offender and wider community membership. It was conceived in the mid-eighties in Hull by a group of students and young unemployed people who decided to take direct action to resolve their own housing situation. Establishing a Workers' Cooperative in 1986, Giroscope members purchased their first house using their Giro cheques for a deposit and set about redeveloping the property to provide accommodation for the unemployed. In 2007 they became a Registered Charity, by now owning over forty residential properties and nine business, retail and trading premises, and in 2009 they began working with HMP Everthorpe, helping ex-offenders rehabilitate into society by providing them with volunteer/training opportunities, and

where necessary housing – introducing ex-offenders to their cooperative approach to community building and supporting their rehabilitation in the process.

There are also instances of probation delivering its mainstream services in a more membership-based mutual way. Vanstone (1985) describes a Probation Day Centre in Gloucester run as a membership-based mutual geared to engaging offenders and their families in building community wellbeing:

“It emphasized voluntary participation and the concept of mutual help and it combined an open door policy with practical assistance via a structured programme. This meant that a wide range of people could use the centre and choose between casual contact and help through a formalized work agreement; those who entered into agreements became ‘members’ of the centre”

There is, therefore, quite a history of probation service users, staff and allied community resettlement and support services using the co-operative structures allied to principles and practices of community wealth building as a base for the relational co-production of the rehabilitation of people who have committed criminal offences.

### **Preston possibilities**

Our current initiative to build on these precedents had its inception in a Relational Movement seminar convened at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan), one of the Preston anchor institutions, and facilitated by Rex Haigh and Nick Benefield. The purpose of this event was to build cross-perspective interest in an idea for a social movement framed by the sort of human relational practices to be found in therapeutic communities, PIPEs, ecotherapy and such like with a view to extending such approaches at a community level or across hitherto untouched public services which might benefit from a relational, democratic and coproduction ethos. Participants were invited from a broad church of services, community and civic society groups, and academic disciplines. These included criminal justice commissioners, managers and practitioners associated with the Offender Personality Disorder (OPD) pathway, users and survivors of services, Preston City Council officers involved in the community wealth building agenda, cooperative developers and solidarity economy activists, academics interested in democracy, voice, participation and employment relations, and a wide range of other affiliated stakeholders. Somewhat serendipitously, networking and workshop activities on the day brought together a group of participants who began to think through the potential of cooperative solutions for identified problems concerning employment and resettlement in the OPD pathway specifically, and prisons, secure mental health units and step-down facilities more generally.

One of the lead national commissioners for the OPD pathway, Mick Burns, had been instrumental in initial planning for the seminar and subsequently took the lead in convening steering group meetings to drive the cooperative idea forward that brought together commissioners, prison governors, PIPE staff, resettlement services staff, UCLan academics, the lead council officer for cooperative development, cooperative developers with knowledge and experience in prisoner cooperatives. These included the two authors here,

Dave Nicholson of ExCell and CMS, and Mick McKeown from UCLan School of Nursing and Criminal Justice Partnership. ExCell and CMS were commissioned to undertake preliminary fact-finding and scoping to lay the foundations for future work, and subsequently have undertaken more detailed consultancy with prison staff, prisoners and staff and service users in resettlement services to identify the most promising areas of activity which could be developed into cooperative enterprises. The commissioners have since allocated a further £50,000 to refine and develop these ideas and emergent cooperatives could also be eligible for start-up support from the OSF project. It is likely that considerable further allocation of resources will be required to fully implement these ideas and the steering group are focused upon bringing this to fruition.

A range of possibilities have been explored, including for instance cooperative solutions to aspects of social care, building upon established prison buddying schemes developed and delivered by RECOOP, supporting older people with convictions (<https://www.recoop.org.uk/>). The consultancy work, however, has been required to take a rational approach to sifting ideas with the most immediate practical viability and commensurate with the democratic choices of participating staff and service users. We have built a consensus around three opportunities for distinct models of cooperative development delivering relationally co-produced probation services through cooperative employment. These three models represent a mutual future for probation service delivery running alongside and adding value to mainstream probation practice, which build on the UK and international experience of co-operatives in probation briefly outlined above. These are:

1. **Edith Rigby Co-operative** – a multi-stakeholder co-operative holding company supporting ‘socially creative’<sup>1</sup> enterprise activities developed by residents and staff of a women’s Approved Premises PIPE Unit
2. **Build a Life Co-operative** – a multi-stakeholder ‘Cooperative Recovery Community’ delivering a new community-led service within the Lancashire Offender Personality Disorder (OPD) Pathway, refurbishing empty properties and self-build new build accommodation for service users and others in housing need.
3. **Goop<sup>2</sup> Co-operative** – a multi-stakeholder cooperative supporting ‘socially creative’ horticultural enterprise activities developed by residents and staff of the HMP Wymott PIPE Units. The intention is to use this as a pilot for the longer-term development of a collaborative network of GOOP Coops in other prisons and Approved Premises with a resettlement function across the NW, tracking the

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Socially creative activities’ are one of the four components of the standard PIPE model. See [http://pielink.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/NOMS-DoH-PIPEGuide\\_October2014.pdf](http://pielink.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/NOMS-DoH-PIPEGuide_October2014.pdf) Our co-operative model translates ‘socially creative’ activities into ‘socially enterprising’ activities within a multi-stakeholder co-operative of staff and residents

<sup>2</sup> In a broader sense, Greener on the Outside of Prisons (GOOP ) is a programme of therapeutic horticulture and conservation work, currently operating in a number of north west prison settings.

journey of prisoners from one prison to another and then into the community, particularly, but not exclusively those on the OPD Pathway – a through the prison gate cooperative employment and resettlement society.

## Conclusions

Our contention is that these three models of multi-stakeholder cooperative

- A holding company supporting 'socially creative' enterprise activities
- A 'Cooperative Recovery Community'
- A through the prison gate co-operative employment and resettlement society

provide firstly a means of using mutuality (or relational co-production) to overcome the challenges faced by individuals transitioning through offender personality disorder pathway support by repairing relationships through co-operative working. Secondly, they provide a template for bringing Community Wealth Building ideals and practices to justice – applying the co-operative development principles of the Preston Model to probation and other offender rehabilitation services. Thirdly, in so doing they provide a new and contemporary expression of key elements of Senior *et al's* (2016) essence of probation – relational co-production from a local base integrated in local communities translated into and feeding off authentic 'mutuality' in service delivery.

We argue that these three models present a workable, cooperative, democratised organisational form for offender rehabilitation and resettlement allied to alternative approaches for realising fairer local economic justice. Progress in this regard offers broad potential to foster health and mental well-being at community level and resettlement and rehabilitation for individuals. New cooperative enterprises like those envisaged here may be a better way of organising certain aspects of health, social care and resettlement (and chime in with some old ways). They represent forms of democratic organisation relevant to work in the public realm, providing a foundation for interesting developments and research into civic society and wellbeing. In Preston we have an opportune location with convergence between a burgeoning model of community wealth building and the perceived value and virtue of relational, cooperative approaches to offender rehabilitation and resettlement amongst diverse stakeholders, not least commissioners. We have thus been able to harness the conjoint efforts of an effectively constituted group of allies to drive our project. There has been welcome initial investment to develop these ideas and practices, but more is needed. We are optimistic for the realisation of concrete examples of new cooperatives that can then act as a beacon for other similar developments elsewhere across the system, not least in terms of showing that successful desistance and community re-integration can be achieved.

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