



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

Growth and the core conditions of transformative change

Emma Hands and Dr Sarah Lewis

HM Inspectorate of Probation

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Foreword

HM Inspectorate of Probation is committed to reviewing, developing and promoting the evidence base for high-quality probation and youth offending services. *Academic Insights* are aimed at all those with an interest in the evidence base. We commission leading academics to present their views on specific topics, assisting with informed debate and aiding understanding of what helps and what hinders probation and youth offending services.

This report was kindly produced by Emma Hands and Dr Sarah Lewis, introducing the ideas and practices of Growth work. A whole system approach is promoted which seeks to grow an organisation through building a sense of community and belonging. Relationships remain central to all the work, spending time to listen, understand and connect, with a focus on utilising people's strengths, resources and talents, developing a growth mindset where everyone is open to new ways of thinking, and co-producing solutions. The goal is to build a strong workforce with a positive culture and a shared vision, inspiring and building confidence in practitioners and enabling the delivery of sustainable high-quality practice.



Dr Robin Moore
Head of Research

Author profiles

Dr Sarah Lewis is the Director of Penal Reform Solutions and Grow Transform Belong CIC. The latter is a relatively new Community Interest Company, which focuses on preventative work in schools and community reform, raising awareness around the issues linked to correctional settings and criminal justice. Sarah worked within psychological interventions in Probation from 2004 before moving to the Institute of Criminal Justice Studies (University of Portsmouth), where she trained Probation Officers and taught Criminology, Penology and Criminal Psychology. She hosts a podcast called Growth Uncut, to illuminate the voices of those who share her vision, and is the founder of the Growth Alliance. Sarah is the author of *Therapeutic Correctional Relationships*, a research informed practitioner's guide to developing relationships and mending relational ruptures within correctional practice, and has been a Senior Consultant for the Council of Europe for six years.

Emma Hands is a MSc Applied Criminology graduate and has worked with PRS since 2016. Emma consults on several projects within PRS including Prison Growth Projects and the youth prevention programme, Grow2Go programmes. She also leads the Internship and Volunteering Programme for PRS and coordinates social media platforms and partnerships. Emma implemented PRS's first Prison Growth Project at HMP Guys Marsh and is now delivering Growth Projects in HMP Hewell and HMP Chelmsford. Alongside this, Emma ran the first Community Growth Project in an Approved Premises. Emma specialises in prison staff relationships, with a specific focus on non-operational and operational culture, as well as positive staff-prisoner relationships and the impact this has on the prison experience.

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the policy position of HM Inspectorate of Probation

1. Introduction

This *Academic Insights* paper introduces the ideas and practices of Growth work (as applied by Penal Reform Solutions), providing an overview of how cultural change in the penal system can contribute to the development of those who have offended. Growth work focuses on embracing a whole system, research-informed approach, which creates opportunities to co-produce solutions with those who live and breathe the penal landscape.

The paper will highlight new thinking around penal reform, attributing importance to community reform as a mechanism to drive change and reduce social harm collectively. The paper demonstrates, through illustrative case studies, how the penal system can promote rehabilitation, deliver new opportunities for development, and focus on the core principles of Growth. The nine Growth principles (Figure 1) are the foundation of the approach, maximising the power of interventions through nurturing positive relationships at all levels.

Figure 1: The principles of Growth



2. A Growth philosophy and culture

Growth is an emerging philosophy that draws on knowledge from positive psychology and humanistic thinking, focusing on building a strong workforce to transform culture and deliver quality practice. The key aspects of this philosophy originated from Norwegian penal practice, which is globally recognised as exceptional in nature and focuses on relationships, trust and humanity.

The Growth philosophy focuses on a whole system approach, which identifies the specific needs of an organisation, building sustainable practices and driving a positive organisational culture. It is an inclusive approach to organisational change, which develops bespoke interventions (e.g. training, events and supervision) that inspires and builds practitioners' confidence in their work. Growth is not solely about rehabilitation but instead focuses on growing an organisation and the culture within it; moving people forward as a collective and facilitating the process of cultural change, from several perspectives. It focuses on:

- celebrating success (no matter how small)
- learning from mistakes with a growth mindset
- working together to create sustainable solutions and make a collective impact.

Six core conditions have been developed (Figure 2) that are used to inform work to drive a Growth culture in an integrated and collective manner. Examples from practice will be used to illustrate these core conditions, illuminating how they play out in practice.

Figure 2: The core conditions of transformative change

1. Understand the context
2. Relationships and identity are key
3. Strengths based and beyond – a post-traumatic Growth perspective
4. Broadening out the whole system through inclusivity
5. Preventative Growth work
6. Sustainability

2.1 Understand the context

Understanding the context in which people are situated is vital for recognising the thoughts, feelings and behaviours that exist within a culture. Without first understanding the experiences of people and the rules they live by within an environment, it is impossible to generate meaningful cultural change within the setting itself. Lewis (2020) acknowledges the benefits of this approach, stating that from a relational perspective, this builds trust and engages individuals within the process of change, leading to collective impact that acknowledges incremental gain and the bigger picture.

To best understand the context and culture within an organisation, a needs analysis is carried out. The purpose of this stage is understanding each element of the culture in greater depth (Juan, 2014), exploring cultural factors (e.g. relationships and hope) and

understanding the root causes of cultural difficulties, rather than focusing solely on the problematic cultural outcomes (e.g. poor staff retention). This is the first stage in any Growth project, gaining a broad and deep understanding of all departments/teams through organisational formulation. It focuses on building relationships through dialogue, sharing stories and expressing hopes. Following this stage, work is tailored to support cultural growth, with bespoke projects developed to promote the implementation of effective practice.

There is the potential for resistance in the form of 'just another report'. Time is thus spent to explain how this analysis will not only create a clear set of activities, but also how it provides a space whereby cultural rules are challenged curiously, harm is acknowledged, and voices are validated.

2.2 Relationships and identity are key

Relationships remain central to all the work, spending valuable time to listen, understand and connect. Community work within approved premises (APs) has highlighted that the positive relationships between staff and residents are an important factor in creating a rehabilitative culture. Transitions are often painful, and moving from prison to the community and residing in an AP brings specific challenges. Developing staff understanding of life pre-AP allows residents' needs to be better understood by staff, and provides staff with the confidence to best support residents, as they re-join life in the community.

Relationships either help or hinder growth depending on their nature and focus. By effectively understanding the barriers that hinder positive relationships, staff can better support residents to help the process of integration back into the community (Taxman, Cropsey, Melnick, and Perdoni, 2008). Our work within AP's thus focuses on developing deeper and more consistent relationships throughout the staffing team, building trust and promoting a safer environment for staff to address any challenges, such as barriers that hinder engagement with residents.

Wilkinson and Picket (2010) identified hindrances that widen the relationships between the professional and the service user. This social distance in relationships is not only present in the prison climate but also within everyday life, as the notion of the 'criminology of the other' becomes embedded within the fabric of our communities. It is therefore, not only the carceral climate which may hold rehabilitative significance but broader relational climates, at a societal level. This may include the practising of 'othering' within the community through blocked opportunities, stigma and policy which targets the 'underserving' (Neville, Miller, and Fritzon, 2007). This punitive push may be less the product of an increasingly retributive and unforgiving society than of mass unawareness regarding what works to support desistance. It is necessary to encourage education regarding punishment to create a climate which embodies intelligent practice and provides insight into the challenges that arise when promoting a positive climate and how these can be addressed.

2.3 Strengths based and beyond – a post-traumatic Growth perspective

Utilising strengths, resources and talent within our work enables people to acknowledge and practice new identities, which support the desistance process (see [Academic Insights paper 2022/10](#) for more information on desistance, recovery and justice capital). Post-traumatic growth also acknowledges that individuals can grow if knowledge is taken from adversity, allowing them to gain a new perspective about their lives. Tedeshi and Calhoun (2004) highlight that drawing strength from adversity can nurture a growth mentality and create an individual who is more resistant to trauma in the future.

Practice example

The Mental Wellbeing Programme (MWP) was collaboratively developed with people in prison, following the increase in mental health issues (self-harm, stress, anxiety, depression) due to the impact of Covid-19. The programme was peer led and was designed to address issues contributing to poor mental health, including disconnection, loneliness, hopelessness and mistrust. It focused on lessons derived from challenges and adversity, adopting a post-traumatic growth perspective.

Within the MWP evaluation, carried out in HMP Bristol, one of the key points was that people lacked meaningful work, which was exacerbated due to Covid-19, while meaningful activities increased people's mood when compared to isolation in cells. It was reported that Covid restrictions reduced mental wellbeing significantly due to being isolated and feeling lonely; and for some, returning to reality before Covid was challenging. Those directly involved in the course highlighted an increased understanding of mental wellbeing, showing greater depth to their responses, such as; "It means feeling good, looking after myself, being stress-free and having good self-esteem" and "mental wellbeing is the wellness of your mind, how you feel within yourself daily and the enrichment of your soul." One participant reflected on his experience of the Programme stating, "It helps me get a better understanding of others' mental health... it has helped me massively...it has helped me boost my confidence, seek worth and build relationships." Adopting a strengths-based programme that created a safe and brave space for men in custody to express their feelings brought with it numerous benefits for participants and those that delivered the programme, raising awareness, confidence and self-belief.

2.4 Broadening out the whole system through inclusivity

To foster a community of growth, there is a need for greater social cohesion between businesses (Hatton-Yeo and Batty, 2011), organisations and individuals (see [Academic Insights paper 2021/06](#) for more information on social capital building). To enable an inclusive whole systems approach, an understanding is required that relationships can shift depending on the events and conditions that exist within broader and larger spaces. As Lewis (2019) previously stated, from a multi-agency perspective, there is a relational background in which organisations occupy alternative areas to one another. Within the criminal justice system, there are several connections across the structures; some of these connections will be close and others distant, and, as within any climate, these are subject to change. These shifts in climate can influence the rate at which growth occurs and influence the readiness of change.

Practice example

PRS are collaboratively working with other organisations to establish the Growth Alliance, a collection of committed individuals from all paths of life, who share the same vision of a rehabilitative-focused criminal justice system; who want to become part of the mission, to change culture, implement prevention tools, reduce harm and contribute to community safety. By mobilising people in the community, the corporate sector, academia and work industries, through a drive to promote social responsibility, there is the potential to alleviate some of the current pressures within the system.

2.5 Preventative Growth work

Case (2006) argued that young people, by definition, are 'at risk' of problem outcomes due to their relative powerlessness in society. Over the past decade, there has been an increase in the development of preventative work (crime prevention and early intervention) and in an understanding of the importance that these early interventions can have on young people in relation to later behaviours labelled as criminal. Early intervention programmes are designed to upskill and provide an understanding of how choices can result in negative outcomes and to explain the alternative options.

Practice example

The 'Grow 2 Go' Programme is a 12-week programme designed for young people, which is facilitated in schools and colleges. The programme was developed as a crime prevention, early intervention measure and was co-designed by those who have lived experience of prison. The programme is psycho-educational in nature and has a strengths-based approach that looks to empower people to reach their own conclusions and develop their skillsets. It was designed to equip and enable young people most at risk of entering the criminal justice system, with key skills to overcome difficulties and challenges, as well as to aid personal growth and development.

It was found that pupils gained a greater understanding of relationships, negative thinking, consequences, stress, and the importance of feedback. Participants gained a broader and deeper insight into their lives, achieved a sense of belonging, were more able to recognise the strengths in themselves and others, adopted healthier coping strategies, and were able to holistically set goals to support their growth. Participants also reported being happier in life, with opportunities supporting their growth, and felt they were less likely to get involved with the police in the future. Further to this, they reported heightened levels of confidence with respect to coping and managing strong emotions.

2.6 Sustainability

Gaining traction and building momentum for penal reform remains challenging. For change to be adopted, awareness of new emerging philosophies and practice needs to be shared, driving a commitment to penal reform which can reduce social harm. Changing a community's culture and current practice can be achieved through developing a growth mindset with individuals open to new ways of thinking (see [Academic Insights paper 2022/07](#) for more information on professional curiosity) and moving away from existing prejudices (Han and Stieha, 2020) towards communities that are more progressive and innovative.

A commitment is also required to utilising the knowledge gained from research endeavours, contributing to greater sustainable change, focusing on action, as well as knowledge.

Practice example

Our work with the Inspectorate of Probation around mental health led us to apply for an innovation award, which was secured to deliver the Mental Wellbeing Programme at HMP Bristol. The programme was designed to be easy to use at the operational level, adaptable to other contexts if necessary, and relatively cheap to implement.

Since its development, it has been delivered in other prisons, and the success and impact of this work is fed back to the people who co-produced it, building on their confidence, pride and recognising their efforts. This is available on request and provides correctional organisations with guidance on how the findings from the Inspectorate of Probation mental health thematic can be applied in practice.

Growth work should aim to create legacy in others, so that hope can be built, and the narratives associated with punishment (and rehabilitation) can be challenged. Celebrating success and focusing on sustainability, through developing people, structures and systems allows change to continue once the Growth work has been delivered. PRS thus offer a lifelong membership to the growth team for prisoners, their families and friends. Once within the growth family, we strive to ensure that everyone feels they are a part of this community while serving time and post release.

3. Conclusion: Focus on culture and the rest will follow

To enable a long-term transformative culture, a collective perspective in which people matter needs to be adopted by all of those within the system. Using a whole systems approach and working together builds trust and understanding that can collectively support sustainable solutions to overcome existing challenges. These conditions are required for interventions and preventions to take root and grow.

Through first understanding the context of a setting, a clear starting position is provided from which practice can be improved, meeting the needs of the organisation and those within it. Cultural work must find the root of any issues, rather than putting plasters on the problems and hoping things will improve. By understanding the context of an environment, positive and robust working relationships can be developed that benefit cultural change. There is a need to consider existing strengths and how these are functioning within the culture and how these positives help to drive growth. Reflecting on the existing good empowers people and generates a sense of pride, all of which contributes to happier staff and positive relationships. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge and validate how difficult things have been and the impact upon each individual's willingness to engage, their energy and their levels of hope.

Considering the bigger picture through an inclusive whole systems approach helps to build a sense of community and belonging. A collective approach is then more likely to be embedded and adopted, building deep relationships, the sharing of a vision, and promoting a learning culture. Embedding change and making something sustainable is the primary factor which will lead to practice becoming successful in the long term and Growth meeting its transformative end.

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Penal Reform Solutions (PRS) is an organisation that focuses on transforming penal culture, creating spaces that are meaningful, trusting and nurturing. It is an evidence-based organisation which draws on academic research, practitioners' expertise, and the experiences of service users. For more information, see www.penalreformsolutions.com

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The HM Inspectorate of Probation Research Team can be contacted via
HMIProbationResearch@hmiprobation.gov.uk

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