

**WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS:
Dialogue Practitioner Development Programme and Re-entry Initiatives
by Peter Garrett and Jane Ball**

Context

Harold Clarke, the Commissioner of the Washington Department of Corrections, had attended a year-long leadership development programme (called Leadership for Collective Intelligence) run by US consulting firm Dialogos, of which Peter Garrett was a Partner and on the programme faculty. The course participants were largely from commercial organisations and seeking to develop skills as practitioners in order to bring Dialogue into their organisations. Harold Clarke had become keen to develop a group of practitioners in the Washington DOC and Prison Dialogue was invited to undertake this work within the year-long contract that it had working with the department.

Aims and Objectives

The aim was to develop high level Dialogue expertise in the Department, at a senior level where they were making policy decisions about re-entry initiatives and organisational challenges, so that they could use Dialogue to talk and think together with relevant staff and stakeholders to address those issues and opportunities.

Method: Activity, Participants and Duration

Participants were chosen from Warden, Community Chief and Executive levels, and they committed to a year of training and development. The course was called the Dialogue Practitioner Development Programme and a curriculum was developed by Prison Dialogue to meet the prevailing needs in the Department. The programme was open to the Commissioner and Deputies and at least one of them attended every session. Participants defined project initiatives that they would lead while they were on the programme based on the area of greatest need in the organisation as it impacted them in their role. They followed an Implicate Change methodology (based on Dialogic principles and practices) to specifically address that need or opportunity and engage all

affected in a participatory process to realise the value for the organisation. Field Guide material was assembled as needed through the quarterly face-to-face sessions and telephone coaching was provided in small groups on a monthly basis. Documentation of the developing initiatives was held by the Washington DOC as the initiatives matured.

Outcomes

There was important personal and professional growth for the Commissioner, the Deputies and all involved in the Dialogue Practitioner Development Programme, along with the development of a substantial in-house Dialogue skill capacity. Included in this was the recognition of Dialogue as a Professional Practice in Corrections.

A number of significant interventions were developed. One example was a monthly spot-check of a randomly chosen individual prisoner in each prison, where the entire case history team met together to consider whether the individual had been served well. Had good practice been followed? Were all interviews and reports correctly undertaken? Were prison systems working? Was the Department's policy adequate as it related to this individual? Was the state policy adequate? Details were viewed at a senior level with some surprising outcomes. Another initiative was the development of pre-release Dialogues between prisoners and their family members where contracts were agreed for behaviour immediately after release. Who would have the car when? How would family finances be managed? ...and so on.

Learning

One of Prison Dialogue's learnings was that the intrinsic value in a situation is prevented from being realised by the organisational closing down of engagement and communication. A Dialogic culture can be established to free the inherent value when people are enabled to participate and contribute their intelligence and compassion to the organisational endeavours. It requires skill to do this, and the development of in-house Dialogue Practitioners is an important step to establishing this. It also requires leadership understanding, commitment and demonstration of the use of Dialogue skills.