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# Developing a Voluntary Sector Model for Engaging Offenders

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*Abstract: This article proposes the development of a distinct offender engagement model for voluntary and community sector agencies, recognising the contribution of: reciprocity, reliability, consistency, and emotional pleasure, to effective offender engagement. Drawing on empirical data from users of a voluntary sector programme in England for young adults, this article makes an original contribution to the evidence base by: identifying the key elements (within the programme) of effective engagement with offenders; seeing how this relates to the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) engaging practitioner model and companion literature review and considers the implications for voluntary sector criminal justice policy and practice.*

**Keywords:** desistance; effective practice; emotional pleasure; offender engagement; reciprocity; voluntary sector; young adults

This article argues for the development of a distinct offender engagement model for voluntary and community sector (VCS) agencies recognising the contribution of: reciprocity, reliability, consistency, and emotional pleasure, to effective offender engagement. It draws on *lived experience*, reanalysis of service user interview data collected for the evaluation of the Transition to Adulthood (T2A) Pathway Programme, which provided a voluntary opt-in support service for young adults involved in the criminal justice system (Wong *et al.* 2017). In making this argument, this article will aim to identify the key elements (within the programme) of effective engagement with offenders; how this relates to the National Offender Management Service (NOMS)<sup>1</sup> engaging practitioner model (Copsey and Rex 2013) and the NOMS commissioned literature review which contributed to it (Shapland *et al.* 2012); and consider their implications for VCS policy and practice.

## Offender Engagement and Probation

The structural changes to probation services<sup>2</sup> in England and Wales, arising from the government's Transforming Rehabilitation (TR) changes (Ministry of Justice 2013a), has heightened interest and attention paid to the effective engagement of offenders. The motivation for this is unsurprising. Maintaining the engagement of offenders for the duration of an order is likely to contribute to desistance and reduce recidivism – an individual and societal good (Copsey and Rex 2013; Sorsby, Shapland and Robinson 2017). At a more self-serving level, the delivery element of Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) contracts is based on outputs, for example, requirements completed by offenders (Ministry of Justice 2013b). Maintaining effective engagement with offenders is a means to ensure *payment for delivery*. In the medium and long term, effective engagement with an offender may provide a further monetary pay-off for CRCs, reducing proven reoffending, triggering a bonus under the payment-by-results mechanism of CRC contracts (Ministry of Justice 2013b).

Interest in the effective engagement of offenders is not new. The 1970s' social work informed model of probation provision was epitomised by the mantra, 'advise, assist and befriend' (Senior 2009). However, as noted by Turley *et al.* (2011), the Offender Management Model (OMM), which dominated probation practice in England and Wales from 2006, assumed that the *programmes or interventions*, within the 'case-manager/interventions model', *made the difference* to offender outcomes, with the offender manager relegated to a more detached brokerage role. Seemingly, as a riposte to this and recognising the contribution of skilled engagement by probation practitioners in reducing re-arrests and reconvictions (Ministry of Justice 2013b), one of the final initiatives undertaken by NOMS prior to the government's TR changes, was the Skills for Effective Engagement Development and Supervision (SEEDS) project and broader Offender Engagement Programme (Copsey 2011; Rex 2012). They were based on the hypothesis that the relationship between the service user and probation practitioner was an effective means of changing behaviour (Copsey 2011; Rex 2012). This reflects the desistance literature, that offenders are most influenced to change (and not to change) by those whose advice they respect and whose support they value (McNeill and Weaver 2010). Arguably, this, in itself, is not new and has been tacitly understood by criminal justice professionals for some time (Senior 2009). More generally, good working relationships with offenders are viewed as being important to the quality of probation practice (Robinson *et al.* 2014) and contributing to rehabilitation and legitimacy (Phillips 2013).

### Developing a VCS Offender Engagement Model

There are good reasons for developing a distinctive VCS offender engagement model. First, the limited level of probation service engagement with offenders (HM Inspectorate of Probation 2017) appears to have fostered a greater dependence on VCS provision, to backfill the gap in probation

provision (Clinks, NCVO and Third Sector Research Centre 2016; Wong *et al.* 2017). Second, the effective offender engagement model developed by NOMS (Copsey and Rex 2013) based primarily on risk-need-responsivity principles (Bonta and Andrews 2010) for probation practitioners, at first glance does not appear to be wholly applicable to the terms of VCS engagement with offenders. Commentators have suggested that the involvement of VCS agencies with offenders in the community and custody has a different function and role from that of probation and prison staff (Maguire 2012, 2016; Martin *et al.* 2016; Meek, Gojkovic and Mills 2010; Mills, Meek and Gojkovic 2011; Tomczak 2017; Tomczak and Albertson 2016). Third, given the greater reliance on VCS services to work with offenders, there is a need for VCS provision to be more evidence based. Therefore, developing and testing a model of VCS offender engagement would contribute to the currently limited evidence base of VCS efficacy in offender provision (Corcoran and Hucklesby 2013; Hedderman and Hucklesby 2016; Maguire 2016; Wong 2013).

### **Transition to Adulthood (T2A) Pathway Programme**

The T2A Pathway Programme comprised six VCS projects which worked with young adults (aged 16–25 years), who were offenders or at risk of offending at: pre-arrest, arrest, pre-court, in prison and on release (Transition to Adulthood Alliance 2014). Each project had a specialist focus, such as education and employment, family engagement and drug abuse, while providing holistic support, tailored to the needs of their users (Wong *et al.* 2017). This was provided by the projects themselves and/or in conjunction with other agencies, operating in three ways: as a *key worker*; *niche service provider*, offering a specialist intervention; or as a *gap filler*, meeting non-criminogenic needs, where criminogenic issues were addressed either by the youth offending team (YOT) or probation (Wong *et al.* 2017). Between May 2014 and March 2017, the projects worked with 414 young adults who had, on average, four criminogenic needs (as defined by the reducing re-offending pathways: National Offender Management Service (2013)) and three-quarters of whom had criminal records (Wong *et al.* 2017). Significant features of the services which appeared to have contributed to their effectiveness were: *voluntarism*, that is, service user involvement with the project was voluntary; and *open-ended involvement*, that is, there were no restrictions on the frequency or duration over which the users could access the projects (Wong *et al.* 2017).

### **Methodology**

The empirical data for this article were collected for the evaluation of the T2A Pathway Programme. A total of 39 one-off semi-structured interviews were undertaken with individual service users in the periods: November to December 2014 (Research Phase 1); and December 2016 to March 2017 (Research Phase 3). Service user interviews were not conducted during Research Phase 2 (June 2015 to June 2016).

Sampling of users was purposive. The original intention was to achieve a spread of age, gender, ethnicity, and level of engagement with the projects. This had limited success because of difficulties in contacting individuals and/or securing their involvement to participate. Users were then selected on the basis that they were: still involved with the projects; willing to be interviewed; and attended their interview. Attempts were also made to sample users who had started with the projects but had disengaged; however, this did not prove possible (see Wong *et al.* 2017).

The interviews with these 'service engagers' were originally analysed using a thematic framework (Ritchie and Spencer 1994) based on: interviewees' participation with the T2A services; the services they received; and their impact. A subset of these analysed data (18 interviews) were reanalysed adopting the same thematic framework approach (Ritchie and Spencer 1994) but mapping the data to a different set of themes which focused on *how* the T2A services were delivered:

- interviewees' experience of the T2A staff;
- how (if at all) their experience of the T2A staff differed from their experience of staff from other services; and
- the feelings which arose from their encounters with the T2A staff.

The findings are necessarily limited, reflecting the experiences of these service engagers. In addition, based on single interviews, they provided a snapshot of how the interviewees felt at a single point in time. Only data from users who had been involved in the project for three months or more were used for this reanalysis, to ensure that the interviewees had a minimum level of experience of the T2A staff. User age, ethnicity, and duration of engagement (based on elapsed time) with the project are detailed in *Table 1*. The ages of interviewees (at time of the interview) ranged from 16 to 25 years; their mean age was 19.8 years. Interviewees' duration of engagement with the T2A services ranged from three months to 24 months; the mean duration was 10.2 months. The duration of engagement is based on elapsed time rather than the actual amount of time that interviewees spent with the project. All of these 18 interviewees were involved in the criminal justice system, ranging from at point of arrest to being in prison.

While caution is urged as to the generalisability of the findings, there was consistency in the findings generated by the interviewees across the two phases of fieldwork and across projects operating in different locations in England. This consistency adds weight to the applicability of the findings, particularly (where we turn later on) to their implications for policy and practice.

## Findings

The interviewees had generally achieved a degree of stability in their lives, with the T2A services as their main support agency. They were generally positive and expressed indebtedness to the T2A services for helping them to achieve this stability. Their accounts may have reflected a degree of social

TABLE 1  
 Profile of Sampled Service Users

Service user	Project and research phase	Gender	Age (years)	Ethnicity	Duration of engagement with the project	Service delivered in community or custody
T2A1	A3	female	22	White British	12 months	community
T2A2	A3	male	19	White British	4 months	community
T2A3	A3	male	21	White British	3 months	community
T2A4	B3	male	17	White British	4 months	community
T2A5	B3	male	18	White British	24 months	community
T2A6	C3	female	25	White British	3 months	custody
T2A7	C3	female	21	White British	10 months	custody
T2A8	D3	male	21	Pakistani	3 months	custody
T2A9	C1	female	21	White British	3 months	custody
T2A10	C1	female	21	White British	9 months	custody
T2A11	B1	male	21	White British	4 months	community
T2A12	D1	male	19	Mixed race	6 months	custody
T2A13	D1	male	20	Black	6 months	custody then community
T2A14	D1	male	19	Mixed race	6 months	custody then community
T2A15	D1	male	19	Black	5 months	custody
T2A16	E1	female	17	White British	3 months	community
T2A17	F1	male	16	White British	12 months*	community
T2A18	F1	male	20	White British	24 months	community

(Note: \* Over this period the interviewee started with the service, stopped attending, then re-engaged.)

desirability – the services were still providing support to the interviewees; their engagement with them had not ended. Nevertheless, interviewees' descriptions of the way in which the service was delivered by the T2A staff and how they related to the users suggest that their positive view went beyond a socially acceptable tokenism.

*How* the T2A services were delivered was as important to the interviewees as *what* the services delivered. Their individual accounts consistently depicted an *ideal professional* described most comprehensively by T2A7 as: caring, understanding, sympathetic, helpful, reliable, professional, motivating, understanding, and consistent. All of the users had experience of other agencies and readily made comparisons between the T2A staff and those from other organisations, where their experience was generally less positive. Users suggested that the approach adopted by the T2A services was the exception rather than the rule. These *exceptional* qualities are examined in this section. However, the way in which the T2A staff engaged with their users needs to be set in the context of the limited capacity and resources of other agencies and a supportive funder of the T2A projects (Wong *et al.* 2017). This latter condition allowed the projects to deliver their services in a *safe environment* unbounded by meeting delivery targets. What was important to the funder was the quality of the service rather than meeting the projected number of users (Wong *et al.* 2017).

In accordance with the analysis approach outlined above, the findings are presented in this section grouped around the following themes:

- persona and approach;
- time and pacing;
- thinking and motivation;
- attitude;
- reliability and consistency.

#### *Persona and Approach*

A number of users described their relationship with the T2A staff as being more like a friend than a worker. This harks back to what may be considered the traditional role of probation operating under the mantra of 'advise, assist and befriend' (Senior 2009). This is illustrated by one user, who felt that this persona had been instrumental in enabling him to build a relationship with the T2A worker:

You can just talk to her, it doesn't seem like she's a worker, it seems like she's more your friend than she is your worker which is better probably, that's what every worker should be like. (T2A11)

A different user had a more nuanced take on the relationship, observing that the T2A worker found it:

... easy to switch between professional and personal ways of speaking while keeping me on track. (T2A5)

Interviewees described the mode of delivery as a social activity rather than a professional consultation. According to T2A11, it was less about activities

and more a question of meeting up for a coffee or the interviewee calling the worker and/or responding to calls from them. This was underlined by another user:

What I have enjoyed the most is getting away and just being able to chat. (T2A16)

The encounters with the T2A staff were described by interviewees in ways which suggested that they derived emotional pleasure from their sessions. This was generally bound up with other feelings, for example one user described finding it very helpful to be able to talk in confidence with someone who listened and cared and who ‘... made me feel warm’ (T2A8). This concept of providing a pleasurable experience is considered in more detail later.

The accounts of the users suggested that they felt *looked after* by the T2A staff. The service and staff were described explicitly by T2A7 as ‘*caring*’ and the sense of being *looked after* was signalled for other users by relatively small but significant gestures:

They’ll buy you a drink, if you come and see them. (T2A1)

This lived experience of users is confirmed by partner agencies who observed that the T2A staff acted as parental figures with users who were without positive parental influence or support (Wong *et al.* 2017).

#### *Time and Pacing*

Half of the *service engagers* (nine of 18) which formed the sample for this study had been with the T2A services for six months or more. One of the key principles which underpinned the services was the open-ended nature of user engagement (Wong *et al.* 2017), enabling the relationship between the user and staff to gradually build up over time. This sense of a gently coaxed relationship is exemplified by this account:

For the first month or two our appointments weren’t in here they were out and about. We went to cafes I’d never been in before ... (T2A5)

#### *Thinking and Motivation*

Users made favourable comparisons between the T2A services and other provision, particularly in the way that T2A staff encouraged them to think differently about their lives and how the T2A workers motivated them. They appreciated the choice and control that the T2A workers offered:

With other people I’ve worked with they were ‘you need to do it this way, this is how you have to do it’ whereas [name of project worker] I tell her what I want to do and then she’ll give me ideas on how I can do it and it’s more down to me with a gentle push in the right direction. (T2A9)

This acknowledgement by the T2A worker and encouragement of the user’s own agency accords with the desistance literature: consciously taking responsibility for their own path (Bottoms and Shapland 2016), and developing self-efficacy and self-determination (McNeill 2016).



Conversely, other users marked out the T2A services by their active encouragement for them to engage in purposeful activities:

I don't think they [other support organisations] push you as much as [T2A provider] does and they don't do one on ones, they don't do activities, they don't do nothing. (T2A15)

That this T2A service was able to offer '*one on one*' activities (where for other agencies it might not have been possible) was due to the way in which the service was resourced and the flexibility of the funder allowing providers to deliver provision as appropriate to their users.

Users described how the T2A staff had helped them to reframe their thinking, exemplified in relation to this individual's hopes and ambitions for employment:

... it's made me think about things different. I want to just go and get a job ... straight away and she said stick at that apprenticeship part and then it'll be better for you in long run, she puts everything into a better perspective. I go to her with summat and she'll put it into a clearer, better picture. (T2A11)

Another user confirmed how the T2A worker had helped her see self-employment as an option building on the beautician training that she had received (T2A7). This re-framing activity offered by the T2A staff appears to have contributed to creating an environment which provided the '... scaffolding that makes possible the construction of significant life changes' (Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph 2002, p.1000).

### *Staff Attitudes*

Staff attitudes emerged as the most multi-faceted theme from the users' accounts, considered as significant in maintaining their engagement with the service, and appeared to be the point of greatest difference between T2A staff and professionals from other agencies.

One of the principles of the T2A programme was trialling a *young adult specific approach* to support services for 16- to 25-year-olds across the various points in the criminal justice system. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that the age-related welfarist approach noted early on during the programme evaluation (Wong *et al.* 2016) is further confirmed by these data. This contrasted, in particular, to the approach of probation exemplified by the experience of a 19-year-old user:

I think [name of T2A worker] looks at your age and she's more sensitive about doing things in the future, probation see you as adults straight away and when you come out if you don't get a job straight away you deserve to be back in prison, ... they don't see that you're young and trying to make a difference, they don't really care but [T2A agency] do ... they are different, they cater for our needs, the work's brilliant. (T2A15)

This experience should not be taken as a reflection of a wider failure to account for maturity, as part of the way in which probation staff related to this user. However, it does suggest a gap between *intent*, set out in the instructions (National Offender Management Service 2016) for considering

maturity for 18- to 24-year-olds in pre-sentence reports (PSRs) *and practice*. The agency interview data collected for the T2A evaluation suggested that because PSRs were rarely used – fast delivery reports were used instead – in practice, maturity assessments were therefore rarely undertaken.

Striking among the users' experience was the relatability between T2A staff and their users, described as:

There is personal understanding with [name of worker]. (T2A16)

This relatability and ease were explained by another interviewee as being able to talk to his T2A worker about anything because of their personality and further endorsed as:

... possibly the best thing you can do is work with someone who can understand and see things from your point of view and still be there as a professional to help you understand things from their point of view ... (T2A5)

Users reported on the commitment of the T2A staff, that they went the *extra mile*, that is, beyond their professional responsibilities, described as:

... she goes above and beyond what she needs to do. (T2A15)

By another interviewee as:

... she thinks about me after work but manages to get involved without getting emotionally distressed. (T2A5)

In comparison with their experience of other agencies, these interviewees regarded the T2A staff as providing a more complete service, by attending to small details:

... [name of T2A worker] made sure that I get everything done, even checking that I've got asthma, she makes sure I've got the information I need to find out about, it's different, I don't know how to explain it, it's actually different. (T2A15)

In comparison with probation staff this could be explained by limited resources and by their focus primarily on issues of a criminogenic nature and, by default, non-criminogenic problems being set aside to be dealt with by other agencies (Ministry of Justice 2013b). This completeness of provision is considered further below.

In addition to adopting a holistic approach, that is, aiming to addressing the range of problems presented by users (Wong *et al.* 2017), interviewees suggested a persistence on the part of T2A staff attempting to find alternative ways of best meeting the needs of the users:

They helped me get into college. But I didn't go because I missed my assessment thing. But then they got me into [a community centre course] that was very good. (T2A1)

### *Reliability and Consistency*

The reliability and consistency of the T2A staff were qualities which were highly valued by the users. In comparison, other services did not follow

through with what they said they would do (T2A2), which was the key difference according to this user. This view was confirmed by another interviewee:

I got referred to [name of other service], they were supposed to get in contact with me when I got out but I haven't heard nothing ... [name of T2A provider] is the only one that's stuck with me. (T2A14)

This same user expressed difficulty in trusting people but stated that the T2A staff had gained their trust by being consistent and reliable. This sense of reliability was reinforced for users by T2A staff being available to see them as needed:

... she's got a bit of an open door policy that if I do need her and she's free then I can come in and see her or ... she'll arrange a time for me to go and see her. (T2A9)

### **Context of the T2A Pathway Programme**

It is acknowledged that the experience of the *service engagers* examined above, was inevitably, context specific. This needs to be accounted for when considering the wider applicability of the findings. However, we would argue that they have relevance beyond the confines of this pilot programme and the policy and practice environment which existed during its implementation, while at the same time point to the type of context that may be required.

As identified in the programme evaluation report (see Wong *et al.* 2017), the context factors of note were:

- *A history of failed engagement* by the T2A service users with other agencies, manifested in missed appointments and being excluded from services, leaving the T2A service as one of the few or the only agency remaining that was willing to work with the user; and/or
- *The size of caseloads and limited staff resources of other agencies* – due to funding limitations, these other organisations were only able to offer limited support that was insufficient to meet all of the service user's wide-ranging needs. By default, it fell to the T2A services to ensure that the other needs were met.
- *The voluntary nature of engagement with the T2A services* – the service users could choose to opt-in, engage, or disengage with the services as required.
- *Open-ended, non-time limited engagement by the T2A services* – this was enabled by a funder who prioritised quality of service delivery over a requirement to meet projected service user numbers.

There is nothing to suggest that at the time of writing and/or for the foreseeable future this delivery context and reliance on VCS provision is likely to change dramatically, as suggested by the recent HM Inspectorate of Probation report on VCS involvement in probation supply chains (HM Inspectorate of Probation 2018).

## Engaging Practitioner Blueprint

A standard VCS offender engagement model for England and Wales does not currently exist, therefore we turn to the next closest model available, one developed for probation provision. The target operating model which set out the blueprint for the design of offender management services under the government's TR changes affirmed the importance of the quality of rehabilitation support as a critical factor in reducing reoffending (Ministry of Justice 2013b). Based on the SEEDS programme, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and NOMS put forward a blueprint for the ideal 'engaging practitioner' (Copsey and Rex 2013), one-to-one interaction with an offender based around four principal elements: structuring sessions; prosocial modelling; risk-need-responsivity principles (drawing on the work of Bonta and Andrews 2007); and cognitive behavioural techniques. Around the same time, the MoJ and NOMS commissioned a literature review on quality in probation supervision to link into the NOMS Offender Engagement Programme (Shapland *et al.* 2012). The review concluded that there was 'surprisingly little research directly on what was perceived to be quality or on what led to desired outcomes . . .' (p.43). However, from the literature, they did find six factors which probation supervisors and supervisees regarded as demonstrating 'quality'. These were:

- Building genuine relationships which demonstrated care about the supervisee, their desistance and future beyond control/monitoring/surveillance;
- Identifying needs and setting goals including a supervisory relationship which showed listening by supervisors and persistence in steering supervisees towards desistance through motivation and encouraging problem solving;
- Understanding desistance and thoughtful consideration of how relapses and breaches should be dealt with;
- Attention to practical obstacles to desistance and psychological issues;
- Knowledge and access to services to address practical obstacles; and
- Advocacy tailored to supervisees' needs and capabilities, involving supervisor action, referral or sign-posting.

These factors are considered below in relation to the findings from this study.

The qualities identified through the T2A user data which map across to the principal elements of the MoJ/NOMS engagement model are set out in *Table 2*.

While alignment exists between the VCS mode of delivery (as exemplified by the T2A Pathway Programme) and the 'structuring sessions' and 'prosocial modelling' elements of the Engaging Practitioner blueprint, there appears to be a notable absence of alignment with the 'risk-need-responsivity principles' and 'cognitive behavioural techniques' elements. This seems to reflect two important points. First, a demarcation of roles between statutory probation services and VCS resettlement and rehabilitation

TABLE 2

*Mapping Qualities from the Empirical Data to the MoJ/NOMS Engaging Practitioner Blueprint*

Elements from the <i>Engaging Practitioner</i> blueprint	Qualities identified from the empirical data
<i>Structuring sessions</i>	Timing and pacing Gradual approach to resolving problems/providing support
<i>Prosocial modelling</i>	Maintaining a professional and personal relationship Proffering options for the service user to decide Pushing the service user Reframing the service user's thinking
<i>Risk-need-responsivity principles</i>	No data available to evidence this
<i>Cognitive behavioural techniques</i>	No data available to evidence this

services – a mandated responsibility on statutory probation services to manage offender risk and sentence compliance. As noted by Maguire (2016), while VCS agencies may have contributed to compliance and risk management in terms of providing information to statutory services about offender take-up of services and engagement with services (Senior *et al.* 2011; Wong *et al.* 2012), by and large they have had no formal part in these roles. With this in mind and given the general welfarist orientation of the T2A services (Wong *et al.* 2017), which reflects much VCS offender provision (Maguire 2012, 2016), the conscious (or unconscious) adoption of a risk-need-responsivity approach to offender management is unlikely to be widespread. This differentiation in role is also reinforced through training and supervision. While probation staff receive training in compliance and risk management, supported through supervision, this is generally not the case for VCS staff (Wong *et al.* 2012). Second, in relation to cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) techniques, none of the T2A services offered this type of provision. Across the VCS as a whole where CBT is adopted, this is generally in the form of specialist provision such as a domestic violence perpetrators programme (Richmond Fellowship 2017). There is little evidence that this is an integral element of engaging with offenders by the VCS.

Other staff attributes prominent in the data reported above while important to these service engagers, appear to be absent from the MoJ/NOMS engagement model but did reflect some of the factors ascribed as contributing to the quality of probation supervision identified by Shapland *et al.* (2012). These are considered next.

### Reciprocation

It could be argued that some of the attributes examined in *staff attitudes* could constitute prosocial modelling, that is, the routine and conscious use

of a set of behaviours, responses and psychological rewards which encourage positive social behaviours and attitudes while eroding negative ones. However, the accounts of the service users suggest something else. The attributes: *viewing the person as a young adult; relatability; going the extra mile; persistence*; suggest a greater commitment to the service users, than that which is explicitly indicated by the MoJ/NOMS model (Copsey and Rex 2013). This is indicated by Shapland and colleagues (2012) in relation to quality probation supervision, where supervisors persist in steering supervisees towards desistance through motivation and encouraging problem solving. Hinted at in the literature review (Shapland *et al.* 2012) but explicit within the T2A user data appears to be a universal truth about human interaction more generally, that of *reciprocation*, that the commitment of the T2A staff as perceived by the service users being rewarded by engagement and co-operation from the users. This is illustrated by the following:

if we didn't see each other as much and she helped me out as much I don't think I'd be willing to co-operate as much but she does help out a lot. (T2A12)

This was also expressed by another user as a desire to 'not let them down' (T2A3). This suggests that the principle of co-production in offender management between service user and practitioner (McNeill 2009; Weaver 2011) applies equally to offender engagement. While this principle of reciprocation appears absent from the MoJ/NOMS model (Copsey and Rex 2013), it is implicitly understood in practice, for example, in situations where offender managers are seeking to manage the compliance of offenders. As noted by Phillips (2016), probation practitioners were reluctant to breach offenders because they were concerned about the impact of this on their relationship with the offender. Moreover, such reciprocation is likely to contribute to practitioner job satisfaction and reinforce the sense that what they are doing is worthwhile and is working, both of which are important factors in sustaining morale. Turley *et al.* (2011) noted that positive offender outcomes increased offender manager job satisfaction. Phillips (2016) also observed that probation practitioners altered the 'field of compliance' for offenders because this provided a greater sense of job satisfaction. Despite the widespread challenges in probation delivery in the wake of the government's TR changes HM Inspectorate of Probation (2017) was able to cite an account from an offender under supervision which echoes the importance of *going the extra mile* identified earlier from the T2A interviewees:

It is more than a job for her. She always gets me to see the positive, using CBT techniques on me, giving me the tools I need to sort out my life. I recently was holding a blade to my arm, wanting to cut myself, but, remembering what my responsible officer had said to me, stopped me harming myself. She probably saved my life. (p.66)

### **Reliability and Consistency**

Similarly, *reliability and consistency* identified as important to the service users in this study, while potentially implicit within the prosocial modelling

element of the MoJ/NOMS engagement model, could in fact benefit from being made explicit. Assuming that such principles may implicitly operate does not have the same effect as making this an explicit organisational, cultural, and individual commitment. It would be perverse to think that the other agencies with which the users compared the T2A services had an operating policy of *not being* reliable or consistent. However, interviewee accounts suggest a comparative exceptionalism among T2A staff. The benefits of explicit commitment can be seen elsewhere. Critical to the effective implementation of the Youth Justice Custody Reinvestment Pathfinder (which aimed to reduce youth custody) was an explicit and regularly reinforced operating culture among YOT staff, of the principle that custody for young people should be the last resort and all other alternatives should be attempted where possible (Wong, Ellingworth and Meadows 2015). Stakeholders acknowledged that prior to the initiative, while this principle among staff was assumed, it became actively operationalised during the scheme (Wong *et al.* 2013).

### Completeness of Provision

Offender management delivery models which have prevailed over the last ten years have adopted a '*fordist*' approach – for the purposes of this article, breaking down the offender management process into discrete 'production' functions based around the ASPIRE<sup>3</sup> model (National Offender Management Service 2006). This is not to suggest that such a model does not have merit. It is evidence based and has provided a means of understanding and systemising the offender management process. In practice, this disaggregation into functions has facilitated a diffusion of responsibility with different agencies and individuals having discrete responsibilities for elements of the overall offender management service; something that service users have found confusing and difficult to engage with, which in part, integrated offender management (IOM) arrangements were developed to address (Senior *et al.* 2011; Wong *et al.* 2012). In addition, given the constraints across public services since the financial crisis of 2007/08, this has inevitably meant allocating these functions to be delivered in the most cost-efficient way, that is, most cheaply but not necessarily most effectively. The evidence-based prioritisation of criminogenic and non-criminogenic needs which are weakly related to recidivism (Bonta and Andrews 2010) has also furthered this separation and the allocation of responsibility for addressing these needs. Mostly, commonly criminogenic-related needs have been addressed by probation and YOT staff and non-criminogenic needs by VCS agencies (National Offender Management Service 2006, 2013; Senior *et al.* 2011); an approach which appears to have accelerated following the government's TR changes (HM Inspectorate of Probation 2017).

It should be recognised, of course, that these *fordist* arrangements are, in part, an artefact of the separate funding and commissioning arrangements which prevail for the range of provision that is required to meet the needs of offenders (National Offender Management Service 2013). This has had the inevitable consequence that different agencies and



therefore, practitioners, will be delivering different elements of the jigsaw of provision required by offenders. The limitations of this approach, where meeting the requirements of the discrete function is prioritised over its contribution to the rehabilitation of the individual, is exemplified by the results from the HM Inspectorate of Probation thematic review of unpaid work. It was noted that unpaid work was administered by 'a separate group of probation staff' and that their approach to delivery was:

... pragmatic and perfunctory, with only one in five placements tailored to suit the individual circumstances of the offender. Planning for the individual appeared to be largely an administrative process rather than to help achieve the broader objectives of the sentence. (HM Inspectorate of Probation 2017, p.68)

In simple terms, the approach adopted by the T2A services appeared to offer a more holistic delivery model, one where, if at all possible, the T2A workers themselves provided the support, advice and/or intervention needed by the service user (Wong *et al.* 2017). Where they did not have the required expertise, for example specialist autism support; or the physical resource, such as accommodation, their role was to broker that provision. However, importantly, from the perspective of the user, the T2A staff were willing and generally had the capacity to address the issues of importance to the user, irrespective of whether or not it fell into the category of criminogenic or non-criminogenic need. While at an agency and system level, the concepts of criminogenic and non-criminogenic needs prevail, these interview data suggest that this neat categorisation did not exist for these service users. Instead, they had a set of problems with which they needed help, in order that they could progress with their lives. Having a single person to rely on for help, who understood them and who they trusted, was their ideal scenario. For the service users in this study, adopting a holistic, rather than fordist approach, appeared to have contributed to user engagement. This holistic approach appears to be echoed by the literature review of quality probation supervision, which acknowledges the importance of addressing offender needs, irrespective of whether these are criminogenic or non-criminogenic (Shapland *et al.* 2012).

### **The Pleasure Principle**

Affording users emotional pleasure through offender management and, more generally, support services for offenders, is generally absent from the literature on rehabilitation and desistance – perhaps because it may appear to trivialise and undermine the goal of offender rehabilitation – a serious and societally important outcome. Politically it could easily lend itself to ridicule as part of a punitive backlash, of the type commonly referred to by policymakers, practitioners and academics as the *Daily Mail* view of justice. This issue has also been played out in the debate around the integration of risk-need-responsivity principles and desistance approaches, that concentrating too much on improving the well-being of the offender without regard for their level of risk could result in a happy but dangerous individual. It is also argued that concentrating on risk without concern for



promoting goods or well-being could lead to a defiant or disengaged client (Ward and Maruna 2007).

That said, the accounts of the T2A users expressed an emotional pleasure from their encounters with the T2A staff, as a combination of: *persona* – more a friend than a worker; *setting* – meeting in a coffee shop rather than an office; and a sense of *being cared for*. The last attribute, the expression of care for the user, is an explicit staff quality prescribed as part of the risk-need-responsivity model (Bonta and Andrews 2007) and recognised as probation supervisors demonstrating:

... ‘care’ about the person being supervised, their desistance and their future, and not just control/monitoring/surveillance. (Shapland *et al.* 2012, p.43)

While the concept of consciously designing in emotional pleasure as a benefit within services for offenders has generally not been countenanced, the importance of the *emotional content* of a service user’s experience has long been recognised in the wider service design and service marketing literature (Price, Arnould and Deibler 1995; Verma 2012). The developing evidence on emotional literacy in criminal justice practice (Knight 2014; Knight, Phillips and Chapman 2016) appears to offer a means to facilitate emotional pleasure among service users as part of the experience of offender engagement, although it ‘... should not be seen as a “technique” to be practised but rather as an authentic human quality’ (Knight, Phillips and Chapman 2016, p.55). The importance for users (in this study) of the expressed *authenticity* of the practitioner as a human being rather than just a professional is illustrated by this account:

I’ve worked with housing people before but they were in their 40s or 50s and they just didn’t give a fuck, just doing it for their job and not to help me, not like here, they’re young and they care. (T2A3)

### **Adapting the Offender Engagement Blueprint for the Voluntary Sector**

We propose, that the qualities identified by the users in this study: reciprocity, reliability, consistency, and emotional pleasure, merit incorporation into an adapted MoJ/NOMS engaging practitioner blueprint (Copsey and Rex 2013) – one that has the potential to be developed as a distinctive VCS offender engagement model for young adult and older adult offenders. They appear to resonate with the recommended practice of *forming and working through warm, open and enthusiastic relationships*, one of the behaviour clusters identified as core corrections practice (Dowden and Andrews 2004) and featured as part of the NOMS OMM (National Offender Management Service 2006). A more recent endorsement of this can be found in the companion document to the NOMS *Commissioning Intentions* document, which acknowledged that one of the set of staff behaviours which assisted desistance was ‘Building relationships that demonstrate genuine care about the individual, their desistance and their future’ (National Offender Management Service 2014, p.11). In simple terms, the qualities identified in this study can be regarded as facilitating key elements of the MoJ/NOMS engaging practitioner blueprint, that is, structured sessions and prosocial

modelling. In addition, they reflect some of the factors regarded as contributing to quality probation supervision identified by Shapland *et al.* (2012). Such a model has the potential to be trialled as part of a commissioning framework by charitable trusts and other providers of grants to VCS organisations. Particularly, as it offers perhaps a better alignment to the values/benefits (as indicated in this study) of VCS offender provision than a service specification based on outputs. Evidencing that these values/qualities occur will require feedback from those who experience it, that is, those who provide and receive the service; a point which has been similarly noted in relation to identifying quality in probation supervision (Shapland *et al.* 2012). There is insufficient space within this article to assess how best this can be achieved. Further exploration is required and is intended to be incorporated by the authors in a separate article which they are developing, examining how such a VCS model would also lend itself to a different form of measurement based on engagement data

### Conclusion

The continued contribution of VCS offender provision in the wake of TR has acquired a greater importance given the limitations of statutory probation provision. The centrality of effective engagement with offenders signalled by the MoJ/NOMS engaging practitioner blueprint has resonance in the importance attached to relationships between offender and practitioner in VCS offender provision. As such, using the engaging practitioner blueprint offers the opportunity to develop a distinctive VCS offender engagement model. Based on the findings of the lived experience of the young adult users, this study suggests the importance of reciprocity, reliability, and consistency, completeness of provision, and emotional pleasure as additional features of such a model. As such, it provides a starting point for considering an alternative model of commissioning and indicates areas for further development and testing.<sup>4</sup>

### Notes

- 1 NOMS was renamed Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service in February 2017.
- 2 Probation service is used throughout this article to collectively describe the statutory services delivered by Community Rehabilitation Companies and the National Probation Service.
- 3 ASPIRE: Assessment, Sentence Planning, Implementation, Review, and Evaluation.
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