



**WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS:
Prisons, Community Corrections and Administration
talking & thinking together**

by Peter Garrett and Jane Ball

Context

Prison Dialogue had worked with Harold Clarke previously in Nebraska DOC (see Nebraska Department of Corrections case study) and welcomed this request to work with him four years later when he became Commissioner of the Washington Department of Corrections. He had developed a theory of organisational change which involved an external audit of the department as he arrived in his new role, a Future Search conference to engage external stakeholders in creating a vision, and then the introduction of Dialogue expertise. Prison Dialogue registered as a not-for-profit organisation in Washington State and contracted to make five one-week visits in 2006, which was repeated in 2007. Washington was a substantially larger correctional system than Nebraska, with 20 prisons and 30 community corrections districts.

Aims and Objectives

Commissioner Clarke wanted to improve the working relationships between Prisons, Community Corrections and central Administration, to engage the organisation to think together rather than in separate silos and to support a substantial re-entry initiative, encouraged by the political administration. Prison Dialogue sought experience of designing large-scale system-wide change that would be delivered by the system itself, and to deepen their international experience.

Method: Activity, Participants and Duration

The first stage was framed as Discovery, after which the aims and activities of the next four trips would be defined. Peter and Jane interviewed the entire Executive by telephone prior to holding sessions with the Executive and the Extended Leadership Team at off-site locations near Olympia, WA. The large-system change model that was employed involved a variety of Dialogic patterns that are less dependent on skill development to be effective. These included Concentric Circle work (where differences are emphasised in order to bring people closer together), the Wall History (to bring people's personal stories into the same larger organisational story), Leading Energy work (to

incorporate a full spectrum of engagement and leadership), and Reciprocal Coaching Trios (to develop coaching by-standing skills). Underlying theory included the Implicate Change Model (for participatory change) and the Container Development Model (for growth and coaching). These patterns and theory were intellectual property developed by Dialogue Associates, a member of Prison Dialogue, and given to the not-for-profit charity for broad international use.

During the Discovery period it became evident that the development of highly skilled Dialogue Practitioners would be the best way to support the re-entry initiatives. 12 Dialogue Practitioners benefitted from a one-year Dialogue Practitioner Development Programme (DPDP) and undertook a range of significant re-entry initiatives which they documented. These were born out of the needs of the system and embedded deeply in it. (See Case study Washington DOC: Dialogue Practitioner Development Programme and Re-entry Initiatives.)

Outcomes

Prisons, Community Corrections and the Administration Departments worked together using the Leading Energies and put together a successful case for substantial re-entry funding that ultimately enabled a reduction in recidivism rates across the State of Washington. A range of innovative re-entry initiatives were authored and delivered within the State. Large group conversation became a constructive means for staff to talk together across hierarchical and departmental boundaries. Executive Team members, Wardens, Community Chiefs and Dialogue Practitioners all benefitted from personal growth, skill building and increased confidence.

Prison Dialogue designed an effective model for developing Dialogue Practitioners who had the skills to initiate Dialogue, provide skill building and coaching to sustain Dialogue and to intervene in challenging situations. In Washington Dialogue was seen as an effective approach for professional Corrections work.

Learning

Dialogue was seen as means of realising intrinsic value for participants, rather than something to be promoted in itself. This placed Dialogue skill building in service of organisational and team needs rather than in service of Dialogue for Dialogue's sake.