

The Building Better Lives Programme for Violent Offenders Irish Prison Service

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Violent offending in Ireland

Violent Offenders	Sexual Offenders
35%	9%

Table 1. Percentage of prison population

Violent Offenders	Sexual offenders
45%	18%

Table 2. Rates of re-offending as per 2008 study

Aim of BBL Programme

- To reduce violent and disruptive behaviour in prison and on release
- To address the challenges of this population
 - Complex clinical & social presentations
 - Core beliefs based on mistrust, paranoia, hostility
 - Limited access to their emotional & thinking worlds
 - Significant substance abuse problems
 - Challenging to engage – violence has benefits
 - High drop out rates (40-50%)

Current groups

- Enhanced Thinking Skills Programme
 - 2 x 2 ½ hours per week x 10 weeks
- Exploring Better Lives Programme
 - 2 x 2 ½ hours per week x 10-12 weeks
- Practising Better Lives Programme
 - 2 x 2 ½ hours per week x 8-12 months

Enhanced Thinking Skills (ETS)

- No disclosure of personal info. or offence
- Teach strategies for social problem solving:
 - Stop & think (impulse control)
 - Defining problem & gathering information
 - Generating & evaluating alternative solutions
 - Considering the consequences
 - Planning
 - Using social skills to put strategies into action

Exploring Better Lives Programme

- Motivational / preparatory group
- Exercises & inputs
 - Disclosure of my offence
 - Autobiography
 - How therapy works – challenge & support
 - Self-sabotage
 - Coping strategies
 - Shame and guilt
 - Attachment
 - Emotional awareness

Practising Better Lives Programme

Exercises -

- Autobiography
- Disclosure of my offence
- Victim letters (empathy)
- Understanding my offence
- My future goals and plans
- Managing my future risk factors
- Address to the group on leaving
- Family meeting

Targeted risk factors

VRS (Wong & Gordon, 2000)

- **1. Violent harmful behaviour**
 - Violence in prison, weapon use , violence cycle
- **2. Criminal lifestyle**
 - Criminal attitudes, CD, criminal peers, work ethic
- **3. Relationship issues**
 - Stability of relationship, interpersonal aggression
- **4. Self management**
 - Emotional control, impulsivity, mental disorder
- **5. Substance abuse**
- **6. Release-related issues**
 - Compliance with supervision, community support

Protective factors

- Hope, self-worth, self efficacy
- Sense of identity and belonging
- Attachment & capacity to relate to self and others
- Insight
- Capacity to communicate thoughts / feelings
- Family/partner support
- Sense of humour

Benefits of a group approach

- Violence occurs within a social context. Anti-social men must learn to function in social groups. *'Change occurs through the very act of becoming a responsible group member'*
 - Finding a place, relationship (trust), coping with boundaries, change, uncertainty, loss, separation
- Peer group vehicle for change in attitude
- Group amplifies emotion – access hot cognitions
- Group re-creates early familial dynamics

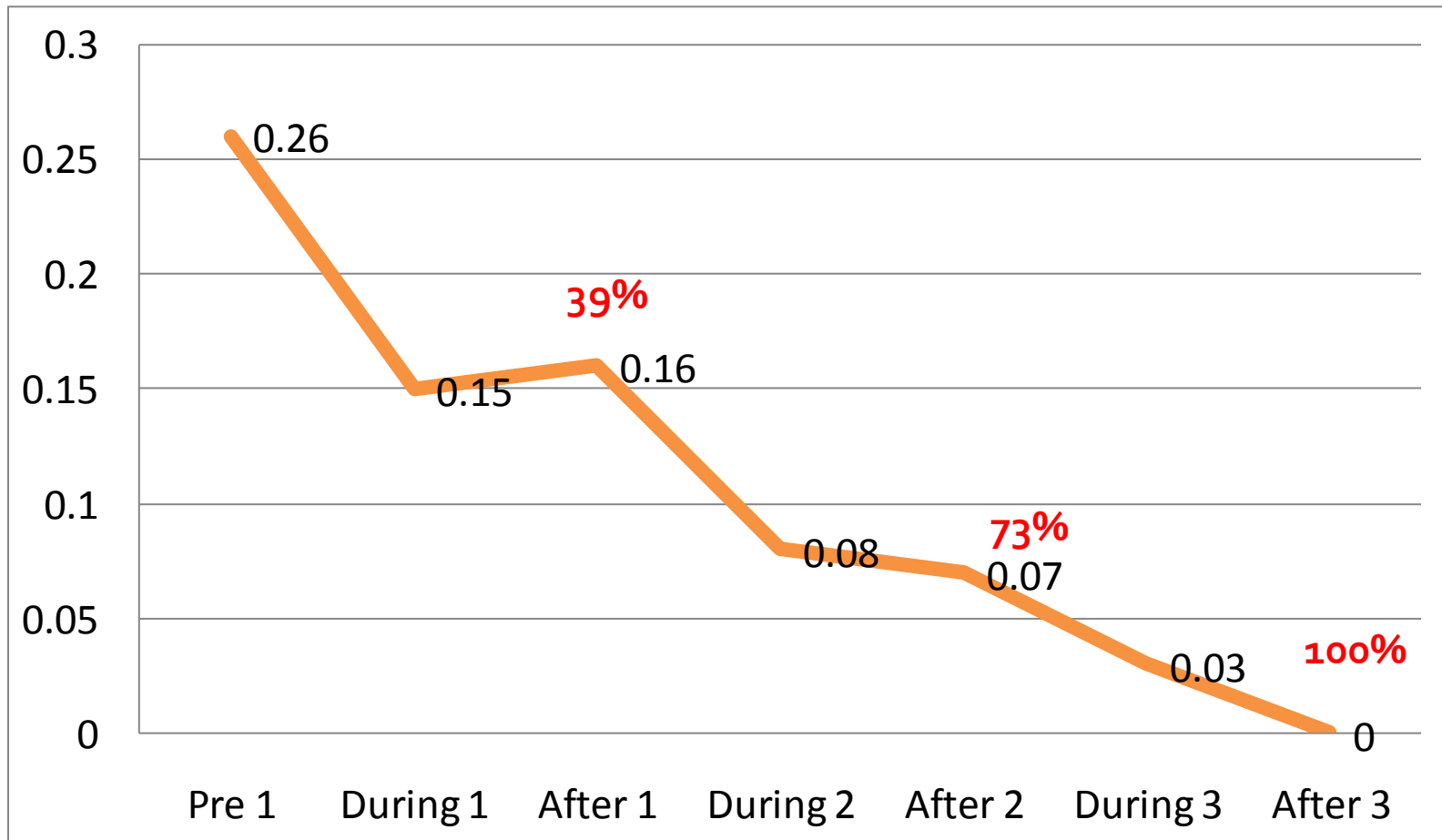
Who is the programme aimed at?

- Higher risk violent offenders
 - E.g. 95 BBL/ETS participants committed 2,594 crimes
 - 101 robberies
 - 91 weapons/firearms offences
 - 142 assaults
 - 4 manslaughter convictions
 - 33 murders
 - 1,614 P19s

Does it work?

- P19s: fewer and less violent
- Very low drop-out rate (0-16%)
- Progress within prison system
 - DFUs, enhanced regimes, open prisons
- Increased participation in training/education
- Improved relationships with families
- Reduction in methadone levels
- Increased engagement with health-care

Reduction in number of P19s



Partnership approach

- Shared success
- Prison level supports:
 - Prison officer detail
 - Facilities
 - Prison regime
 - Culture – Prison officers

Participants to date (Jan 2013)

	Participated	Completed	Drop-out	% Drop-out	Other reasons
ETS	59	50	8	14%	1
EBL	64	52	10	16%	2
PBL	23	20	0	0%	3
Total	146	122	18	-	6