



CATS project

Mapping the landscape: Support for offenders and their families

Evaluative summary

Rational for ethnomethodological observations

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Ethnographies are known to be reliable methodologies in understanding real world phenomena in a natural setting. In observing human beings in particular circumstances, the researcher is able to make direct correlations to the motivations, actions and effects of any given participants behaviour. Alternatively, ethnomethodological observations permit researchers to observe theory, interventions and provisions in practice. As opposed to developing and measuring scores based on a questionnaire, the observations allows to see both the provider and the recipient of any given intervention or project in its administrative phase. It acts in an illustrative capacity, illuminating the various stages, sequences, points and mechanics of the observed and providing the research team with greater insight into the object of observations inner-working.

Specifically with the organizations recruited for the current study, an ethnomethodological approach permitted for an extremely wide and varied set of projects and interventions to be disseminated. It allowed for a general focus to be placed on each different set of projects and allowed for a flexible approach in understanding and illustrating each organizations different aims, objectives and methods in approaching 'at-risk' families. Had a more structured assessment tool been used, such as a survey depicting service user satisfaction with each organization or a single interview with particular cliental, entire aspects and provisions of each observed project would have been missed. In turn, this would not have provided as grandiose and qualitatively rich a picture as has been obtained. Specific and detailed interactions between staff and users can be highlighted as well as the idiosyncratic identifiers of each organization, making them stand apart from the plethora of services currently operating.

Ethnographies also permit for a clear, concise and structured narrative to be constructed as an output. As the human mind interprets incoming information in a fairly coherent and scripted manner, ethnography allows for a 'case' report or study to be drawn. It permits the researchers to depict the complicated entity of study (in this case the organizations dealing with families and offenders) in a pragmatic, sequential and logical frame. It structures the output with a beginning, middle and an end which



is the preferable method of interpretation for the common reader. In essence, it allows for the organization and its work to be read as a story.

Key findings:

Through the observations conducted with NEPACS, CAFE and ORMISTON, a number of key findings emerged from dissemination of the ethnographic case reports:

1. Multi-agency partnerships

- Organizations work with community partners in order to ensure holistic and complete coverage of service user needs. This includes taking on the family as a ‘whole unit’, dealing with their issues both inside and outside of the criminal justice system.
- Statutory services such as Primary Care Trusts, Her Majesty’s Prison Services, National Probation Service, NOMS, Youth Offending Teams, Social Services, Drug and Alcohol agencies, schools and many more.
- This provides continuous assistance and support for both the family and the individual in the prison system in working towards both successful re-integration/re-settlement as well as ensuring that support is not suddenly ‘cut-off’ post service engagement. Also ensures that both the criminogenic and clinical needs of the offender in particular are satisfactorily met.
- Partnerships with HMPS are of the utmost importance seen as both NEPACS and CAFE function predominantly in prisons and their visiting centres.

2. Hierarchical structure

- Ensuring that staffs within the organizations are not over-burdened, successful projects have a structured and standard system in which employees function within.
- Volunteers form the scaffold of all organizations visited, with an emphasis on placing volunteers in tailor-made positions and not just taking them on for the purpose of increased bodies.
- Practitioners form the bulk of employees, coming from a variety of backgrounds (i.e. Social Work, Youth Work, Counselling, Probation, etc.). These are the primary points of contact with service users and assist in meeting their needs and helping with continued support both inside the institution and outside, as far as supporting maintained family relationships.



- Management is essential in times of austerity—specifically, it was observed that dedicated teams of fundraisers, research and development formed quintessential components of the projects. Without their expertise and constant search for future funding, many of the projects would not be able to sustain their provisions.
3. Therapeutic alliance
- Following Bordin's (1979) model as well as loosely in line with the National Probation Service, an emphasis between establishing a therapeutic alliance between practitioners and service users (whether it be the family in the community of the offender/prisoners themselves) was seen as the ideal gold standard for intervention and provision.
 - Bond-Tasks-Goals
 - i. Bonds assist in practitioner and service user developing a working and meaningful relationship; developing rapport; and establishing a functioning partnership based on equality, authority and respect
 - ii. Tasks—mutually agreed upon activities that the service users and practitioners develop together in order to reach desired outcomes. Provides a mutually inclusive activity in which both parties can engage. It also provides empowerment to the service user as they are able to track their progress on specific activities. By agreeing on tasks and developing them together, it also utilises fundamental theories of motivation and change. Within any client-practitioner model within the CJS (and related fields) motivation by the user needs to be sincere and desired in order for any progress to be made. By creating tasks together, the validity and
 - iii. Goals—these are the desired outcomes of intervention/provision for the service user. Again, these are discussed at length together (with the practitioner) and the aforementioned tasks are used in order to reach these outcomes. Need to be realistic and obtainable and are case-dependant. Through the bond between the two parties, the context and realism of these goals will be discussed at length.
 - Developing trust is also seen as the utmost importance and corresponds with the creation of a bond between both parties. Although there will be a slight power differential between the service user and practitioner, it is a question of establishing empowerment, equality and self-esteem



in the user so that they are able to gauge the activities of the ‘professional’ as honest and in their own best interest.

4. Secondary victimization/hidden sentence

- Identifying family needs in the community is seen as a priority. Often neglected as being an extension of the offender, organizations aim to both support the family post-offence and facilitate continued relationships once their loved one has been incarcerated.
- This can occur at the orientation phase of incarceration, where ‘first time’ families are met in the visiting centre by dedicated staff who offer support, understanding and information. Keeping families informed of the pragmatics of a visit such as bus schedules, accommodation, hours and requirements are issues that the family may not have considered.
- Keeping family connections tight—between those incarcerated and those on the outside. Not seeing it as an ‘offending family’ but instead as a family with a member in prison.
- Ensuring that the children are able to maintain as ‘nuclear’ a parenting style as possible, considering the circumstances. This includes special visiting sessions for children only; parenting skills for fathers inside the system; provision of financial bursaries in order to lower the burden on families visiting a loved one; and many more.