

## CS26: HMP RYE HILL INITIAL TRAINING COURSE

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### Context

Staff retention at HMP Rye Hill had always been a concern since the prison opened in 2001. The prison is located centrally in the UK in an area of high employment with many job opportunities, and as a result many staff left within nine months of being recruited. Management was concerned that new staff were not adequately prepared for working in the prison, and this was exacerbated by the high number of assaults occurring at that time in the prison. In 2007 HMP Rye Hill received a very critical report from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons which commented: *"Staff did not challenge prisoner behaviour and did not set boundaries for prisoners. It was clear that staff were being conditioned to inappropriate conduct"*.

The Initial Training Course (ITC) in use at the prison for newly recruited staff was a ten-week training course that, amongst other topics, included operational security, interpersonal skills and first aid. There were concerns that this training did not prepare Staff Trainees to engage with prisoners. Prison Dialogue (PD) contracted to help in this area, and introduced Dialogue sessions into the ITC from October 2007. Innovatively, these Dialogues included both prisoners and Trainee staff from the ITC in the same conversation.

### Aims and Objectives

The aim was to reduce the loss of newly qualified staff from the prison. To achieve this it was necessary to increase the Trainees confidence to engage professionally with prisoners from day 1, and to handle potentially confrontational situations. The interest, therefore, was for Trainees to understand prison life from the point of view of a prisoner, to hear genuinely from prisoners how doing their job correctly would reduce confrontation and keep the prison safe, why confrontation happens in a prison, to develop an awareness of how confrontation might impact them personally, to learn how to be more effective in such situations through practice, and to understand the contribution successful handling of confrontational situations makes to improving the management of a prison.

## **Method: Activity, Participation and Duration**

It was agreed that PD facilitated training on 8 ITCs Between December 2007 and May 2010 with sessions that included Trainees, Prisoners, Unit managers and Senior Managers. The design was for a day of open Dialogue in the first week of the ITC with prisoners and staff at all levels looking at what makes a good prison officer; a day in week 8 focussed specifically on managing confrontation and conflict; and a day of dialogue in the final week, half with prisoners and half just with staff and managers which was usually focussed on team work and what to do when you your colleagues are no the job as you have been taught.

Rather than more traditional didactic teaching Trainees and prisoners learned together. In the session on managing confrontation and conflict everyone thought through the different sides of the conflict and confrontation together, with real prisoners and real officers acting out a real situation. By deliberately slowing down the action it was possible to show what is involved, and what is behind peoples words, so that Trainees could make better decisions about how to handle a situation successfully. This was followed by a reflection between staff and prisoners on how to improve the ability to handle confrontational situations.

The concept of 'Managing Conflict - Minimise and Deal with Obstructive Behaviour' was broken down into a sequence of six steps that became part of the ITC. They are:

- *Do something* - you are paid to act
- *Explain* - or fuel the conflict
- *Decide* - use your professional judgement
- *Think* – there is always more than one option
- *Ask and Listen* – there may be more to this than meets the eye
- *Read the situation* – the Potential for Conflict?

## **Outcomes**

Staff were more confident when they started working in the prison and staff retention improved significantly. Perhaps more significantly, the number of assaults decreased. HMP Rye Hill went on to achieve the Investors in People Award for training that staff believes equips them for their new role.

The Director of HMP Rye Hill said that in her experience: *“This was the first time that prisoners had been involved in staff training. As a result of the training, new staff entered the prison with more confidence in their ability to talk to prisoners.”*

## **Learning**

Prisoners learned that genuine people come to work in a prison to have a decent career and make a difference. They had more understanding of the challenges for for new staff and found ways to help them as they arrived on the units.

HMP Rye Hill learned that it can address staff/prisoner relations from induction and thereby impact the state of the prison. PD proved what it already suspected – that prisons have a significant highly-skilled resource in their prisoner population if only they knew how to draw on it.

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