

# **Voices of Desistance: An Ethnographic Evaluation of the C-FAR Training Programme**

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*“Jail’s not there to change your life – jails are just there to get people off the streets” –  
Trainee D, C-FAR*

The Centre for Criminal Justice Policy and Research at the University of Central England in Birmingham (UCE) was commissioned in December 2003 by the trustees of the Centre for Adolescent Rehabilitation (C-FAR) to carry out an ethnographic study of the Trainee experience of its programme at Burdon Grange, Highampton, Devon. This ethnographic study was commissioned to complement another that C-FAR had commissioned from the University of Bristol, which seeks to evaluate the effect of its programme on recidivism among its graduates. We were asked to assume that the training programme did significantly reduce recidivism and to investigate what aspects of the programme the Trainees themselves believed might have contributed to this effect. The evaluation was to be carried out as part of a validation of C-FAR’s vision statement which requires C-FAR to strive to lead the way in the design and development of evaluated and cost-effective training for young offenders enabling them to achieve constructive and fulfilled lives. As such, the evaluation is grounded in Genders and Player’s (1995) “therapeutic career model” and, whilst remembering the intended largely, non-academic audience of this evaluation, contextualised within the growing literature related to offenders’ desistance from crime (see in particular Laub & Sampson, 2001; Farrell, 2002; Maruna, 2001). Indeed it has the advantage over many such studies in that it is not retrospective - looking backwards at the process of change, but rather at the origins and development of change.

Background to the Evaluation

The authors had a series of meetings with Trevor Philpott, the Chief Executive of C-FAR in the autumn of 2003 and again in December 2003 to finalise details for the evaluation. It was agreed that the evaluation would be concerned with the first intake of Trainees in January 2004 and that interviews would be conducted in the first week of the programme, again in a mid-point week of the programme, and finally in the last week of the programme. Given that we were interested in what the Trainees themselves thought about the course we felt that it was necessary not to form any preconceptions as to what aspects of the programme might have a significant effect on the Trainees. However we decided to ground our interviews with them in Genders and Player's (1995) "therapeutic career model", based on qualitative work that they carried out with prisoners at HMP Grendon, which suggested a five-stage model for how offenders changed their behaviour – albeit a model from a penal environment, rather than within a residential one located in the community (see, also Wilson and McCabe (2002)). Nonetheless we anticipated that in the first week of the programme Trainees would demonstrate recognition of the problems that they faced and show a desire to change their behaviour. In the mid-programme week the Trainees should be showing understanding of how their problems arose, how they were inter-connected and related to other aspects of their life. They should also have begun to identify solutions to their problems. By the final week of the programme Trainees would have identified solutions to their problems and had some opportunities to put them into practice. This model was explained to Trevor Philpott and he was content that we should adopt it to frame our thinking.

It was agreed that Julian Killingley would conduct the bulk of the interviews. As such he attended the three agreed weeks, interviewed Trainees and staff, and generally got a 'feel' for the formal and informal activities on the programme (for a general introduction to ethnography see Brewer, 2002). This also allowed for a limited form of participant observation. He kept a reflexive diary of his observations. David Wilson attended once in each week to monitor progress and discuss developments. He also reviewed the reflexive diary, discussed observations and finally interviewed staff and Trainees to clarify points that arose. Thus, this has helped to facilitate internal triangulation of the research findings.

Ethical considerations were at the heart of the evaluation and each Trainee that was interviewed gave informed consent. All the interviewees have been anonymised and are identified only by a randomly selected letter. The research was approved by UCE's Faculty of Law and Social Sciences' Ethics Committee. Where necessary to protect a Trainee's identity some specific details that they have provided have been generalised within the quotes that have been used and some quotes have not been attributed to any Trainee. The interviews with the Trainees can be characterised as taking a form somewhere between semi-structured and open-ended interviews. The results of these interviews were then transcribed to form a series of running narratives and subjected to a modified form of grounded theorising (see Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998, Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983), partly through using the computer package MaxQDA. As such direct quotes are used throughout this evaluation not only to give the Trainees a 'voice', but also to develop those issues and themes that form our conclusions. We also decided to supplement the longitudinal study of the Trainees by administering a

continuous attitudinal scale at the start of every interview (see Attitudinal Changes) to try to ensure a degree of uniformity to interviews and help map any changes in attitude among Trainees during the study. Finally, we offer some observations about what has happened to these Trainees through a Language Analysis of their interviews (see below), which we suggest might be further developed.

It should be noted that The Centre for Criminal Justice Policy and Research at UCE has an excellent reputation for producing high quality ethnographic research on a range of criminological issues (see, for example, Sharp & Wilson, 2000; Spalek & Wilson, 2002; Wilson, 2003).

## **The C-FAR Programme – A Brief Description**

According to its own written materials, the C-FAR life change programme is nominally targeted at persistent offenders (see [www.c-far.org.uk](http://www.c-far.org.uk)). However, the programme has evolved in such a way that the Trainees recruited are not only persistent offenders but also serial substance abusers. The programme comprises three parts: contact in prisons and the community with motivational interviews and support; an initial 11-week residential course followed by a 40-week after-care programme. There is an age requirement that applicants should not have achieved their 25th birthday on the date of their entry to the course.

C-FAR staff comprises a multidisciplinary team who are called upon to deal with a wide range of matters relating to the Trainees' rehabilitation. This spans such diverse topics as parenting, health and safety, remedial education, physical fitness, information technology, teamwork, leadership, counselling, victim awareness, drug effects, and management of personal finances. In addition to these training functions C-FAR also uses its best endeavours to obtain housing for Trainees and to find them employment or place them on training courses.

Once Trainees graduate from the residential phase of the programme, C-FAR provides continuing support for a minimum of 40 weeks thereafter. At its least this will comprise low-level monitoring of the progress the Trainees make. However, in many cases this will extend to almost continuous crisis management with staff providing 24-hour support when Trainees are tempted to revert to substance abuse or have employment or housing problems. This is nominally a one-year programme, although as C-FAR has chosen to view its commitments to its graduates as an open ended one it offers continuing support many years after they complete the programme. Inevitably some graduates will revert to substance abuse and further offending. In such cases there will be an additional workload of liaising with defence solicitors and probation officers. Another characteristic of the programme is that Trainees who failed to complete it may be given a second chance to rejoin at a later date.

The programme is structured in such a way that at any given time there are usually two cohorts separated by a five-week interval. When one cohort graduates, a new cohort immediately replaces it the next day. Certain breaks are built in to allow for staff holidays and training, however for most of the year there is a rolling programme of instruction.

The whole programme is staff intensive as those on the residential programme have to be supervised 24 hours per day and, as the programme matures, an increasing number of graduates have to be supported by the after-care staff. In addition to staff directly involved in the training programme and after-care support for graduates, there is also a number of staff involved in applicant assessment, record-keeping, building maintenance, general administration, and fund raising.

The administrative problems involved in running the course are considerable. Each cohort nominally comprises 15 selected applicants. The process of selection is an onerous one. Paperwork has to be marshalled and all applicants are individually interviewed. This involves travelling the length and breadth of the West Country, visits to probation officers, and attendances at Magistrates and Crown Courts. A number of Trainees are on drug testing and treatment orders (DTTOs), on bail, or subject to probation or other community sentences and supervision. In such cases C-FAR has to be aware of the appropriate conditions and ensure that Trainees comply with them.

Staff have to tread a fine line when recruiting to the course. If too many are recruited, the human resources of C-FAR strained; if too few are recruited, its financial resources are strained. Experience has taught staff that there is a reasonably predictable rate of attrition. If a nominal cohort of 15 is recruited, a number will not turn up on the first day of the course. Some back out at the last minute through personal choice; others may be arrested for further offending or breach of bail conditions.

On arrival at C-FAR's premises, Trainees are immediately tested for the presence of drugs. If any drugs other than alcohol or THC are detected, the prospective Trainee is refused admission to the course. In a typical intake the nominal 15 Trainees are often whittled down to about 12 on the first day. Anything up to a further five may be lost through attrition on the residential course either by Trainees requesting to withdraw, or by being expelled for breach of rules. When the programme is running normally there are usually between 15 to 20 Trainees on the premises at any one time. Those leaving the residential course early are often offered support in the community and the opportunity to return on a later programme.

## **The Study Cohort – An Overview**

The cohort that is the subject of this study was an unusual one in a number of ways. On the first day of the course 12 Trainees presented themselves - itself an unusually large number. One Trainee was clearly unsettled and withdrew from the course 24 hours later. This left 11 Trainees remaining at the end of the first week. On the occasion of our second visit seven weeks later, the original 11 still remained on the course. This again

was highly unusual and caused some apprehension among staff when a new cohort joined the previous week. The unusually large number of Trainees at that stage had put some pressure on the residential accommodation, particularly since the original cohort had got used to being the only occupants of the premises. At the end of our second visit the original 11 Trainees still remained on the course. On the occasion of our visit in the final week of the course, we learned that one Trainee had been required to withdraw two weeks previously reducing the original cohort to 10. Eventually a further two Trainees were required to withdraw for misconduct on the penultimate day of the course, leaving eight of the original cohort to graduate on the final day. Those who left the course early were still offered support.

The ages of Trainees ranged from the youngest of 18 to the oldest of 24, with a mean age of 22 and a median age of 23. The majority of them had had difficulties with their education - three had been categorised as "special needs pupils" at their secondary schools; five had failed to complete their secondary education either through an exclusion order, persistent truanting, or simple withdrawal. All had served at least one prison sentence.

Despite their youth, all were prolific offenders with numerous previous court appearances - a typical profile for a Trainee would be someone with 17 separate substantive convictions for property acquisition offences, a criminal damage offence, an assault offence, a public order offence, two road traffic offences, and six criminal justice system offences such as escaping from custody, failing to surrender to bail, breach of community service order, resisting arrest, etc. Surprisingly few of the trainees had any convictions for drug possession or dealing offences. In addition to these substantive offences there were numerous other offences taken into consideration.

All the Trainees had longstanding substance abuse profiles: two had begun substance abuse at the age of nine and all had begun abusing by the age of 15. The mean age at which substance abuse began was 12.8 years. The range of substances habitually abused was astounding: seven had longstanding alcohol abuse problems, eight were addicted to heroin, four were cocaine users, six were crack users, three amphetamine users, three LSD users, eight were Ecstasy users, and nine were cannabis users. All but one had occasionally abused other substances as well. The level of polysubstance abuse was surprising – four Trainees had been regularly abusing six or more different substances and all but two had typically been abusing at least four different substances in the course of a week.

It should be noted that substance abuse on such a heroic scale is an expensive habit. All the Trainees had been on state benefits immediately before their last arrest. Prior to selection for admission to the programme, all had been asked to estimate the cost of their habit. The lowest estimate (for a trainee whose abuse was largely confined to alcohol and occasional use of cannabis) was £100 a week and the highest estimate was £1050 per week. The mean estimate of the cost of their abusing habit was £586 a week, which was financed principally by shoplifting and commercial burglaries. It was reported to us that in past cohorts Trainees had had abuse habits requiring as much as £3000 pounds a week

to finance. Whilst it is not easy to estimate the cost of such prolific offending to society it has been suggested that a drug habit costing £586 per week will require goods with a ticket price of £4688 to be stolen every week after making allowance for the discounted price offered by those who buy stolen goods (personal communication, Professor Douglas Sharp). In interview, one Trainee commented:

*We just went out committing crime and we done it for a solid month. What I was done for was just over £20,000 worth of stuff which I had.* Trainee A

Assuming 100 trainees per year enter the programme, the cost of putting a trainee through the C-FAR programme is £13,500, including a continuing aftercare programme. With a drop-out at various times over the 12 month programme, the cost increases to £20,000.

In addition to their common problems of offending and substance abuse, the Trainees had a host of other personal problems. Despite their youth, three had suffered the death of one of their parents and three had been physically, or sexually abused by one, or both of their parents. Five came from backgrounds where parents or elder siblings were drugs abusers. Five had been raised in children's homes, foster care or residential schools. Ten of the original twelve Trainees had been abandoned, or disowned by one, or both of their parents.

## **So, What Works at C-FAR to Produce Desistance from Crime?**

Criminological definitions of what desistance is have varied over time, but recently Bottoms *et al* (2004), for example, have argued that instead of seeing desistance as the complete cessation of criminal activity, we should also be interested in significant crime-free gaps in an offender's history. Similarly, whilst some researchers have been concerned with how social context and "turning points" influence the production of desistance (see, for example, Laub & Sampson (1993)) and others emphasise cognitive transformations undergone by desisters (see, for example, Maruna (2002)) – the so-called "agency-structure debate", Bottoms *et al* have argued that it is necessary to give weight to both social context and agency, rather than see these as mutually exclusive. Here "agency" is defined as the subjective dimension that encourages the process of stopping offending, and given the ethnographic focus of the study we pay particular attention to what the Trainees themselves say is happening to them. This has the added advantage of allowing desistance to emerge as it is taking place, as opposed to being described after the event, and can also help to reveal the particular parts being played by both the social context that the Trainees find themselves in at C-FAR, and their own personal growth and self-development.

The interviews that follow have been grounded in Genders and Player's (1995) therapeutic career model, which has five stages: recognition, motivation, understanding,

insight and testing. Thus we anticipated that by the time of their induction Trainees would already have begun to show recognition and motivation. Accordingly, our initial interviews were designed to assess how far advanced this process was and what insights the Trainees might have into their own condition. It should also be noted that each interview began with a Trainee being asked to mark their agreement or disagreement with 10 statements on 10 continuous scales. Their responses to the statements were designed to explore their attitudes towards behavioural change, the sources of their problems, and their beliefs in the outcome of the C-FAR programme. We hypothesised that if the programme was bringing about changes in the Trainees' beliefs and behaviour, this might be reflected in their attitudes towards the scale statements. Administering the same scale to them at the beginning, middle and end of the training programme and then analysing responses for significant changes could track this and the results are presented in our concluding thoughts.

## **Stage 1 - Recognition**

Trainees' journey towards rehabilitation must begin with some recognition of the extent of the problems facing them. It is only when a Trainee acquires a real appreciation of the extent of those problems that he is likely to generate the necessary motivation to do something to change his behaviour. Our interviews with Trainees during the first week of the programme showed an emergent pattern. All had formed views on the usefulness – or otherwise, of the various officially sanctioned orders and courses conventionally offered to substance abusing recidivists. All Trainees inducted in the subject cohort had previous experience of probation officers. All had at one time another been made subject to supervision orders, probation orders, community service orders and prison license. With a few honourable exceptions, their view of probation officers was not a flattering one. There was pretty full agreement that probation officers had little individual interest in their clients. Comments such as:

*No. I don't think they do care about us. I don't know why but I don't think they do [...] I think these people that work here care about people like us. Probation don't. I don't think they care about us - they just want to get the paycheck, Trainee B*

And, when asked what use his probation officer had been to him, another replied:

*None. I told my PO when I was 15 that if they wanted to help me they should move me out of my area, 22 years of age and still...and they haven't done squat, Trainee C*

While it may be that Trainees had unrealistic expectations of what probation officers could do for them, most took the view that their probation officers had either been timeservers or naive. The first viewpoint is well put by Trainee D:

*All it is basically is to see how you're going. If you go in there one week and you're looking fine and the next week you're looking fine and two or three weeks later you start going in with holes in your clothes, pinned up, sitting there with your eyes gouging out - they can see what you're doing but they don't do nothing about it. As long as you carry on*

*going once a week, even if you're out – saying that, if you're out of your nut they'd probably take you back to the courts – but generally if you can sort of keep your head together, as long as you turn up once a week and finish the order you're done for.*

The second criticism is made by Trainee E:

*I thought they were talking crap to be honest with you. They done a year or two in college/university - or whatever you call it - and they think they know what's best for you. They think they know you from the minute you walk through that door. But they don't know nothing about you - all they know is what's on paper and that's it. They don't know about what you've done the week before, they don't know what happened to you the week before that, if it don't show up on paper then it didn't happen.*

The role of the Probation Service has changed since the days when the function of the probation officer was to be a “wise friend”, who would offer clients sound advice, which is just as well as none of the Trainees had any great confidence in their probation officers, or their ability to offer the sound advice that they craved.

Another government initiative that many of the Trainees were familiar with was the Drug Testing and Treatment Order (DTTO). Many politicians fondly imagine that, once subject to a DTTO, offenders would either stay clean or find themselves in custody again. However the Trainees’ experience of DTTOs was of a rather different kind:

*One thing is DTTO Orders - the biggest waste of time ever. You've got a load of junkies all sitting in a room, they put me on a DTTO when I come out at Christmas [...] They put me on a 12 month DTTO order. I went on there, 8 people there, there was one girl, and everyone single one of them ordering gear, ordering crack and I go there to do the programme and you get people popping off to the toilets, smoking crack pipes or doing a boot or banging up a bit of gear and you're in a room and you're doing an order that is supposed to get you drug free and move your life forward and you're sitting in a room with people gouging out, popping off to the toilet, banging up gear, smoking it, smoking crack. And the woman that was actually running them said “As long as you tell me you're going to piss positive, then we won't do anything” and I thought that was really pointless. What's the point in telling us – “Alright, if you're doing a bit of gear, as long as you tell us it's going to come through positive we won't throw you off”? Because at the end of the day you think “Right, I might as well tell you every time I do a bit of gear. I won't go back to jail and I will just carry on with the order.” Biggest waste of time going, Trainee D*

Trainees were clearly looking for sanctions if rules were broken. Most felt that unless there were consequences for non-compliance there was little incentive not to give in to temptation.

There was a general agreement that what they wanted in their lives was someone who would listen to them, offer constructive and realistic advice, and set clear boundaries. The solutions they had been offered previously had proved to be illusory. By the time they

arrived at C-FAR these Trainees had come by a variety of routes to a realisation that they needed to get a grip on their lives. For a few of them there was an ill-defined sense that they had somehow missed out on life:

*I haven't seen my nieces and nephews for a while and now they're grown up. So I want to be there now because I've missed out on quite a bit of their life, Trainee F*

Or,

*I had the same girlfriend, the same friends and I think this time I've lost a lot and it's made me see things in a different light and I've grown up, Trainee G*

Again there was a widespread recognition that they wanted a better life than the one they had been living. The same Trainee commented:

*[...] I'm fed up with the way I'm going. I can't see any future in my life at the moment. I can go somewhere but I'm not on the right road.*

And that there were consequences of continuing in their old ways:

*[...] I carried on the way I was going, I would end up dead or end up doing a long time in jail. I got bored of it. I don't want to be a junkie with drugs first in my life. I want to do something with my life, not spend it in and out of gaol all the time, Trainee C*

There was also an impatience to get on with things, once a decision to change their lives had been made - *I want to change my attitude. I want to crack on and spend some good times sorting my life out. I've already wasted the best years of my life already and I just want to piece together something of a future and what I can do (Trainee A), and few were under no illusions as to what they wanted to leave behind:*

*I've started life the way in which you live your life on heroin basically. I've got really bad, I think, from the streets for months. I've thieved, I've robbed - I've done it all basically. No-one could tell me about drugs what I don't already know. But just living that life and not knowing where your next bit of gear's coming from, your next bit of money to buy the gear and the next...and the sort of people you hang about with and the sort of life that you lead, it's just not worth it. You can see it in some people's reaction, you know what I mean? [...] I've gained a lot of respect, a lot of respect that I had lost when I was on heroin but now I'm slowly regaining it back because I want to sort my life out, get a job, settle down that sort of thing, Trainee D*

Trainee F put all of this rather more succinctly - *Robbing motors, burgling houses, commercial burgling and fights really. It's just that I've had enough of it.*

Virtually every Trainee attributed a large part of his downfall to 'mixing with the wrong people'. Typical observations were:

*Yeah, I do get led astray and I can be a little bit gullible sometimes. [...] Well that's what I'm planning on doing by moving to a new area. I've already moved away from T\_\_\_\_ once to get away but I've just fallen straight back into the wrong sort of crowd, it's just the environment that I'm in, Trainee A*

*It used to be the company - because that's how I came into drugs - the company I was hanging around with, if you know what I mean? It kept on going like that for years until I was about 18 or 19 and I could think for myself, Trainee B*

And, more soberingly:

*My dad died last year of cancer and he left me £9000. I came out of prison to have £9000. [...] Suddenly I had a lot of friends and they were getting me crack for free [...] and before I knew it all the money was gone and they robbed my account. I think things like that make you know - you just step back and think.*

Some of the trainees analysed dispassionately their own behaviour and pulled no punches in describing just how low they had sunk at times, or how squalid their situation might be:

*My Auntie died 3 or 4 years ago when I started my cocaine addiction - plus I lost my Nan, Grandad, Mum and Dad and basically my brother, sister – everyone - because I started drinking. I had already been drinking since the age of 12 but when I was about 15, 16 I started cocaine and they all vanished because I would turn up at their doors demanding money. I tried to kick in my own Nan's door to try and get some money. I was knocking around her house and I lost them all because of it, Trainee E*

Another reflected:

*Well my dad died last February and he was on the gear as well. He had a big abscess on his groin - it exploded and he bled to death and that's one reason why I've stopped doing the heroin because I don't want to go the same way as my dad, so I gave it up.*

Trainee D is aware how he has let down those who tried to help him, but is trying to make up for it now:

*In the last year, of what it was, living on the street, backing up heroin in my brain, to start doing things like that and to cheat people, to rob people and to lie and that to some of the people that are trying to help you and would actually stick by you, you realise "What was you playing at?" and you see the difference between that lifestyle and the life I'm living now, and I'm going forward, I'm making steps to do it.*

Generally, there was a widespread realisation that C-FAR might be their last chance, and thus the structure that C-FAR would offer would allow these emergent hopes and aspirations to materialise:

*I just think that it's a great opportunity and it's something that I'm not going to get again. I've been given this one opportunity - obviously if I mess it up I'm going to get a long time in prison. There's that at the back of my mind which I'm sure at the hard times it will push me off [...], Trainee G*

And,

*I hope it really does work because, quite frankly, if I continue how I'm going I'll end up dead, Trainee C*

When asked to reflect on why previous programmes, orders and punishments had failed to correct their behaviour there was widespread agreement that you had to be ready for change mentally. If you personally did not want to change, others could do nothing to bring it about. Typical insights were:

*[I did] CARATS - but that didn't really see a drug problem. You can say anything in gaol, it's when you get out you've got to put yourself to the test. I don't think there is no help. [...] I don't know but I've tried rehab but they don't work - maybe I wasn't ready to give up the drugs at the time, Trainee B*

And, of help from Social Services:

*They offered me counselling- they were there for me as a kind of surrogate family sort of thing because I was in care most of my life. The reason it didn't work is purely because I wasn't ready. I wasn't at the stage of my life where I was ready, that's the only way I can put it to be honest.*

Equally, programmes taken with a metaphoric gun to the Trainee's head were seen as just as ineffective:

*Trainee F: I knew before I went on the courses that they weren't going to work because, as I've said before, it's not what I wanted to do it was what they wanted me to do.*

Interviewer: How did they force you on the course if you didn't want to do it?

*Trainee F: The police and the probation service would normally say 'you do the course or you've got a prison sentence'. You do whatever, so if you don't get put on courses I wouldn't get a chance to stay out of prison.*

Finally, there was a streak of realism in some Trainees' expectations. Merely reforming behaviour did not expunge the record and make problems disappear magically:

*No employer in their right mind would employ someone like me who's a car thief, burglar, and commercial burglar and has a violent record - basically it hurts. If you had a firm would you take me on? [...] In] all these forms you have to declare your criminal*

*record. They put a small little box at the bottom - which is pathetic! You need another page, you fill it in; you turn over the page and it's continued, Trainee F*

## **Stage 2 - Motivation**

Several Trainees recognised that they had problems long before they joined the C-FAR program. Yet they also needed to mature their understanding of their problems before they could develop the requisite motivation to do something about their circumstances. The second stage that Genders and Player (1995) identify in their model is one where people not only express a desire to change but also act upon it. All of the Trainees had spent time in prison and many had taken the opportunity to reflect upon their situation:

*When the judge said “[Trainee F], I sentence you to two years”, I never had my family there or nothing because everyone had bugged off. I get a phone call to say my sister’s in hospital with cancer, stuff like that. So it’s all ... I think “Shit! I should be out there; I should be out there with my family.” That’s basically what it is - it’s the family circle that’s made me think, Trainee F*

Another reflected on his wasted life:

*I’ve been doing crime ever since I was little and I got into drugs - got hooked on heroin and crack. I’ve just finished a 3 year jail sentence. It gave me enough time to think in jail about what I’d be going back to, you know, and that’s why I’m at C-FAR - to see if they can help, Trainee B*

After such reflection it was not a big step to conclude that he did not want to return to gaol:

*Because I’m tired of the life I’ve led, going out stealing every day, taking drugs, putting needles in my arm, I’ve had enough of it and I don’t want to go back to gaol either [...] I’ve done too much gaol, Trainee B*

Many Trainees first learnt of C-FAR in prison, or from people who had recently served terms of imprisonment:

*I got out of the court and 3 or 4 days spent homeless and then ended up in a hostel. I met a friend called Tony who’d been on this course and he told me it would be good for me as we got on really well. He went on to say how he had had crap all his life and said I should go to C-Far, “They’ll help you out there if you want to help yourself”, Trainee E*

Sometimes the recommendation is made strongly by someone who has joined the programme but failed to complete it. This has not prevented them realising what they had lost and passing the good word on to others:

Trainee G: I’ve been padded up with people who have been on it and one of them has been in tears saying 'I’ve wasted it' and ended up in prison, they do regret it.

Interviewer: But they still spoke highly of it?

*Trainee G: Yes – definitely. Every single person I spoke to.*

Trainees seemed highly motivated to join the programme when the recommendation came from those like themselves, even if the recommender had failed to complete the course, or relapsed after attending and had returned to prison. This ‘word of mouth’ recommendation was an important component in motivating Trainees and also helps to explain why other such courses that they attended fared more poorly.

C-FAR’s requirement that trainees test drug-free on their first day on the course means that Trainees must have already made some resolve to clean up their lives. For many the struggle was difficult:

*As soon as I got nicked, on the way to the prison I thought to myself, “Here’s my chance.” So I’d been in gaol over last Christmas and it was a bit moving to watch television, watch everyone partying and you’re sitting in the cell - and New Year’s Eve’s the same. So I just had to basically go cold turkey, no prescription drugs or nothing,*  
Trainee D

Others were less sure of their ability to stay the course:

*That’s 3 months in here. If I do the whole 3 months it’ll be the longest I’ve ever gone without being haggled, so I’ll wait and see what it’s like,* Trainee I

Motivation springing from a desire to return to mainstream society was a recurrent theme. A number of respondents expressed their desire to lead an ‘ordinary life’ - much like everybody else’s:

*What I’m trying to come to terms with is a working class person has to earn his money. He has to work for his money, wait for it, once he’s got enough money he can then go out and buy it and he will feel more appreciative - that’s what I’ve got to learn,* Trainee A

Another noted:

*I want a decent job, a family, a nice house, a car and a mortgage - just the normal things,*  
Trainee G

There was widespread recognition that returning to old haunts would be problematic. Trainee C voiced thoughts common to many:

*Well if I take any drugs while I’m in here I’ll get kicked out and I’ll go straight back to ----  
-- and I don’t want that. Start in a new environment - that means I can move down here if I want to. That’s up to me, that’s what he said, said I can move down here. If I moved down here I’m alright, as long as I stay away from my area.*

This leads naturally to another motivation almost uniformly expressed by Trainees – the expectation that C-FAR could and would help them get accommodation of their own at the conclusion of the residential module of the programme. Trainees expressed their frustration at their past inability to secure housing for themselves and the seeming ability of officialdom to assist once they had got themselves into serious trouble:

*If you go to the Council and you want to get a flat, you go there and say 'I'm homeless.' They will do sod all to help you, they'll do nothing to help you. Once you commit a crime you get help - you start getting accommodation and you start getting everything like that. It's like, "Yes, I'm someone who commits crime. If they don't give me this then I'm going to keep on committing crime." That's the way how I look at it and then they give you everything that you need, Trainee A*

Others had perhaps rather unrealistic expectations of what C-FAR would be doing for them:

*Yeah, you've got the phone, they put you in a little flat or bed sit when you get out of here and they have a person who visits you to make sure you are alright. They show you around the town to make sure you know where everything is like the health centre, police station, probation, and solicitors' stuff like that so you know what's in the area, Trainee F*

The reality is that many would have to initially be accommodated in hostels and the unwillingness of some to accept this would prove to be problematic later in the programme. Similar unrealistic expectations about employment were also common among Trainees – and these too would prove difficult at a later stage. Again, the reality is that most would initially have to find placements on schemes such as the The Prince's Trust, rather than permanent employment.

Many had made the decision to abandon their past ways but could not see their future direction clearly. They believed that C-FAR could help them find a direction in which to steer their life. A typical comment was:

*My one ambition in life was to go into the army and once I got kicked out of the army that was the end of me. It was like nothing else to look forward to now. I ain't got no ambition, I ain't got nothing- so I started back up on the E's [...]What I'm going to try and do is to get a future or some sort of ambition before I finish this course because if I can get some ambition, that means I've got something to look forward to, Trainee A.*

Another important motivator was the degree of continuing support – called “throughcare” – that C-FAR offers. Far too many had experience of programmes or orders where those running them washed their hands of attendees the moment they finished. We learned later from the throughcare workers that, initially at least, Trainees sought a light touch. This was reflected even at this early stage:

*I think it's good but you don't want it for too long. Just for a little while longer to make sure you're standing on your two feet, but after a while you just want to be left alone and get on with your life, Trainee D*

And

*Just the confidence that someone's there because that's what I need to know that someone is there. Somebody looking over my shoulder I've always liked that, somebody just keeping an eye out, Trainee A*

By the end of the first week the Trainees had begun to bond and look on themselves as a group. This process was helped by an element of camaraderie in adversity as C-FAR's Burdon Grange premises are best categorised as Spartan and the Devon weather blew gale force winds and rain.

### *Stage 3 - Understanding*

We returned to Burdon Grange some seven weeks later to assess progress at the programme's midpoint. Trainees had just returned from a 3-day camping expedition on Dartmoor in wet and sometimes sub-zero conditions. During their absence a second cohort had been inducted. This put some pressure on accommodation and also meant that C-FAR staff had less time to devote to individuals than had previously been the case. We did not fully appreciate the significance of this immediately, but by the end of our observations it became apparent that the intimacy of one-to-one counselling, conducted in an environment where trust was built over time is central to the success of the C-FAR programme. Group work was not highly rated by Trainees, but is administratively convenient. One-to-one counselling on demand is staff intensive, but ultimately rewarding and the appearance of a second cohort disrupted the routine the study cohort had gotten into. Many of the Trainees could be characterised as emotionally needy – and they resented the reduced prospects for satisfying those needs.

Nevertheless, the group were in rude health and none had withdrawn, or been required to leave the programme. The increase in their confidence was obvious – they were much more willing to engage with staff even if that engagement was not always positive. Again all Trainees agreed to be interviewed and tape-recorded. All were interviewed within three days of our arrival.

At this stage of the programme we looked for evidence of increased understanding of the circumstances that had led to their offending. Genders and Player (1995) postulate in their model that this is the stage where people show some holistic recognition of the inter-connected and related aspects of their lives and that this marks the beginning of real therapeutic activity. We found ample evidence of such understanding. For some Trainees this was revelatory, for others it was more an affirmation and consolidation of what they already suspected before joining the programme:

*A lot of my thinking I was already thinking before I came here but, at the end of the day, coming out of here I just know that I could never go through that all over again. So at the end of the day if I was bored I would rather sit down and be bored than go back to drinking,* Trainee D

At a minimum, we expected Trainees to be able to confront their offending behaviour. This was more difficult for some Trainees and one, when asked whether C-FAR was “just a softer prison”, replied:

Trainee J: Well what I'm trying to say is when I've been in prison I've just blocked everything out of what I've done in the past. Here you've got to speak about it in your one-to-ones. [...] I think the other day I was here and I had a one to one with [staff member] who I get on really well with and I just ended up crying.

Interviewer: Can you talk about the issue that you started crying about?

Trainee J: It was just my past and what I had done when I burgled the people, how they must feel and I was just thinking back and it just got to me a bit.

Trainees had a good understanding of the causes of their offending, their substance abuse and how they were interconnected:

*The things I did was bad but I see that I had to do it to feed my habit. If I didn't do It, then I'd collapse. What I did was bad. I don't want to go back to that lifestyle because I want to be somebody. I don't want to be a nobody,* Trainee B.

Another Trainee was able to make connections even where the law had not done so:

*I can only talk from a year ago when I say that then I drank to forget my problems - to forget. I don't know - just to get out of my head basically [...] My criminal record was for a time when I was doing drugs but I don't think there's been a time when I got drunk and haven't done anything stupid. If I haven't picked a fight and got away with it or nicked a car or something stupid like that - it's all related to being out of my head,* Trainee G

Most recognised that taking drugs or alcohol was a device to mask emotional pain but that such behaviour was a crutch rather than a cure:

Interviewer: Tell me about when you're on smack and crack - what feeling does that hide?

Trainee J: Your emotions, every emotion you can think of it hides.

Interviewer Why did you want to hide those [J]? What was wrong with the emotions you were feeling?

Trainee J: I think because of the past I had - with all the bad things I've done. I could have smack and it would hide that but I know now there's no getting away from it. I just have to be strong about it.

However, this is not to say that Trainees were unthinkingly signing up to convenient excuses. Another declined to make any connection between his drug use and emotional hurt, and thus find a false insight into why he used drugs:

*[... T]he counsellors in here say that people take drugs to hide if something bad has happened in your past. But I started taking drugs for fun, because everybody else was doing it, so I don't know. [...] I still think I did drugs for fun apart from once smack gets hold of you and won't let you go, but no, I ain't got no more insight into it, Trainee B*

Some Trainees also found understanding for other past behaviour:

*I'm dyslexic as well and that's when my anger really comes - when I'm trying to do some writing or something and no-one's giving me any help. That was why I dropped out of school. I was asking for help - I was trying to do the work but no one was giving me the help and I would just switch on them, Trainee J*

This same Trainee had met similar frustration on the C-FAR programme, where English lessons were conducted as group sessions and he felt he needed individual instruction to meet his needs.

Most recognised that they had to set boundaries for their own behaviour if they were to change their lives. They had a clear idea of what to do, even though it might be hard to achieve. However, some had difficulty articulating just how they would set their own boundaries, but recognised the need to do so:

Interviewer: Where are the boundaries here?

Trainee J: *Not taking drugs*

Interviewer: Who sets those boundaries here?

Trainee J: *Well, we get told you can't do this, you can't do that*

Interviewer: But you've heard that a thousand times

Trainee J: *Yeah but I'm taking it in now*

Interviewer: Why are you taking it in here and you wouldn't take it in anywhere else?  
[Trainee J] - you've folded your arms - that's the first time you've got defensive?

Trainee J: *I'm sorry mate - I don't know, it's all I've got in my head to sort my life out.*

Interviewer: Now [Trainee J], being really genuine, you've said you wanted to sort your life out a thousand times in the past

Trainee J: *Yeah, that's true*

Interviewer: What makes that statement this time sincere and believable as opposed to something you would say a thousand times before?

Trainee J: *It's while I was in detox or while I was in court. I was saying it just to get out of court or to get into detox. Here the mask is off, if you know what I mean? You're here and I've just got to sort it out. It's weird - I can't tell you.*

All trainees expressed a desire to be respected – whether by staff in C-FAR, or by the community outside. Trainee D commented:

*The only thing that used to bother me was dying and everyone being nice – one smackhead off the street, one criminal off the street – no-one had no respect for me being dead. I'd really hate that, that's another reason why I wanted to get off the drugs. I didn't want to die and everyone just treating me like one less thug off the street. At the end of the day if I die today, even though I've only been off the drugs a year, I'd get a lot more respect as someone who tried to get off it than if I was just an average human being really.*

Others, while wanting respect themselves, sometimes found it difficult to be respectful of others. This was a source of annoyance to Trainee G:

From my point of view there is a lot of ignorance, lack of respect within the group and I feel that at the moment I kind of took myself away from it and I'm on my own journey.

Interviewer: What kind of lack of respect have they shown?

Trainee G: *Respect for everybody else in the group, respect for staff, respect for C-FAR, the lessons, why they're here. There's just a lack of it - a great deal of ignorance.*

## **Stage 4 – Insight**

In their model, Genders and Player (1995) identify a fourth stage where people progress from understanding to identifying solutions to their problems. Such personal insight is essential if the Trainees were really to change their lives. We hoped that we would begin to find some such evidence by this stage of the programme. By far the commonest insight was the need to get away from old haunts. A typical comment about relocating was made by Trainee K:

*That (returning to his old haunts) would be my downfall, that would. So basically I want to get stable in my new location. I've got 10 hour voluntary and that will continue out*

*there and finish off my order. Then I need to keep occupied until a job comes up for me...be careful with my monies, my giro and what not until I start getting a wage, get food in my cupboards and for me that's big time because I want to keep busy. I want to get into a routine, I want to get up at half seven even if I'm not at work. If I can get up at half seven and go for a run down the beach, do some things, organising things that I've got to do, start going to gyms, do my voluntary work, keep occupied.*

The value of mutual support was also recognised. Trainee F was asked about whether trainees fell out with one another:

There's been a few falling outs, but that's it, we pulled together. A few people did want to leave but we spoke to them and said "You've come this far - don't break down." [...W]e all know each other in here now and we will speak to each other about issues.

Similarly, when Trainee D was asked what he would do if a trainee was thinking of pulling out of the programme, he replied:

*It has actually happened. When I said to them I was going to go - and there was a couple of times that I really did want to go and I was really devoted to going - but I had about 4 or 5 of them coming to my group and said "You can't go. If you go you're going to mess the group up and if you're going we're going" sort of thing. I mean that was a joke but... when I wanted to go they all basically come to me - "Don't go, don't go."*

Many Trainees increased their knowledge of themselves and enhanced their self esteem:

*[...] I know I'm seen as a criminal but I don't feel like a criminal. I don't see myself as a criminal. I wouldn't go out and deliberately go and hurt someone, I wouldn't go out and deliberately rob someone's house because it's just not me. I might have done when I was younger but I don't see myself as that anymore, Trainee G*

And:

Interviewer: And is here helping you to find that person who is [Trainee J]

Trainee J: *Yeah, because if you had spoken to me at the start of the course I wouldn't have said half the stuff that I've said to you today. I've got to trust myself and I'm always expecting to fail myself.*

Another comment, made as a matter of fact observation and not self-pityingly, is particularly poignant:

Interviewer: You've certainly got no illusions about yourself have you?

Trainee E *No - I know what I've got to do when I get out of here which is don't go to the bloody pub and don't do drugs. I'm in a new area and I'm not going to be searching T\_\_\_ for a coke dealer, no way - and I've told my dad that I don't want nothing to do with him*

*ever again and that takes strength to do that. I said to him “You've never been a dad to me, to be honest. Never cuddled me once” He's never bought me anything. All he's done is bought me pipe after pipe after pipe and put cocaine in my pocket and you shake my hand. He used to shake my hand and see me off to my flat, no cuddles, no (unclear) saying 'I love you son, goodnight.' Nothing like that - so he ain't my dad.*

Other insights included the values of persistence, tolerance, and honesty. A number recognised that something was changing within them that was both unfamiliar and disquieting and which throws some further light onto the inter-relationship between agency and structure:

*There has been times when we've been out with the outdoor stuff camping, bike riding, when I've been on my own doing whatever I'm doing outside and I've just looked up and, in my head, I'm sorting things out in my head. It's hard to explain but I'm on a journey at the minute in my life and starting to find out who I am and what I want definitely and I'm realising that now, Trainee G*

*It's the fact that I can walk out of that gate and that's it you know. I'm not going to get any comeback from this. It's the fact that I'd know I've let myself down big time. It is hard knowing that I'm not here on any kind of licence or condition and that I can just walk out – so, yes, I have got my own will power, Trainee D*

Finally, at least one trainee had begun to advance to the final stage of testing their new found skills and knowledge and start to repair previously damaged relationships:

*Going to one to one meetings helped me because I was chatting to them and that and I was able to get my head around a few things that had gone on in my family and that, and I got to the stage that I was picking up the phone whilst I was here, and it was like I was dialling the number and I was waiting for the person to answer and as soon as someone answered I was putting the phone down – I was too nervous. A couple of days later I actually built up enough courage to actually dial the number, pick it up and say 'Hi, is mum there?' It was actually my mum at the other end of it, Trainee E*

## **Stage 5 -Testing**

Our final visit to C-FAR took place in the last week of the residential phase of the programme. C-FAR holds a graduation ceremony on the final day for those who successfully complete the course when it also honours former graduates who have completed a full year without major re-offending. We arranged to interview two former Trainees who were being so honoured to get a retrospective view on the programme.

We found there had been a significant change of mood since our previous visit. A popular Trainee had been required to leave the programme two weeks previously after he had confessed, despite passing a urine test, to paying a local member of the junior cohort to smuggle cannabis into Burdon Grange for him. Trainees were divided as to the justice of

this action – although all agreed that the Trainee had breached the rules they were impressed by his honesty in confessing when, without that confession, the offence could not have been proved against him. However, a far more significant factor was the high degree of dissatisfaction with arrangements made – or, as the case may be, not made – for their accommodation on graduation. C-FAR's housing officer probably has the toughest job in the organisation. He is charged with finding accommodation for all graduates on the day of their graduation. However, his clients have a long history of thieving, drug abuse, violence, and arson and are likely to want to be located in a new town at short notice. They are on job seekers' allowance and housing benefits but are also choosy about where they would like to live. He is a much-maligned man who, nevertheless, consistently managed to pull irons out of the fire at the last moment and get everyone housed.

Genders and Player's (1995) model identifies a final stage of the therapeutic process when people try to put into practice new ways of coping with their problems. We sought to interview Trainees as to what opportunities they had had to do this. Some Trainees declined to be interviewed on this occasion: two had housing preoccupations and two pleaded interview fatigue.

Burdon Grange is situated on the extremity of a fairly isolated village on the edge of Dartmoor. At first glance there would not appear to be many opportunities for Trainees to practice coping strategies. However, this proved to be deceptive. Simply by virtue of staying the course and abiding by the rules Trainees demonstrate their ability to voluntarily observe boundaries:

*You're given boundaries here as in jail but they won't tell you that you have to stay behind those boundaries. You can choose to leave if you want, so they give you a lot of trust [...] It was your choice, if you wanted to leave, you leave - but you know the consequences if you do.* Trainee L

Another opportunity for coping is to be found in rubbing along with others on the programme. The mix of personalities meant Trainees had pronounced likes and dislikes:

*I have worked in here with people I don't know from Adam, so I can go and get a job and start working with people I don't know from Adam. They teach me to get along with them better, respect others, don't be quick to judge people. They have given me a better outlook on life out of it, start a box to build my life on right now, just little pointers, which direction to go, stuff like that,* Trainee C

As might be expected when ten fit young men live cheek by jowl there were many opportunities for fights to break out. The subject cohort seemed to manage to avoid any fights that came to the attention of staff. We asked about this:

Trainee J: *It's been close though.*

Interviewer: But how have you managed to calm down - restraining your hand so that you didn't get into a fight?

Trainee J: *It's been really close with a couple of them, I've almost called them outside and it was going and I thought – "No, I'm here to change my life - that's the old me, I need to start changing", so then I put my hands up and said "I'm sorry"*

However, some were more cynical about staying out of trouble:

Trainee B: *Yeah but that's only because I've been here. So in here I've got a lot to lose if I did do something stupid and out there I haven't got anything to lose, not really*

But this Trainee was still pragmatic:

Interviewer: Do you think it could help you in employment if you were to "bottle it" as it were?

Trainee B: *I will be in employment because I would have something to lose then.*

Most Trainees recognised that they had been shown a range of strategies for dealing with problems and that they had only begun to test these out:

*[I've been shown] how to cope with anger management, how to cope with problem solving, how to cope with stress instead of going off the handle, how to cope with stuff. Instead of where before now I would go out and get smack, I find a way of coping with things, another way of coping with life. They don't really change your life; it just gives you the starting blocks. It's up to you whether you want to change your life; it just gives you the starter blocks, Trainee C*

However, some Trainees believed that if they were placed in too structured an environment they would not get to try out these things:

*I would say that the course has been spot on, it's like I've got a tool box and I've been filling it up with tools and that's what I can use in life but if they move me I'm never going to get the chance to use my tools that I have gained from this course, Trainee A*

Perhaps the first real test for many Trainees was the chance to begin to rebuild fractured relationships with estranged parents and relatives:

*I actually dealt with three quarters of my issues while I was here, I actually made my first contact with my dad after 18 years in this building. That was a big thing for me and now I see my dad on a regular basis, Former Trainee L*

We saw on our previous visit how Trainee A had tentatively contacted his estranged mother. We asked whether there had been any further contact:

Trainee A: *Yes - she sent me a birthday card this week.*

Interviewer: [...] The repair in your relationship - is that likely to be helpful to you when you leave C-FAR?

Trainee A: *It's one of those things that I have to prove myself worthy. I have to prove myself once I've got my accommodation, got a job, once I've got everything like that sorted - then they will come back into my life.*

However, perhaps their first real test of coping was when temptation was placed before them. We learned that the Trainee who had imported the cannabis had shared it with two others. We anticipated that others would also have had the chance to share it and questioned them accordingly:

Trainee C: *I could have had it if I wanted to.*

Interviewer: What was it that enabled you to resist it? [...]

Trainee C: *Because I don't want to fuck up. It's drugs that fucked me up in the first place, it's as simple as that. [...] I'm more concerned about sorting my head out and sorting my life out, at this precise moment. I don't give a fuck about drugs. It's the first time I ever felt like that.*

Another was similarly strong:

*I knew that it was in here. What actually happened is that I went in to use the bath and woke up and a lad had come into the bathroom and comes back and puts something into the bathroom and as soon as I saw it I said I didn't want anything to do with it and a couple of days later they found out and he got kicked out, Trainee A*

However, others succumbed to temptation but promptly regretted it:

Interviewer: Were you one of those?

Trainee B: *(Silence)*

Interviewer: I think you were. Why would you be tempted to?

Trainee B: *I don't know*

Interviewer: You have a lot to lose - as you saw. That could have been you as well. Why were you prepared to risk that for what is really only momentary pleasure?

Trainee B: *I don't intend to stop smoking cannabis - not everyday. But I do still intend to smoke it. When I had it I hardly smoked anything - anyway it was just a spliff each and that was it. When he first showed it to me, and as soon as I had the first couple of drags, I*

*thought "What have I done?"- but it was too late. So I carried on smoking and then I had some water for it to go through my system quicker. We had piss tests anyway and I was just lucky.*

However, it seemed that the offender who brought in the cannabis also had regrets about his actions. Another Trainee saw a lesson in failure:

*Well he knew straight away. He knew that he'd made a big fuck up, big time and that's why he didn't touch it again after that night that he had a couple. But you know, he came back and it was like "I fucked it" - and he did big time regret it. So it wasn't like he weren't bothered about it - "oh, fuck it!" - he wasn't bothered so much about getting caught, he was just gutted that he'd done it and he knew there was no going back. So he did regret it - so in a way I think that was quite a positive attitude towards it [...], Trainee D:*

Trainees were asked what they felt about someone who had volunteered a confession being required to leave the course:

*I think it was fair but harsh because he'd nearly finished, but rules are rules, Trainee J*

And they understood why the rules had to be enforced:

*Everybody would think "Well, if he's done it then I could get away with it as well." [...] I think he should have been given another chance. I know realistically he shouldn't have - if he didn't, people would think this course was a pushover and they would start bringing drugs in themselves and thinking that they would get away with it, Trainee B*

There were other temptations too that were successfully resisted:

*Trainee J: Yeah, some of them were making hooch. But I only had to hold out till next week, so it's not worth getting kicked off the course now.*

Interview: So you resisted that too?

*Trainee J: Yeah - but I mean there's been close a time when I just wouldn't - it's easy in gaol like.*

However, for some Trainees the biggest problems are not external ones but their inner demons – their own past. At least one Trainee found he was able to begin to deal with these satisfactorily for the first time:

*The buzz that I've got from here and learning about myself is far better than the buzz that I've ever got off crack, far better. And I haven't got time for a start and you're not aware of what I've been dealing with, but if you can understand how far I've come in myself, I just feel like a new person. It's that strong and that's what C-FAR has done for me. But it's been within the one-to-ones and I feel that they're really important and I think C-Far*

*should be about, not just the educational side of it [...] Okay, you've got loads of certificates but where's that going to get you in life if you're, excuse the term, head fucked?* Trainee G

Desistance is usually discussed academically as a process rather than an event and one Trainee instinctively intuited this was likely to be the case. When asked how he would deal with succumbing to temptation, he replied:

*But I have actually seen it for myself you know - that they do lapse, then they go another six months without lapsing. But then they will lapse - then they go through long periods but it's only a matter of time before they just get back into that example again, so I feel like you've just got to totally stay away from it [...] I'll go out there and I'll end up trying to make it in my head that it'll be alright to do it once and I will be able to carry on. But if I go out of here thinking that if I do one bit of gear that's it, I'm going back down that road, it'll sort of give me that kick up the arse and sort of scare me. I'll think "No, it ain't even worth doing it that once",* Trainee D

## Aftercare at C-FAR

While the residential programme was the high profile part of C-FAR's life change programme, the aftercare (or "throughcare") part was of much longer duration. We took the opportunity to ask two former Trainees about this part of the programme. These former Trainees found the throughcare programme more valuable than the residential component:

*Well you can't expect to change your life in three months, you know what I mean? If you've been living a certain way of life for so many years, three months here - all it's going to do is screw you head up, it ain't going to straighten it. All it's going to do is screw it up. I'm not quite sure if this was the actual help I needed here, this was the basis, this was the foundations for the one-to-one sessions that I got with Chris, the key worker sessions I got with Chris and when I left here I was very mixed up. Very messed up - I had very mixed up perceptions of what life was going to be like when I got out there, just very messed up in the head really. It wasn't until I started to get my one-to-one sessions with Chris and Neil that things started to go right,* Former Trainee M

Another former Trainee had begun to lapse back into drinking. We asked about the quality of the throughcare support:

*Yeah, I phoned up and spoke to Kat, one of the trainers here, and said "Kat, I need your help, I've been pissed up" and she was like, "Okay it's not a problem, what I can do is I can get the drugs and alcohol worker to call you back" and she phoned me back. She talked me through all the withdrawals, reckon them in different things and said you know if you want to talk about an issue [...] and I did, it was pretty good. I phoned up here about 10.30 at night, half an hour before the last shift signed off,* Former Trainee L

We also asked whether he had wanted to conceal his relapse from his key worker:

Former Trainee L: *No, because I didn't want to let her down*

Interviewer: How did she know?

Former Trainee L: *Because I liked her and I didn't want to lie to her anymore, but at the same time I didn't want to hurt her feelings because I knew how much she thought of me - and because I knew how much she thought of me, that's one of the main reasons why I've done what I've done and come as far as I have [...]*

We noted that Trainees frequently attributed the root cause of their substance abuse as boredom. Boredom was mentioned 62 times in 13 interviews. We asked Former Trainee L what he thought the most difficult thing was that Trainees have to face after completion of the residential programme:

Former Trainee L: *I think boredom if anything.*

Interviewer: That is a word in interviews that's cropped up time and time again.

Former Trainee L : *Boredom is such a powerful thing, I was unemployed after my first job in Cornwall for about three months and I hated it and I'd get so stressed out. I'd get angry for the slightest thing because I was bored. But boredom is a very big thing to combat in everyday life and I personally believe that once I left here if I got a job that I really wanted to do I'd be doing that. Boredom is a big thing that needs to be combated within the guys' heads and if they've got a goal or an aim that is going to be a struggle for them. If not the boredom and they can combat that, then it's peer pressure I suppose.*

## **Concluding Comments - Attitudinal Changes**

At the conclusion of our study we analysed Trainees' attitudinal responses to certain statements, such as "My life is in complete disorder" and "I am confident I can change my future behaviour". Identical scales had been administered on each of our three visits and all Trainees, except the one required to withdraw from the programme before our final visit, completed these. The Trainees were given a sheet with a number of 120mm numbered lines. They were instructed that the left end of the line represented strong disagreement and the right end of the line represented strong agreement. They were then invited to indicate their reaction to statements by drawing a mark vertically through the scale. At the conclusion of the study the distance of the marks from the left-hand ends of the scales was measured and then converted into a percentage where 0% represented the strongest disagreement and 100% the strongest agreement.

Low self-esteem was not a particular problem for most Trainees. The mean response to the statement “I believe I am basically a good person who wants to live a useful life” was 90% at the outset of the residential programme. Nevertheless a modest increase in self-esteem was recorded – by our second visit it had risen to 94% and finally achieved 96% on our last visit. However the most significant change was Trainees’ response to the statement “My life is in complete disorder.” An initial mean score of 69% had fallen to 40% by our second visit and was finally recorded as 42%. We suggest that it might have been even lower had not three Trainees recorded very high levels of agreement (98%-100%), probably prompted by dissatisfaction with housing arrangements made for them. Five Trainees recorded very high levels (scores lower than 7%) of disagreement with the statement. Similarly, the programme clearly injects a degree of reality into Trainees – at the outset the statement “I am confident I can change my future behaviour” attracted a fairly confident mean score of 88% but this initial optimism had ebbed to 80% as Trainees faced the prospect of putting theory into practice.

Two Trainees’ attitudes as measured by our scales were almost completely unchanged by the programme. One Trainee was so consistent that the majority of his answers were within two percentage points of one another when his first and last responses were compared. The other’s were mostly within five points of one another.

## **Concluding Comments - Language Analysis**

We also took the opportunity to analyse a sample of the language used by Trainees in their exit interviews. We did this using a computerised system called DICTION 5.0 devised by R P Hart (Hart, 2000). We used six exit interviews with Trainees A, B, C, D, F and G. When interview transcripts are processed through DICTION it reports if any values are out of the normal range.

The most common out of range variable was Commonality, which is defined as language that highlights the agreed-upon values of a group and that rejects idiosyncratic modes of engagement. Five out of six interviews were beneath the lower bound of the normal range for this feature. The next commonest out of range variable was Optimism, which is defined as language endorsing some person, group, concept or event, or highlighting their positive entailments. Three of the six transcripts were above the normal high bound for this speech feature. Finally, one transcript tested above the high bound for another variable – Realism. Realism is defined as language describing tangible, immediate, recognizable matters that affect people's everyday lives.

This was our first use of language analysis in our research and we offer our results more as an observation than as a significant finding at this stage. However, we think it notable that only one Trainee (Trainee C) tested out of range for three variables and that Trainee was the one most commonly predicted by staff and Trainees alike as destined to succeed

on graduation. If we can follow Trainees' future progress we may be able to develop language analysis as a predictive tool.

## **Concluding Thoughts – Summing it All Up**

We started this evaluation with a quote from one Trainee who made plain that whilst he thought that prison was merely about getting “people off the streets”, or as one criminologist has recently put it, prison performing a “disappearing trick” of those who are seen as being undesirable (Rhodes, 2004), C-FAR was about changing “your life”. How this change was to occur emerged over the course of our interviews and was reflected in recurring themes that preoccupied the Trainees. These themes included the part played by C-FAR as an organisation – both in terms of the role of the staff as listeners and counsellors, whom the Trainees compared favourably with other criminal justice professionals, and as a place that offered a crime-free environment, with lots of activity and distraction from boredom. However, the Trainees too played a vital role in all of this and it should be remembered that C-FAR did not cherry-pick easy candidates for reform – far from it. The Trainees that form the basis of this study are, by any standards, both psychologically damaged people and prolific offenders. Even a modest reduction in their rate of recidivism for a limited period of time would have significant benefits to society, both economically and socially.

We were asked to reflect what the Trainees themselves felt contributed to changes in their outlook and behaviour on the programme, based on an assumption that there would be a process of change uncovered by the longer Bristol study. As such we grounded our interviews within Genders and Player's (1995) “therapeutic career model” and, whilst remembering the likely audience of this evaluation, we have sought to contextualise what the Trainees said within the growing criminological literature of desistance. In particular we believe that this prospective study of the process of desistance allows us to see more clearly the mutual and complimentary roles played by the structure that the Trainees found themselves in at C-FAR and the part played by their personal and growing desire to change themselves. At the end of the day, these Trainees did not want to be “disappeared”, but rather acknowledged and respected as equal members of society - a society in which one day they might be able to make something of their lives. If we genuinely value social inclusion, C-FAR should be but the beginnings of that hope.

**Professor David Wilson, Professor Julian Killingley**

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Diction 5.0 is a dictionary-based language analysis program that searches a passage for five semantic features - Activity, Optimism, Certainty, Realism and Commonality - as well as thirty-five sub-features. DIRECTION conducts its searches via a 10,000-word corpus and also reports normative data for each of its forty scores based on a 20,000-item comparison sample of contemporary discourse. For comparative purposes, DIRECTION includes normative statistical data when processing the input files. The data are generated from a broad sampling of texts produced mainly in the U.S. between 1945 and 1998. DIRECTION 5.0 provides a number of specialised files enabling more refined comparisons to be made. For the purposes of this report we also compared exit interview language with normative values in the Daily Life class Problem-Solving Discussion type. The normative values for this file were derived from a sample of 73 texts comprising group decision-making from three settings: a state agency, a school district teacher's caucus, and student peer mediation.

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