

## **Staff Well-Being and Resilience in Correctional Environments – During and After a Pandemic’**

Below are questions that were asked during the ICPA Webinar in collaboration with IACFP ‘*Staff Well-Being and Resilience in Correctional Environments – During and After a Pandemic*’ which was held on Thursday 9 July 2020 at 1600CET. Answers have been provided by the webinar panelists Dr Robin Belcher-Timme - Vice President & Senior Consultant, Falcon Inc. (RBT), Dr Gabriel Ong – Principle Psychologist & Deputy Director, Psychological Research, Operations and Programme Design, PCRD, Singapore Prison Service (GO), Dr Sarah Lewis – Director, Penal Reform Solutions (SL) and Dr Jake Phillips – Reader in Criminology, Sheffield Hallam University (JP).

1. ***In some countries the power and depth of relationships in prisons are really clear to see, they seem more therapeutic and possibly therefore provoke more rewarding and productive outcomes for all. Why do you feel that there are so many contrasting approaches to correctional ways of working across the world, and what would you do to encourage a change in penal policy?***

SL - I think there are so many complex reasons why there are different approaches: the societal culture at large, the influence of politics and the media and their position on punishment, the perceived function of prisons within a context and the training of staff and investment in their continuous growth. I want to connect people up and increase the power of a humanitarian response. I think working together is the key with a collective vision.

2. ***Sarah, I like your "growth matters" slide - did you say that came from a published article/book? If so, could you provide the citation, I'd like to read more***

SL - I created the principles of growth following my research in Norway. Please email me on [info@penalreformsolutions.com](mailto:info@penalreformsolutions.com) and I can ping you some articles I have published.

3. ***Who was the author you mentioned?***

SL - I am happy to send you some articles for more information. Email me on: [info@penalreformsolutions.com](mailto:info@penalreformsolutions.com)

4. ***Jake, would you be able to provide a citation for that article? I can't click on the link in your presentation***

JP - I have put this in the chat. <https://adults.ccinform.co.uk/practice-guidance/creating-online-reflective-spaces-during-lockdown-quick-guide/>

5. ***Hello Sarah, thanks for your interesting and useful presentation. Would you describe how your experience and study of penal reform in developing countries, such as in Indonesia?***

SL - I sadly have not had experience of penal reform in developing countries though currently writing a bid for a Rwanda prison. I have worked in the Balkans within prison reform and rehabilitation. Happy to connect and chat as I am always eager to learn!

6. ***Is it possible to have a copy of the PowerPoint presentations from the panellists???***

Of course. The recording and PowerPoint are available at <https://icpa.org/c19-in-prisons-webinars/> and at [www.myiacfp.org](http://www.myiacfp.org)

7. ***Many of us have excellent mental health referrals for inmates - do you find many systems make those same resources available to staff?***

From my experience there are some processes in place, like counselling services, care teams and trauma support. However, I think greater attention needs to be around preparing staff for prison so they don't only get support following an assault (for example)

8. ***Question for Jake Phillips, thank you for your talk! - During COVID, has any evidence emerged around effective practices for preventing/minimising the bleed-over of work into the home for Community Corrections Officers working from home, and if so what have they been (or what looks promising)?***

JP - I think we're going to see more working from home in the field of probation and - hopefully - more work with people under probation supervision outside of the office. Probation offices in England and Wales tend to be pretty sterile environments which aren't conducive to good conversations and relationships - I love the sound of supervision whilst walking and would like this to persist. Hope that answered our question Vlad!

9. ***A key thing is also as Robin said, to reduce uncertainty. Uncertainty is one of the worst psychological challenges for humans - those of us who are criminologists also know too much uncertainty makes people become more authoritarian; we don't need any of that! Managers can reduce uncertainty by pre-empting, planning and making good decisions. I would like to ask every panelist what can else can be done to reduce uncertainty when everything else is so uncertain.***

GO - Such a great question and so difficult. We created materials for prisoners to help them with uncertainty during COVID and I think guidance and training around how we sit with uncertainty is important. This could be done with the prison community as a whole. In VUCA situations (i.e., situations marked by Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity), it is hard to arrive at any solution that would establish certainty, as we would, by the very nature of VUCA, expect things to evolve continuously. In crisis research, one thought is that when people encounter uncertainty, they would usually seek Safety Needs, Emotional Needs, and Informational Needs. Hence, in instances of uncertainty, any strategy or measure – and these could come in the form of communication packages, acts of leadership, new policies or practices, or actions on the ground – that addresses the inherent need for safety, emotional support and information would, I think, be helpful

RBT - Correctional facilities function on standard operating procedure. Many of these have been obliterated by COVID. But we know so much more now than we did at the beginning. Write down what people should do, train on it like you would other policies, ingrain it in the culture, and then update it regularly. People feel more comfortable when they have an authoritative document that instructs them that what they are doing is reflective of what they are supposed to be doing. Comment from Participant: Take thoughtful control of the things you DO have control of. This really works!

10. ***What do you think are the reasons that the UK/US are so resistant to a Scandinavian-style system? It seems they are establishments that would greatly benefit considering the current states of their criminal justice systems?***

SL - I think populism is a massive barrier; that idea that rehab is easy and fluffy which it isn't. The media are also not interested in sharing positive stories and this is a challenge.

11. ***What are the main topics to deal with especially in countries with very few resources?***

RBT - There are interventions that take zero resources. Everyone coming in quarantines, symptomatic or positives get isolated, etc. Education and training on basic hygiene and cleaning practices. But also get your staff

talking about mental wellness. None of these things need to cost money; they need champions, information, and protocols to get it done. Good luck!

**12. *Would the panelists have any thoughts on what changes we've made during the COVID situation that will remain as permanent changes even if the pandemic gets under control?***

JP - I think we're going to see more working from home in the field of probation and - hopefully - more work with people under probation supervision outside of the office. Probation offices in England and Wales tend to be pretty sterile environments which aren't conducive to good conversations and relationship - I love the sound of supervision whilst walking and would like this to persist.

GO - I'm not sure what it means to say that the pandemic is under control. I don't think we will go back to old ways of working. COVID may well re-emerge. Even if COVID is well under control, the next viral pandemic may be a few cycles away. So, I think it is sensible to adopt some of the changes made during COVID into permanent practice. Working from home is one. Another is the adoption of blended learning approaches for staff training or inmate interventions. Staff and inmate mental health and well-being practices should continue to be emphasised (stress, burnout issues are commonly faced by correctional officers even pre-COVID times, so this is a fantastic opportunity to institutionalise some of these).

**13. *I find essential we also understand what are the specific qualities that are expected of a 'good manager' - leader. What I have heard so far is: giving us autonomy/acknowledging that our current context is difficult/checking on us regularly/trusting us/***

SL - Absolutely, with a large spoonful of compassion and hope.

**14. *Kindly share your idea on how Sub-Saharan African countries with less level of technology can cope with the new normal.***

RBT - There are interventions that take zero resources. Everyone coming in quarantines, symptomatic or positives get isolated, etc. Education and training on basic hygiene and cleaning practices. But also get your staff talking about mental wellness. None of these things need to cost money; they need champions, information, and protocols to get it done. Good luck!

**15. *Philippine jails are COVID time-bombs due to overpopulation. How else can officers help alleviate anxiety among the jail/prison population especially if medical measures such as physical distancing and hygiene is near impossible? Has there been experience by other prison settings from past outbreaks?***

GO - When COVID-19 broke out, we conducted article scans to look at the impact of COVID on prison systems worldwide, and arrived at the following 3 conclusions:

1. Disease outbreaks were caused by poor hygiene measures and poor containment measures
2. Inmate fears led to panic and anxiety, leading to escapes and riots
3. Distancing measures appear to be the primary strategy adopted by various jurisdictions

Given these findings from the scans, some measures to be taken may include:

- Need to adopt a proactive stance in risk communications to mitigate risk of rumours and fearmongering
- Actively monitor the psychological well-being of inmates and staff
- Ensure adequate hygiene measures and provision of supplies to do this

We thereafter did another literature scan to find out what may happen if a pandemic (not necessarily COVID) breaks out in prison, and arrived at 2 findings:



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1. Prison medical facilities are unlikely to cope with a pandemic outbreak in prison
2. Staff and inmates may face mental health issues in a prolonged pandemic

Arising from this literature scan, we propose the following:

- Conduct periodic sensing of ground morale of inmates and staff
- Monitor staff and inmates who may be coping poorly, and provide them access to mental health care services and resources
- Plan for the availability and security of alternative medical facilities located in the community if prison medical facilities are overtaxed