

Sylvia Sleeman

Psychodramatic Methods, Social Groupwork and the Probation Service

In this paper I will look at some of the apparently significant changes that have taken place in recent years in the Probation and After Care Service and suggest that social groupwork can provide a valuable adjunct to the one-to-one relationship. In addition, I believe that psychodrama has much to contribute to the group process and will look at the applicability of psychodramatic techniques to the treatment of offenders in group settings.

Social groupwork is not new to the probation service. Barr (1) supplied information about groups being run by probation officers and produced evidence to combat fears that, by meeting in groups, clients may be led to commit offences together. The survey indicated that most groups fell into one of two types, either discussion or activity groups, usually with adolescent probationers. This pattern has continued in that major provision now exists for group work with adolescents in the form of intermediate treatment, which can include both activity based and discussion centred groups. In addition, Haxby (2) makes the point that the service has acquired new opportunities for using groupwork in the form of greater involvement with institutions, for example, prisons, borstals and hostels. The new methods of social skills training developed by Priestly and others have been introduced successfully in some institutions and probation officers are becoming involved in other forms of groupwork in prisons.

Groupwork approaches are being used to assist prisoners' wives in many areas but can also be used to meet a much wider area of client need, particularly for adult probationers and licencees. In the article 'Groupwork Techniques' (3) probation officers used a groupwork approach for clients previously unresponsive to one-to-one work. This could mean that a greater number of probation orders could be made and probation become a more flexible alternative to imprisonment. The selection process is stressed in order to "discover whether the applicant sees his life as unsatisfactory by his own standards and, if he does, whether he is prepared to make a real effort to change it". The article 'Groupwork with Sexual Offenders' (4) describes a very interesting project within Avon Probation and After Care Service, where the group is seen to provide these men with hope that some control over their behaviour is possible and a means of achieving this through the group process. In addition, "members are firmly of the opinion that attendance at the group has helped them to avoid reoffending and there is a strong feeling of group support in their individual struggles".

Believing as I do that the methods of the Probation and After Care Service need to change and diversify in order to accommodate the challenge of providing

alternatives to custody and continue to give the client an effective service, I feel that social groupwork such as psychodrama can provide a significant contribution in making a wider range of treatment options available and in coping with a greater number of higher risk offenders.

Lewis Yablonsky (5) writes "Psychodrama is primarily a group process, although it may shift from the group to an individual's problems at varying points in a session. The director constantly moves toward mobilising the group to work together on their mutual problems and feelings, even though only one or two members of the group serve as the sessions' primary representatives. The response of people in the audience is often greater than that of people on stage. There are several central elements, roles and techniques used in psychodrama to focus a session". Psychodrama is essentially a method by which people are helped to enact their problems rather than just talk about it. Group members explore lives by enacting scenes that are modelled on life itself, such as dreams, joys, disappointments and sorrows. There is no script as in the theatre and all participation is spontaneous. Scenes of the past, present and future may be enacted. The scenes are played through the eyes of the subject or protagonist with the guidance of a group leader or director and with the help of the group in significant other roles. Each session evolves from a warm up to a series of enactments and ends in a discussion as members of the group share their own identification with the person or the problem.

Psychodrama focuses on emotional responses to a situation rather than intellectual interpretations. Psychodramatic techniques are as applicable to work with offenders as in the fields of mental health and education. The potential would seem great and in a group, where members are encouraged to look at their day-to-day relationships, psychodrama offers a means of expressing and clarifying existing feelings like anger or grief, or rehearsing more appropriate forms of behaviour which could benefit both the members and others in their lives.

A recent article (6) explores the use of psychodramatic techniques with delinquents of low intelligence in an institutional setting. Using techniques such as doubling, role reversal, modelling and soliloquy in order to dramatise problems, this appears to have been a successful venture. Here is a short excerpt, "*later in the session it was revealed that a judge was one person the protagonist desired revenge against. A court scene was set up. The protagonist was seated in the defendant's chair and was pronounced guilty. The protagonist interrupted the action to say that the judge was not playing his part as forcefully as the real judge. A role reversal was quickly effected. There were two reasons for this: 1) Any revenge representations that might follow at this point would only serve to role train the protagonist for revenge. Also, 2) it was important that the protagonist get the feeling of receiving revenge, not of giving it*".

In the New Careers Project in Bristol, which trains young offenders with a view to future employment in the field of social work as an alternative to borstal training, psychodrama has been extensively used to help members adjust to their changing role in life and act out in a group setting energies that might otherwise be channelled into delinquent activities.

Psychodrama is a powerful methodology which requires skill and training in application. With more emotionally disturbed people, the question must be asked whether a support system is necessary within which psychodrama can be used, a residential as opposed to a fieldwork setting for more indepth work? It is sometimes useful to have an auxiliary ego in the group who is trained in the use of psychodramatic methods because he may be more perceptive and spontaneous. This most often occurs where there is an ongoing programme of psychodrama, for example, in a psychiatric hospital where certain kinds of personality disorder may lead individuals to be suspicious and slow to reveal themselves. Another factor is that the use of physical movement is especially important for those who have little capacity for intellectual and verbal exploration and also those who tend to over-intellectualise their experience. The experience in mental health shows psychodrama to be a valid form of therapy with the emotionally disturbed and the evidence to date is that this is an extremely promising technique for those working with offender groups.

References

- (1) Barr 1966 H.M.S.O.
 - (2) Haxby 1978, p.245
 - (3) Probation Journal - June 1977
 - (4) Probation Journal - September 1978
 - (5) Yablonsky 1972
-

Helen Jones

The Afan Alternative For Young Offenders

"The purposes of training and treatment of convicted prisoners shall be to establish in them the will to lead a good and useful life on discharge and to fit them to do so."

The Prison Rules 1964

The Afan Alternative - a course of group work using role play, sociodrama and psychodrama was set up by Deri Lewis as a viable alternative to Borstal and prison. In this way, the scheme takes on hard-core offenders, ones which the Probation Service does not usually deal with. It runs for a period of six months. About 10 young persons are involved in the group, but it is a continuous process with others joining as some complete the course. The idea is to get offenders straight from Court where an order will be made for 12 months. A medical certificate is required and no one is accepted on the group unless they are fit to take part. Offenders who would probably otherwise receive custodial sentences are told that if they embark upon the scheme it is going