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# The Long-Term Impacts of Probation Supervision

Justice Cooperation Network  
(JCN)

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# An Outline of My Talk

- Headlines news from earlier sweeps of interviewing.
- Brief case studies of what PRs said about supervision. Link this to other life changes.
- Try to peer inside the 'black box' of supervision.
- Draw some wider lessons.



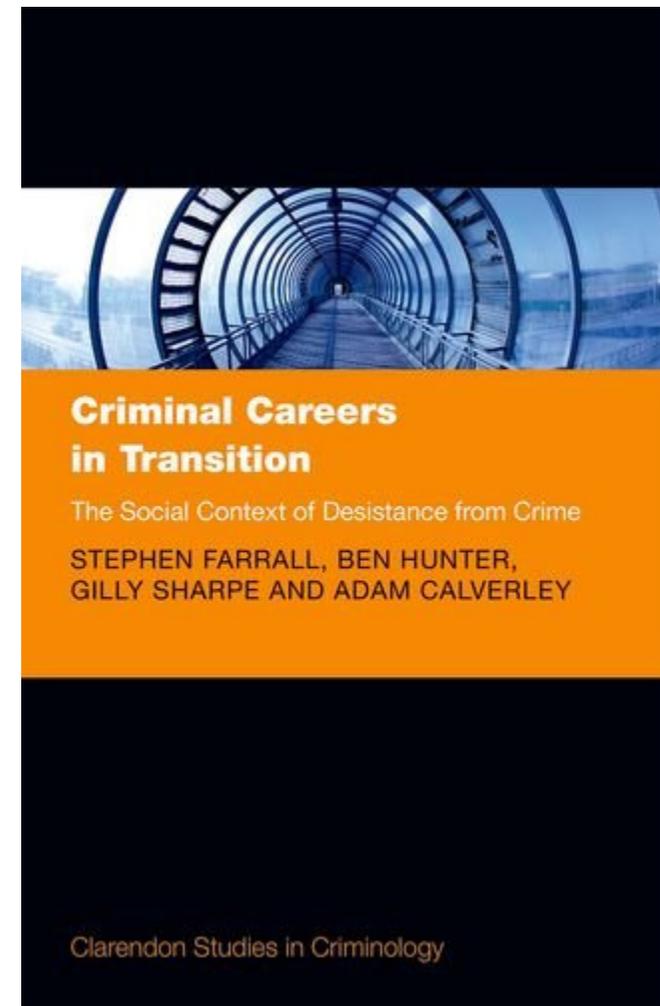
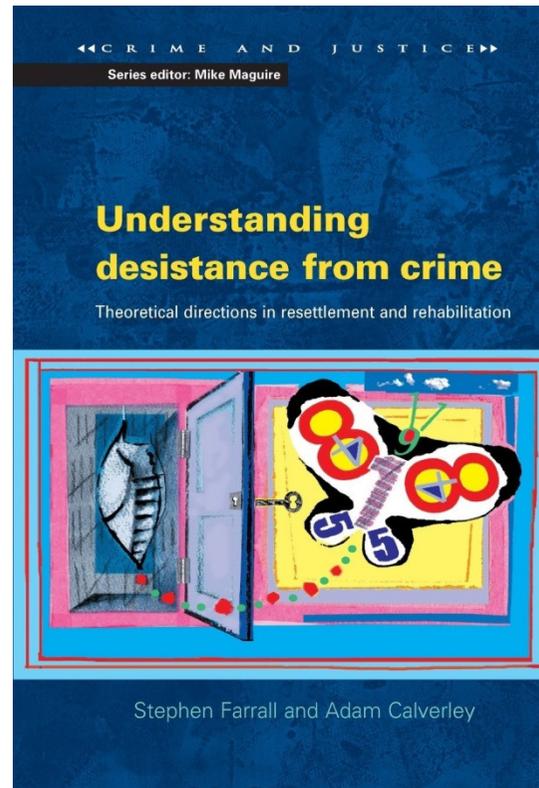
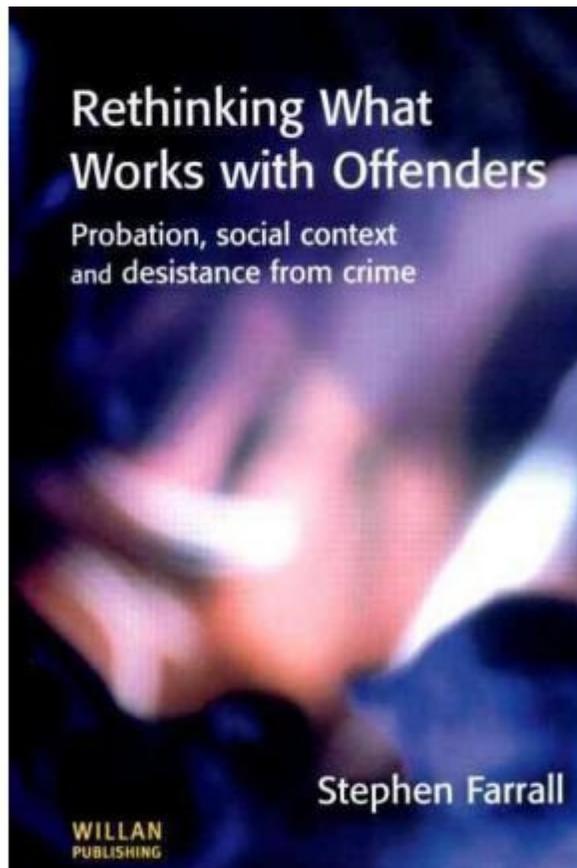
## News from 'Tracking Progress On/After Probation'

- 199 'daily traffic' probationers recruited into the study (aged 17-35) Autumn '97-Spring '98.
- They and their POs interviewed at the start of their orders, six months later and at end of order (1997-1999).
- 4<sup>th</sup> sweep (1/4 sample) follow-up (2003-04).
- 5<sup>th</sup> sweep fieldwork (2010-2012). 105 int's.
- 1,156 interviews (613 probationers, 543 POs).



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# The three books I shall draw on





## What did PRs say during/soon after probation supervision? (SWPs1-3)

- They felt that they had not got a lot from their supervision.
- 1/3 said that their POs had done 'little' or 'nothing' to assist them in tackling an obstacle to desistance. (Farrall, 2002: 92).
- PO/PR: <50% of obstacles were resolved
- Desistance was 'all my own work'.
- Generally dismissive of probation.



## What did PRs say during/soon after probation supervision? (SWP4)

- Now 2003-4 (so 5yrs on).
- Overall picture still rather depressing; few PRs suggested that they had taken much from probation (Farrall & Calverley, 2006).
- But there were the first signs from some of the PRs that they *had* taken something from probation.



## What did PRs say during/soon after probation supervision? (SWPs1-3)

- **Anthony:** Started 1yr order for violence.
- Typical: male, aged in late 20s/early 30s, intermittent manual worker, drinking heavily, using 'soft' drugs + pills, poor educational attainment (but clearly bright).
- Got on well with PO. Order ended early in breach (failure to attend anger man' course). Drunken violence at weekends.



## What did PRs say during/soon after probation supervision? (SWPs1-3)

- Continued to offend, but growing less frequent over time.
- Move away from town centre to suburbs also associated with reduction in episodes of drunken violence.
- ‘Settles down’ with new partner; ‘blended family’. Working on and off.



## What did PRs say during/soon after probation supervision? (SWPs1-3)

“If I was in a club and I was [drunk] I wouldn’t think ‘ummm, I’d better not get in a fight ‘cos I’m on probation and I don’t want to go to prison no more’. **It wouldn’t enter my head.**”

Anthony, SWP2

“It [anger management] **was a load of [rubbish]**. You sit there with eight or nine other kiddies, just discussing stupid things, like I just said. Like stupid questions. Or like, they give you a form, you go there every week, they give you a form, you have to tick the box ‘how you feel today’ and all that kind of thing, ‘what’s wound you up that week’ and stuff like that. Stupid things really.      Anthony, SWP3



## What did PRs say during/soon after probation supervision? (SWP4)

“I wouldn’t say anything’s [that probation officer said] stuck with me but it chipped away if you know what I mean, it sort of chips away at you. [SF: Right]. They don’t stick in your head but occasionally you’ll get that little thought of ‘maybe I shouldn’t do this because I’ve...’. And maybe he told me about this or ... you know what I mean? **It chips away at you** I suppose”. Anthony, SWP4



## What did PRs say during/soon after probation supervision? (SWP5)

“I suppose anger management **did help a little bit** when I got that through probation and that, cause I’d be seeing this stupid [PO], and she’d be telling me stuff I don’t really want to hear and then a couple of days later I’d just go and see [PO] and he’d say “how did anger management go” and we’d talk about anger management. So I suppose, and **from that respect it makes you analyse what you’ve done, who you’ve done it to, how you can change it. It gives you them tools**, it tells you the tools, whether you want to bring them onboard is up to you”. Anthony, SWP5



# What did PRs say during/soon after probation supervision? (SWPs1-5)

## What have we learnt from Anthony?:

- Probation appeared to offer little whilst on probation.
- Started using insights from probation after having been on probation.
- So 'impact' of probation sometime after probation and related to other life changes too.



# Opening the 'Black Box'

- How is impact produced over time?
- Can we relate staying out of trouble back to probation supervision?
- What lessons about 'assisted desistance' can we extract?
- I'll use further case studies from SWP5.



# Bobby: drink-related offending

*All data from SWP5*

BH: Did PO say or do anything to try and help you stay out of trouble?

Bobby: Yeah, well she – she told – told me what she was – for the best but the alcohol, she just says, “You’ve got to can it, it’s obvious that’s the root, that is the be all and end all of what’s happening, if that,” you know, she put everything I’d done, “Were you drunk when you did this, were you drunk when you did that?” “yes” to every single thing, everything, there wasn’t even one that it wasn’t, it was, it was literally – and so we worked on that ...



# Bobby: drink-related offending

*All data from SWP5*

BH: I guess what I was wondering, sort of did you learn anything while you were on probation with PO?

Bobby: Yes, yeah I did because also we – we went across what it [alcohol] does to your body for one thing, and what units are and all that lot, you know, and how many and – and so on and so forth. So that side of things, yeah, I didn't learn – and **I was quite surprised about how much of a poison it is really.**



# Bobby: drink-related offending

Bobby: But it's hard to – it's like leading a horse to water, you can't make it drink type thing, although I did learn that **I wasn't fully committed to stop so my fault**, nobody else's, you know.

.....

BH: Did she give you any advice on managing the drinking?

Bobby: Yeah, I had a scale of what I drank, I had to write down what I drunk, how I felt, blah blah blah, which I lied about, I'll admit now [both laugh], yeah, but again she can only do so much, I mean I only saw her, what an hour or two every week, so that's not really going to solve much. **It was good to have somebody to talk to though about it.**



# Bobby: drink-related offending

Bobby: It – **when I started to see my son growing up** I thought, I don't want him to know – I mean he's – chances are he'll find out about what I've done, what I've been – been doing, drinking wise and everything else, he'll hear it off, I don't know, off his mam probably because, you know [laughs], I'm not her best – best person in the world at the minute, but fair enough he'll find out, he'll – it's up to him how he deals with it. I'm – I won't deny things, I won't lie to him, **but I thought I've got a little man here and, you know, that's a big eye-opener.**

Son born 2006; last conviction 2008 (but some trouble into 2009); reports walking away from fights in 2010.



# Peter: injecting user

- Peter injecting since early 1995 (on and off). Stopped 2004-08. Went back to injecting late 2008 (family death). Not used since early 2009.

## SWP5 interview:

Peter: I was talking not long back about the criminal offences and a lot of the things I did, I didn't actually do it out of being calculated, I just did it because I did it, it was just spur of the moment, dependant on the particular scenario and who I was with, and I just did and I never really thought about the consequences of it and all the ins and outs, I just got on and did it. And in that sense I've changed a lot, because I do think a lot more about the consequences of things and how it affects other people. **And funnily enough, the root of that started on probation.**



# Peter: injecting user

SWP5 interview:

Peter: *And it kind of planted a seed, and it took a few years before I really started to act on it, but I think yeah, probation probably started all that off.* Perspective and seeing things from a different angle, instead of thinking from my point of view or thinking it from somebody else's.



# Peter's PO's insights ...

PO SWP2 interview:

*Has anything that you've said or done been helpful in keeping Peter out of trouble?*

"I doubt it. I don't think other than reminding him that he is on probation we achieved anything else.

Sometimes when you say something that sticks in the mind [it] comes out only a long time after the event. Sometimes people remind you of something you said 5yrs ago".



# The Role of Talking

- Talking previously derided by PRs:
- “We talked a lot about [drug use], but that is as far as it goes. I didn’t get much help”  
Charlotte, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview.
- ... but becomes appreciated later:



# The Role of Talking

“We’d just talk about things and that. Just life in general, I never missed my appointment with him. [...] it was something to sort of look forward to going. Sort of like, get out and talk to someone. Cause like, alright fair enough, like

you’re married and you’ve got a partner and whatever, but you can talk to your partner about things and that. But like sometimes, **whatever you talk to them about, they interpret it in a different way. I mean it doesn’t sort of make sense to them, what you’re trying to get out.** You know what I mean, so I’d like talking to someone else. **So that helped as well”.**  
Elsayed, 5<sup>th</sup> sweep.



# Practical Help Key Too

- Downplayed by some critics of the project.

**Kirsten:** ... the CV that they wrote for me at probation, I still use it.

**Derek:** [PO] did help me, you know, in some ways, you know, if anything was messed up with my benefits or anything like that she'd be there for me.

**Clifford:** A lot of it was helping me to get a job really. If anything they helped me more than the Job Centre really. They sat down with me, helped me do CV's and what have you.



# Befriend, Advise, Assist

**Brett:** [...] you did listen to her because she wasn't ... she was a nice lady actually, so you'd listen to what she was telling you, and it was like

good advice. Even though she was helping you on her own to get somewhere to live, you had to listen to what she was telling you, about what to do, **even when probation was finished.**



# Befriend, Advise, Assist

So, practical help

- a) builds trust
- b) encourages engagement and
- c) creates compliance in the long run.



# Lessons

- How is impact produced over time?
- Explaining very basic things to PRs.
- Talking things through with PRs.
- The interaction of the above with naturally occurring changes in social/personal lives.
- (This last point implies community, not custodial, sentences).



# Lessons

- Can we relate staying out of trouble back to probation supervision?
- I would say so; numerous references to supervision as a 'seed'/'starting point' for change.
- Advice given (even if NOT used at the time of 'delivery') IS used as circumstances change. The advice is 'stored'/drawn upon later.



# Lessons

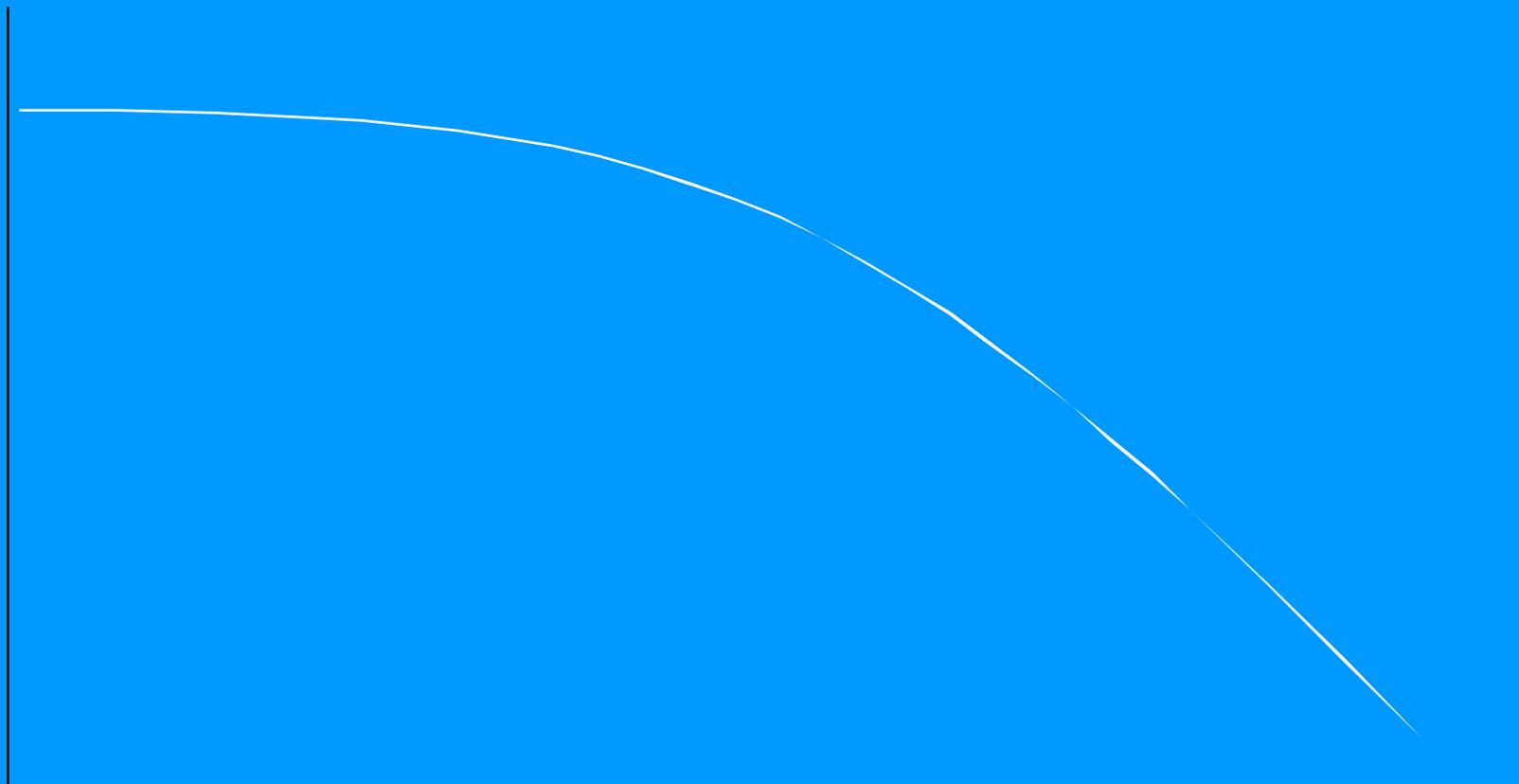
- What lessons about 'assisted desistance' can we extract?
- Some aspects of the social work model appear to 'work'.
- Building relationships; taking a long-term perspective.
- Our model of how probation staff assist in the production of desistance.





# Assumed model of impact (based on the idea of 'decay')

Level of pain relief



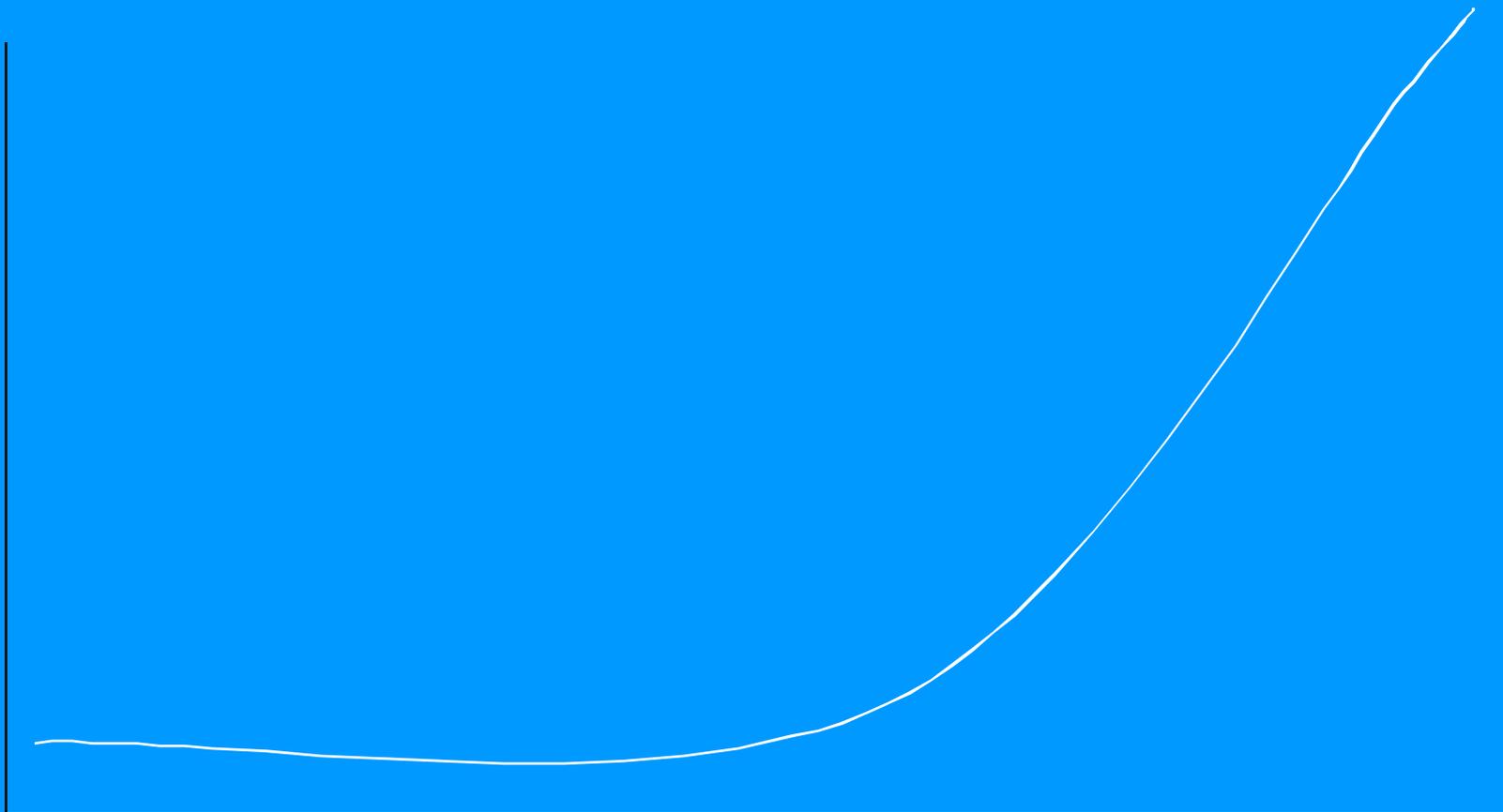
Time



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# Possible model of impact?

Level of impact



Time



# Implications?

- ‘Clear Theories of Change’?: No thanks!
- Need longer assessment periods (>2yrs. 10yrs?).
- Need to accept periods of low/no impact.
- Need to recognise that other social/personal factors play a mediating role in probation work.
- More (and more rigorously designed) studies.
- Need to accept that some drivers to change operate very mundanely.



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## Main reports on the project:

Farrall, S. (2002) **Rethinking What Works With Offenders**, Willan Publishing, Cullompton, Devon.

Farrall, S. and Calverley, A. (2006)  
**Understanding Desistance from Crime**, Open University Press, London.

Farrall, S., Hunter, B., Sharpe, G. and Calverley, A. (2014) **Criminal Careers in Transition: The Social Context of Desistance from Crime**, Oxford University Press, Oxford.