

Evaluation of Geese Theatre's Reconnect Programme

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ABSTRACT

In this study we examined the impact of Geese Theatre's Reconnect programme on the men who attended it. This programme used theatre performance, experiential exercises, skills practice role-plays and metaphors such as the masks to invite the group to consider and explore issues connected with their release and re-connecting with a life outside prison. Pre and post-programme psychometric tests, behaviour ratings, and interviews were completed to assess the effectiveness of the programme. Significant changes were observed from pre-treatment to post-treatment in terms of self-efficacy, motivation to change, and improved confidence in of skills (i.e., social/ friendship, occupational, family/ intimacy, dealing with authority, alternatives to aggression or offending, and self-management/ self-control skills). Improved behaviour and engagement within the programme was observed over the 3 days of the programme. Interviews also revealed the positive impact the programme had on the participants. This provides evidence supporting the short-term effectiveness of the *Reconnect* programme.

Introduction

The rehabilitation and subsequent resettlement of individuals serving time in prison should be one of the primary goals of incarceration. Ideally, it provides an opportunity to instil the skills necessary for a successful move back into the community, providing these individuals with options for living a life that doesn't rely on, or continually resort to, crime for lack of other options. Without assistance in developing such skills, it is unreasonable for people to presume that incarceration will deter reoffense. The Prison Service in England and Wales offers programmes to address individuals' needs in a number of areas such as cognitive skills, substance use problems, anger management and relationship problems. Some prisons have specific units that provide assistance with resettlement. However, these programmes and units are not offered at all prisons and some individuals aren't offered the opportunity to make use of them (e.g., due to security concerns). The fact remains that those on determinate sentences will all be released eventually. If for no other reason than this, efforts need to be made to ensure this reintegration is as successful as possible. Different approaches to addressing issues of resettlement make a useful adjunct to the services that are available through current prison programmes, or may provide the only opportunity for some individuals to address these issues prior to their release.

The use of theatre and drama provide a unique approach to working in the criminal justice system. The use of theatre and drama in this context is noted to be relatively under researched (Hughes, 2004). Drama-based approaches offer advantages over other approaches in that they are more personally-focused and practical, rely less on literacy and expression skills, and allows for self-reflection and practice of newly learned skills (Baim, Brookes, & Mountford, 2002). The approaches used are also consistent with those found to be essential components of successful rehabilitative programmes for offenders (Antonowicz & Ross, 1994).

Research has provided support for the use of drama-based approaches in prisons and secure settings in terms of reducing anger. One such study examined changes in level of anger following a therapeutic theatre project with 12 adult male mentally disordered offenders (Reiss, Quayle, Brett, &

Meux, 1998). The researchers found that levels of anger (measured in two different ways) were significantly reduced from the week prior to the programme to the week following the programme. This improvement was maintained after 3 months. Another study examined 62 participants who attended a combined drama and cognitive-behavioural programme designed to explore the processes of anger, aggression, and violence (Blacker, Watson, & Beech, 2008). In this study, the researchers again found significant reductions in anger from pre-course to post-course.

It would be expected that prison programmes which hope to translate into improvements in pro-social functioning in the community would provide individuals with an improved sense of self-efficacy, increased motivation to work on their problems, and improved confidence in a number of skills. Bandura (1994) notes that self-efficacy beliefs are said to ‘determine how people think, feel and motivate themselves and behave’ (p. 71). These self-beliefs of efficacy are central aspects of motivating people, in that they develop ideas about what they are capable of, generally establish plans to achieve these, and anticipate the possible outcomes of these actions/behaviours. Motivation to work on one’s problems is also an important aspect of bringing about and maintaining change. Motivation for change can be conceptualised in terms of Prochaska and DiClemente’s (1982) transtheoretical model of change, ranging from lack of acknowledgement of a problem (i.e., precontemplation stage), to considering that one might have a problem and considering working on it (i.e., contemplation stage), to actively working on the problem (i.e., action stage), through to the maintenance of the changes made in treatment (i.e., maintenance stage). Improved confidence in skills ensures that people are better able to face the challenges they may encounter in terms of successfully reintegrating themselves into the community.

This study will examine the impact of the *Reconnect* programme on the participants who attended it. With only a few exceptions, previous studies (e.g., Blacker et al., 2008; Reiss et al., 1998) looking at drama-based interventions have used qualitative designs, had relatively small samples, and relied on self-report measures (Hughes, 2002). In this study, the impact of the programme will be examined using

several psychometric tests, behaviour ratings, and interviews with a relatively large sample collected from a number of prisons across the U.K and Wales.

Study objectives

The first objective was to determine whether improvements would be observed on psychometric tests measuring self-efficacy, motivation to change, and confidence in a range of skills.

The second objective was to determine whether behaviour and engagement within the programme would improve over the three days of the programme.

The third objective was to examine individuals' perceptions of the *Reconnect* programme and their plans for and thoughts about the future.

Method

Setting

Re-connect was developed by the Geese Theatre Company in 2005 as a theatre and drama group work programme addressing resettlement issues for offenders in prison who are approaching their release date. It was delivered in 11 prisons on 20 different occasions across the UK and Wales, as a three day (and in limited cases, 2 day) project.

Re-connect uses theatre performance, experiential exercises, skills practice role-plays and metaphors such as the masks to invite the group to consider and explore issues connected with their release and re-connecting with a life outside prison. The objectives of the programme are:

- To explore and practise problem solving skills and effective coping strategies
- To analyse potential high risk situations for offending and identifying and practise non-offending alternatives
- To assist with setting realistic and achievable goals for the future
- To enhance motivation to change

Prisons were asked to select individuals who show some level of motivation to change, who are close to release or engaged in resettlement programmes, and those with basic skills deficits. Individuals were excluded if they were juveniles, had mental health problems, had insufficient time remaining in their sentences to complete the course. The participants were not required to have basic literacy or numeracy skills. The maximum group size was 12 individuals. The programme was delivered by two or three Geese practitioners.

Participants

Participants ($N = 113$) who were selected by prison staff as appropriate for the programme, including both men ($n=70$) and women ($n=43$). Some of these individuals did not complete the full three day programme so results will be reported for a smaller subset of this sample for the individual analyses. Some prisons were unwilling to provide any information or only very basic information about the participants so demographic and offense history information is missing for a number of individuals.

The participants were incarcerated for a range of offenses including robbery (8.0%; $n=9$), drug offenses (8.0%; $n=9$), burglary (5.3%; $n=4$), customs evasion (5.3%; $n=4$), theft (2.7%; $n=3$), wounding (1.7%; $n=2$), handling stolen good (1.8%; $n=2$), forgery (0.9%; $n=1$), gross bodily harm (0.9%; $n=1$), murder (0.9%; $n=1$), arson (0.9%; $n=1$), manslaughter (0.9%; $n=1$), and Harassment (0.9%; $n=1$) and for the remaining 63.7% ($n=72$) offense category was unknown. The majority (28.3%) of the participants were White British ($n=32$), 3.5% ($n=4$) were classified as a 'White Other' ethnic category, and 3.5% ($n=4$) were classified as Asian, 15.9% were classified as Black Caribbean or Black African ($n=18$), 3.5% were classified as White/ Black Caribbean ($n=4$), for 45.1 1% were classified as unknown ethnicity ($n=51$).

Measures

Self-efficacy

This was measured using the General Perceived Self Efficacy Scale (Jerusalem & Schwarzer, 1992). This 10-item scale was created to assess a general sense of perceived self-efficacy with the aim in mind to

predict coping with daily hassles as well as adaptation after experiencing all kinds of stressful life events. Responses range from not at all true (1) to exactly true (4). Higher scores indicate higher levels of self-efficacy. There is evidence for the reliability and validity of the measure (Jerusalem & Schwarzer, 1992).

Motivation to Change

This was measured using the University of Rhode Island Change Assessment (URICA; Diclemente & Hughes, 1990). This is a 32-item self-report measure including 4 subscales measuring stage of change in treatment. The URICA assesses motivation for change by providing scores on four stages of change: precontemplation, contemplation, action and maintenance, as well as an overall score indicating motivation to change. Responses are provided on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strong disagreement (1) to strong agreement (5). Higher scores indicate more motivation to change. There is evidence for this measure's reliability and validity (Diclemente & Hughes, 1990).

Confidence in Skills

This was measured using the Skills Rating form in the Geese Theatre handbook (Baim et al., 2002). This rating sheet measures confidence in social/ friendship skills, occupational skills, family/ intimacy skills, dealing with authority, alternatives to aggression or offending, and self-management/ self-control. Higher scores indicate more confidence in skills.

Group Behaviour and Engagement

This was measured using the Evaluation of Behaviour in the Group form from the Geese Theatre handbook (Baim, Brookes, & Mountford, 2002). Examples of items that are considered are whether the individual engages positively without prompting, maintains concentration, and shows a willingness to do personally focused work. Responses ranged from Always (1) to Never (6) therefore higher scores indicated poorer performance.

Semi-Structured Interview

Some of the participants were interviewed about their thoughts on the programme having completed it, their thoughts about the methods used and their feelings/ plans for the future (Appendix A).

Procedure

This study was designed to measure the short-term impact of the *Reconnect* programme, therefore pre and post-programme ratings were examined in terms of self-efficacy, motivation to change, and self-reported confidence in terms of social/ friendship skills, occupational skills, family/ intimacy skills, dealing with authority, alternatives to aggression and offending, self-management/ self-control. These measures were introduced and explained by one of the primary (LH), secondary (CP) researchers or by one of the Geese practitioners if the researchers were not able to attend. Consent was obtained from those who chose to take part. For individuals who had difficulty reading, one of the researchers or one of the Geese practitioners provided assistance.

Furthermore, daily behaviour ratings were conducted of the participants' behaviour and engagement within the group. This was completed by the researchers and the members of Geese Theatre together. All discussed and agreed upon the most appropriate rating. Originally the researcher intended to complete the rating to avoid possible bias, but at times the group broke into smaller groups to allow for more individually-focused work. In these cases the researcher could not be in more than one group at a time so it was decided that the rating would be made by both the researchers and the Geese team so that all of each participant's work could be considered.

Finally, interviews were conducted with a subset of the participants immediately following the programme about their thoughts on the programme and plans for the future. Individuals were chosen randomly from all the participants for each particular group. Two participants were interviewed from all the prisons that the researchers attended. This resulted in 18 interviews being conducted.

Analyses

Paired t-tests were used to examine differences in the pre and post-treatment measures. Repeated measures ANOVAs were used to examine change in behaviour and engagement in treatment.

Results

Pre-programme and post-programme scores were examined for evidence of improvement over the three days of the programme. In particular, self-efficacy, motivation to change, and self-reported confidence in skills were examined. Additionally, daily ratings of behaviour and engagement within the group were also examined for evidence of change. Finally interviews were conducted on a subset of participants to ascertain their thoughts on the programme and their plans/ thoughts about the future.

Psychometrics

Significant improvements were observed on all the psychometric measures (Table 1). Specifically, self-efficacy improved significantly ($t(59)= 3.6, p<.001$). Motivation to change also improved significantly from the first day to the last ($t(46)= 2.5, p= .015$). Finally the overall self-reported confidence in skills also showed significant improvement ($t(35)= 3.6, p=0.001$). All of the individual skills showed significant change as well (Table 1.).

Table 1

Pre-treatment and post-treatment mean and Standard Deviation (SD) for each psychometric measure

MEASURE	PRE-TREATMENT (SD)	POST-TREATMENT (SD)	Significance
Self-efficacy (N=60)	30.7 (4.5)	33.6 (4.2)	P<.001
Motivation to Change (N=47)	9.0 (1.5)	9.4 (2.0)	p.015
Overall Confidence in Skills (N=36)	154.8 (16.4)	165.0 (23.3)	P=.001
<i>Social/ Friendship Skills (N=52)</i>	21.8 (3.7)	23.8 (3.7)	P<.001
<i>Occupational Skills (N=51)</i>	25.5 (5.3)	28.1 (4.9)	P<.001
<i>Family/ Intimacy Skills (N= 42)</i>	43.5 (6.4)	45.3 (6.9)	P=.03
<i>Dealing with Authority (N= 47)</i>	17.8 (4.2)	19.5 (4.6)	P=.001
<i>Alternatives to Aggression (N= 46)</i>	31.3 (5.8)	34.0(6.9)	P=.008
<i>Self-management/ Self-control (N=50)</i>	14.3 (3.4)	15.4 (3.0)	P=.010

Behaviour Ratings

Daily ratings were made about the participants' behaviour and engagement in the group. This was completed by the researcher and the members of Geese Theatre who were facilitating the programme. A repeated-measures ANOVA revealed significant improvements in terms of behaviour and engagement over the 3 days of the programme ($F(2, 148) = 8.4, p < .001$).

Interviews

Brief interviews were conducted with 18 participants. Some quotes are provided to illustrate the participants' perceptions of the programme.

Thoughts on the Programme.

“It gave me confidence. I never had confidence before. It gave me strength and made me realise a lot of things. It made me think deep and open up my eyes... This is the first time I've had this experience in my whole life. It was perfect, more than perfect. It made me open my eyes, wake up and smell the coffee... It made me happy and proud. It was an amazing job they've done. You don't understand how much I appreciate it. It has so much meaning to me. Brilliant. Brilliant.”- Participant from The Verne.

“Very constructive. It certainly opened your eyes to what you can expect when you get out. It might not go that way, but it certainly made you think. Enjoyable to do in all. Not like other courses that are like 'yap, yap, yap'. With this, it's activity, then talking, then activity. And you don't always realise what you've done until you've done it.”- Participant from Kirkham.

“Before this I didn't think I'd be able to walk away from situations. It has taught me to stop and think about situations. Made me sit back and look at things before I act. Very, very, very, rewarding. It has been so good. It made me very positive about my future and what's important

and what isn't...I recognise when I need to ask for help. It doesn't make me a weak person. I'm determined more than ever to pursue my goals."- Participant from Morton Hall.

"It's a really, really good course. It has made me think a lot deeper than usual about a lot of skills that I do have but I didn't realise. And the things I might need to use in the future and that I do have the power to use...When I started I didn't have much confidence. But it has had a big impact on how I see myself and my confidence...It's a really powerful course. I didn't expect it to be. I wish it would go on for longer than 3 days."- Participant from Downview.

"Very good. Actually made it enjoyable, not mundane. Sort of put people at ease. You could relate to the people running it. It was nice to see the people running getting involved rather than having someone tell you what to do and to get on with it. They should be praised for it. Personally I think it's [*Reconnect*] a worthwhile thing and shouldn't be knocked on its head. It should get more funding to keep it going because I do believe people learn from it. I've learned."- Participant from Stanford Hill.

"Sometimes it's hard to express yourself in here, sometimes you repress it and this course made me think about things and express it."- Participant from Stocken.

Thoughts on the methods used.

"Very good. Some things seemed silly at first but then you realised that it was all connected. It was really good."- Participant from New Hall

"All very different but each was as good and exciting as the last. There wasn't any time that I daydreamed. And I'm a daydreamer! I didn't want to miss out on a second of it, especially if I

could help someone else. It's a shame that it's finished. For something that I was really apprehensive about, as long as you're willing to face your fears, I would recommend it to anyone."- Participant from Morton Hall.

"I liked the activities because at first you don't know why you're doing it, so you're putting yourself forward and when you see the reason, you realise you've been able to do it all the time. It takes an activity to make you realise you can do it."- Participant from Downview.

"Role play was good. I was thinking about it after. When I was asking him [the character] questions about his kids, I realized later I was thinking about myself. " – Participant from Stanford Hill

"The job interview is something you know you're going to have to do. It's when they asked about my criminal record. If I practice like that a few times a month, I'd be spot on by the time I get out. I suppose it was useful learning different tactics for different situations as well."- Participant from Downview.

"The masks were great and it was great how the games lead to you letting go. Look how many people were crying with laughter. That doesn't happen here."- Participant from Stocken.

Thoughts about the future.

"They're much more realistic now. There are lots of steps to get to my goal. I do feel prepared, but I realise I have a lot to do."- Participant from New Hall

“The masks really played on my mind a lot. In a very good way. While we were doing it I could really relate to people who are different from me and think about situations that I have been afraid of. I look at some of the other girls and they have such lovely hearts and I might not have ever seen that before. It’s the differences between one another, but also seeing things you have in common. Especially with lifting the mask. It is something I’ll take with me for the rest of my life. Your goals shouldn’t be something that drag you down. I’m going to stick with my goals and I have the right to pursue them. Now I know that. I want to make the most of it.”- Participant from Morton Hall.

“A bit more optimistic. It has definitely made me refocus. You get a bit lazy in here and you need someone to point things out to you”- Participant from Stanford Hill.

“I feel I’ve always had the tools [to cope with resettlement] but now I have the confidence. It’s amazing that in 3 days I’ve been able to find that confidence.”- Participant from Downview.

Discussion

The present study examined the effectiveness of the *Reconnect* programme. One specific area that was examined was change from pre-programme to post-programme on psychometric tests. Participants who attended the programme showed significant improvement in terms of self-efficacy, motivation to change, and their confidence in a number of skills. Another area that was examined was change in behaviour and engagement over the three days of the course. These daily ratings were agreed upon by the researcher and the Geese facilitators. The level of behaviour in the group and group engagement was found to improve over the three days of the course. Furthermore, based on interviews with a subset of participants, the programme had a positive impact on them.

The level of self-reported self-efficacy of the participants increased significantly from the beginning of the course to the end. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate

themselves and behave (Bandura, 1994). Those with high levels of self-efficacy approach difficult tasks as problems for them to master, rather than things to be avoided (Bandura, 1994). They are also able to recover if they encounter failures or setback and sustain their efforts when they encounter difficulties, feeling that they can exercise control over them (Bandura, 1994). A strong sense of self-efficacy will clearly prove useful for someone who is about to face the difficulties associated with resettlement into the community.

Motivation to change was found to increase significantly from the beginning of the course to the end. As motivation to change increases, the individual commits to addressing their problems and makes efforts to maintain them. This is necessary if individuals are to continue to make and maintain the changes that are necessary when committing to have a crime-free life in the community.

Participants felt more confident in their skills in a number of areas from pre-programme to post-programme. This includes confidence in skills in a number of different areas. In particular, the participants felt more confident in their social/ friendship skills (e.g., occupational skills, family/ intimacy skills, dealing with authority, alternatives to aggression or offending, and self-management/ self-control skills). Improved confidence in all these various areas will go a long way to helping the participants tackle the challenges that will come their way when they're released as they try to find employment, rebuild their relationships with their families, and avoid or deal appropriately with the situations that have caused them problems in the past..

Interviews conducted with some of the participants highlighted the positive impact of the programme on them. In particular they noted how useful they found the masks and the opportunity to role-play possible situations they might encounter, such as attending a job interview. Some also commented that they felt more confident and better prepared to deal with the future.

Limitations and Future Directions

Limitations to this research should be noted. One limitation is that the length of follow-up. It was not possible to examine the same measures after a longer period of time had passed. This is unfortunate

because it does not allow it to be determined whether the changes that were observed on the last day of the programme were sustained beyond that. This is an area that would be useful to examine in future evaluations. However, it should be noted that there would be difficulties with attempting to follow-up with a group of individuals who were close to being released. By the nature of the selection criteria, these individuals were going to be released in the relatively near future at which point it becomes extremely difficult to contact them. Also, some of the individuals may have been moved to lower security category prisons as they moved closer to release, which provide more opportunities to address settlement issues. This would make it difficult to locate and get the research questionnaires to them once they had moved.

Another limitation is the lack of a control group who did not attend the programme. This means that we cannot be certain that the observed changes occurred as a result of the *Reconnect* programme and not some other factors (e.g., simply being in prison, another intervention occurring simultaneously in the prison). It is unlikely that significant changes (especially in a number of different areas) would occur without some sort of intervention, but this cannot be concluded with absolute certainty without a control group.

Conclusions

Overall, the *Reconnect* programme had a positive impact on the participants who attended it. The participants' level of self-efficacy and motivation to change improved significantly. They also felt significantly more confident in their social/ friendship skills, occupational skills, family/ intimacy skills, dealing with authority, alternatives to aggression or offending, and self-management/ self-control skills. They were found to become more engaged in the programme over the three days. The comments of the participants highlight the important impact they thought the programme had on them. This study provides support for the not only the utility of the *Reconnect* programme in preparing participants for release, but also provides support for the continued use of theatre and drama in the criminal justice system.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions (Post-Programme)

What were your expectations on the programme before you started?

What are your thoughts on the Re-connect programme now that you've completed it?

What did you find the most useful?

What did you find the least useful?

Which part do you think had the biggest impact on you?

How do you feel about your future?

Do you feel prepared to cope with reintegration into the community?

What are your goals for the future?