

**BOURNEMOUTH AND DORSET THRESHOLD DIALOGUE:  
Through The Gate, Multi-Stakeholder Partnership To Reduce  
Re-Offending  
by Jane Ball and Peter Garrett**

## **Context**

In January 2006, Prison Dialogue launched the Bournemouth Threshold Dialogue pilot, an innovative inter-agency intervention based on Dialogue, to support high-repeat offenders leaving HMP Dorchester and returning to the community in Boscombe, Bournemouth. The aim was to reduce their re-offending. Over the next 5 years this developed into Dorset Threshold Dialogue with a network of Threshold Dialogues in three prisons and three community centres, a multi-agency team of trained facilitators, an integrated inter-agency Operations Group and Governance Board.

The project was initiated during the final phase in the Prison Turnaround at HMP Dorchester<sup>1</sup> on which Prison Dialogue had been working since 2002. The vision of the Governor and the Senior Management Team at HMP Dorchester was not only internally focussed (on improving delivery and on engaging staff and prisoners) but also outward-facing, recognising that a prison is also part of a community and that offenders move between the two. Prison Dialogue wanted to develop ideas for providing community supervision through Dialogue, first pioneered in the partnership with Cambridge Probation Service<sup>2</sup>, 1996-8. This was as an opportunity to create a replicable model for integrated multi-agency resettlement support for prisoners, through-the-gate from the prison into the community.

In line with national policy, Dorset Criminal Justice Board<sup>3</sup> was establishing projects for Prolific and other Priority Offenders (and some High Repeat Offenders) who were responsible for committing the majority of crime in the area. Many of them experienced problems with drugs and alcohol, mental health, unemployment and homelessness, and were trapped in a revolving door in and out of prison, but never serving a long enough sentence to benefit from meaningful intervention work in prison. Bournemouth Threshold Dialogue was ideally suited to work with this particular group of offenders because it could continue to work with them seamlessly as they moved in and

out of prison. The Dorset Criminal Justice Board provided some basic grant funding and Prison Dialogue secured additional funding over the following years from JP Getty Junior Charitable Trust, Mulberry Trust, Tudor Trust and Dialogue Associates Ltd.

### **Aims and Objectives**

The aims of the Threshold Dialogue were to reduce re-offending and to improve relationships and understanding between repeat offenders and those charged with their management so that they could work more effectively together to do so. In addition, Threshold Dialogue aimed to:

- Engage with the offenders whilst in custody to help them to prepare for release
- Support the offender in their transition back into the community and once they were resettled
- Enhance the resettlement opportunities that were available
- Develop staff awareness of the needs of offenders in resettlement
- Promote closer partnership working between agencies and enable joined up practice

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

Threshold Dialogue was based on the extensive use of Dialogue as a forum for prisoners and the agencies involved in resettlement and crime reduction to come together to think through what was needed to make resettlement a success. These Dialogue forums were based in prison and the community. They followed the offender on their journey across the 'threshold' of the prison gate, hence the name Threshold Dialogue. Offenders often crossed the threshold with intentions not to return to prison, but did not seem able to sustain the transition into an offence-free life.

There were three phases in the development of Threshold Dialogue in Bournemouth and Dorset. The first phase ran throughout 2006 and was evaluated by Coventry University<sup>4</sup>. 41 offenders, who were defined as Prolific and other Priority Offenders or High Repeat Offenders and were from Bournemouth, took part. Prison Dialogue facilitated 2 cycles of Bournemouth Threshold Dialogue in HMP Dorchester and Bournemouth town. The sessions ran weekly both in the prison and in the community. Prisoners were awarded certificates for completing the whole programme. Agencies came into the

prison to take part in the sessions, including Police Officers and agency staff. Previously Police had only come into a prison in order to investigate a criminal offence, and it was unheard of for Police in uniform to come and meet and talk at length with a group of prisoners. The prison staff were so nervous about walking them through the centre of the prison that they instead took a back-route to the meeting room. In the other direction, Prison Officers attended Community-based meetings with ex-offenders who they had known in prison, and worked closely with the community agencies. Some prisoners were granted Release on Temporary Licence to attend Dialogues in the community before their release, engaging with the Probation and agency staff who would be supervising and supporting them and the Police from their community who would be “keeping their eye on them”.

The second phase extended the Threshold Dialogue network based around Bournemouth and in doing so established the Dorset Threshold Dialogue. HMP Dorchester was a local prison (housing remand and short term prisoners, like a jail in the US) and prisoners were moved on from there regularly to nearby HMP Guys Marsh, a training prison set up for sentenced prisoners to engage in purposeful work, training, education and programmes.

**Back in prison again?  
Sick of the merry-go-round?  
Want to change but don't know how?**

**Are you:**  
From the Bournemouth Area?  
Struggling with drug and/or alcohol addiction?  
Constantly in and out of prison?  
Due for release and worried about the future?

We've worked with lots of people like you  
In prison and on the out  
We want you to stay out of jail!!!  
Help us help you

**Prison and Community Threshold Dialogue**

Bournemouth area only - find out more - get an app in...

Running every Tuesday until 15.01.08

Prison: 2-3.30pm Chapel, HMP Dorchester  
Community: 6-8pm CRI Clubhouse, Boscombe, B'mth

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PRISON DIALOGUE

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Following the offenders' journey, Threshold Dialogue was introduced at HMP Guys Marsh next, and then later into the young offender institution HMYOI Portland. In the community, Threshold Dialogue was established at two sites in Bournemouth, at a supported Housing Unit that offered accommodation to prisoners on release, and at a direct access hostel and day centre for people

whose lives were more chaotic. It was also established at one site in the neighbouring Borough of Poole. More agencies became consistently involved, including Police, Probation, Bournemouth Borough Council, Drugs and Alcohol Services (particularly CRI - Crime Reduction Initiatives), and accommodation providers (particularly BCHA - Bournemouth Churches Housing Association). At the same time an inter-agency Operations Group and Governance Board<sup>5</sup> were set up to provide local leadership and integrated ownership for the initiative and a team of facilitators was trained<sup>6</sup> so that Threshold Dialogue could be sustained without Prison Dialogue's long term involvement. Key to this sustainability was the case that Threshold Dialogue was an effective and efficient way for all of the agencies to carry out their 'day job' and it was a valuable way for staff to apply their time. For example, the Police recognise that engagement with local offenders is an effective way to improve policing and a Police Officer could achieve over 20 hours of high quality engagement with local offenders in a 90 minute Dialogue with 15 prisoners.

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| <p><b>Sessions held at</b></p> <p><b>HMP Guys Marsh</b><br/>Tuesdays 9am – 10.30am</p> <p><b>HMP Dorchester</b><br/>Tuesdays 2pm – 3.30pm</p> <p><b>HMYOI Portland</b><br/>Tuesdays 6pm – 7.30pm</p> <p><b>BCHA St Paul's</b><br/>10 St Paul's Lane<br/>Bournemouth<br/>Thursdays 1.30pm – 3pm</p> <p><b>BCHA Dorset Lodge</b><br/>10 Suffolk Road<br/>Bournemouth<br/>BH2 5SX<br/>Thursdays 4pm – 6pm</p> <p><b>Poole</b><br/>DAAT, North Road<br/>Wednesdays 3pm – 5pm</p> <p>@PRISON DIALOGUE 2013</p> | <p>Who are we?</p>  <p>Supported by:</p>  <p>[V - 22/6/10]</p> | <p>Back out of prison again<br/>Sick of the merry-go-round<br/>Want to change<br/>Don't know how to change</p> <p><b>BOURNEMOUTH THRESHOLD DIALOGUE</b><br/>Bournemouth Agencies in a Partnership to help Bournemouth Offenders</p> <p>We've worked with lots of people like you in prison and on the out<br/>We want you to stay out of jail !!!<br/>Help us to help you</p> |
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The third phase of Threshold Dialogue was the handover of Dorset Threshold Dialogue to the local agencies at the Line of Sight Workshop in November 2010<sup>7</sup>.

## Outcomes

In 2007, one of the practitioners was a Team Award Winner for the Dorset Justice Award for the 'Partnership of the Year'. Genuine effective strategic and operational partnership was significantly improved among the agencies. There was progress towards shared ownership and an integrated approach to reducing re-offending. A shared understanding of the 'offender journey' and a wider knowledge of the range of support services, and the gaps between them greatly enhanced the resettlement opportunities and successes for offenders. On a day-to-day at the frontline of offender services there was far greater inter-agency co-operation and collaboration, and a firm contribution was made to enhanced community safety.

*"From our point of view, what is unique about the Dialogue methodology is that it not only seeks change from the (ex-)offender but also encourages relevant organisations to change their working practices to make them more responsive to the needs of their clients".* Bournemouth Community Safety Partnership.

*"I have learned a lot today. I've always blamed Probation for areas that they no longer have the remit, time or resources for. My mind has been completely changed by what I've heard today".* Prison Officer.

One spin off development was an inter-agency initiative in Bournemouth to provide private rented housing and employment advice and support to prisoners immediately on release. Called 'Line of Sight', it required no additional resources, just existing services talking, thinking and working together in a different and more collaborative way.

Dorset Threshold Dialogue provided an opportunity for the agencies to see the offenders in another environment and to work effectively in depth with a large group of offenders through the dynamic of Dialogic group work.

*"Dialogue helps you to break down stereo-typical beliefs – eg between police and offenders - because when you talk to people in a situation like that that you see their human side, whether you agree with their views or not".* Police Officer

Threshold Dialogue recognised the crisis that offenders have to manage on release from prison, and helped individual offenders to manage that crisis and successfully make the transition. In prison most offenders have most decisions made for them: when they are locked up; when they have association; when they eat; and in some cases, what they wear. In the community, in resettlement they have to think for themselves and manage their own lives, which can be stressful and challenging when support seems hard to access.

*“Other people highlighting your strengths give you the confidence you need to move forward and change. Sometimes other people’s feedback can be uncomfortable at first but once you’ve processed it, it can help”.* Ex-offender

The Bournemouth Borough Council changed its policy on Anti-social Behaviour Orders as a result of engaging with offenders in Threshold Dialogue and understanding the counter-productive implications for ex-offenders of some of the terms imposed.

## **Learning**

Despite years of experience and the quality provision that the agencies already provided, they realised that they could learn more about the needs of the offenders they worked with, and about different ways in which they might do their work to prevent re-offending. Agencies learned more about each other, and about how they could work together more effectively. Through-the-gate thinking was really embedded in the mind-set of Bournemouth services.

PD learned about the Offender Journey and created models and language to support that learning, including:

Line of Sight – the path that an offender needs to take from their current position to be resettled. It needs to be clear, simple and well-informed to be successful.

Crisis of Release – the emotional crisis that prisoners experience on their journey as they prepare for release and move through-the-gate across the prison threshold.

Crisis of Entry/Re-entry – the emotional crisis offenders experience as they anticipate going to prison (...again) that, without support, may lead them to commit further offences.

There are numerous transitions that people have to take to move from dependence to independence on their resettlement journey. Each transition has their own potential stumbling blocks and crises, and each area of one's life has many transitions (employment, housing, health etc).

Prison Dialogue also learned to think in terms of Dialogue enabling staff to 'do their day job better'. Prison Dialogue learned how to train agency representatives to facilitate Threshold Dialogue.

Dorset Threshold Dialogue was an integrated service based around the whole offender journey - from the community into prison, back through the prison gate into the community again. Prison Dialogue learned about the fragmentation of the criminal justice system close-up, and the challenges of integrating the system. Each agency only owns part of the activity ('their part') and there is no ownership or leadership for the whole system. Threshold Dialogue leads to the solution that the community should own its offenders, and the community should require agencies to provide effective integrated support for offenders to resettle and become contributing members of society.

<sup>1</sup> Prison Turnaround at HMP Dorchester case study summary is available

<sup>2</sup> Cambridge Probation Partnership case study summary is available

<sup>3</sup> There are 42 local Criminal Justice Boards across England and Wales. They bring together Chief Officers of the Criminal Justice System agencies to co-ordinate activity and share responsibility for delivering criminal justice in their areas.

<sup>4</sup> Threshold Prison and Community Dialogue pilot programme 2006. Report on Primary Stakeholder Perspectives' on the programme. Dec 2006. Karen Ross, Coventry University

<sup>5</sup> Dorset Threshold Dialogue Governance Board case study summary is available

<sup>6</sup> Dorset Threshold Dialogue Facilitator Training case study summary is available

<sup>7</sup> Line of Sight Workshop case study summary is available

Some of the supporting documents available to Corporate Associates:

Weekly reports from Threshold Dialogue sessions; posters; leaflets; facilitation training information; Governance Board and Operations Group Terms of Reference; reports on interim programme review; other research.