

## **Speech at Langley House Trust National Thanksgiving Service - 26<sup>th</sup> June 2008**

I am greatly honoured to have been invited by Steve to speak to you on this very special occasion (and thank you Steve for the very generous introduction) ....

... I must admit that, compared with many of the other speaking engagements I often have to undertake, today feels very much more like the always-pleasurable task of 'preaching to the converted'.

You are all here to celebrate 50 years of the excellent work undertaken by the Langley House Trust, and I am here to tell you why you are right to do so -

- What could be simpler or more pleasurable?

Well maybe, alongside carrying out that very pleasant duty, I will try to find some ways of modestly adding some additional value, if I can.

Probably everyone here is very familiar with how the Trust was established 50 years ago, and the major changes in its practice that it has undergone since then, especially over the last 10 to 15 years.

Clearly Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation has played a part in stimulating those changes, and it may be helpful if I offer some of my own particular perspective on that –

- I hope it helps you to establish a clear platform for your work for the next 50 years.

As someone who has worked in and around the Probation Service now for 35 years I have of course had experience of the Trust and its work for quite a long time now.

I have been very conscious of its explicitly Christian basis, and the desire to provide a home, as it once was, for people who need to re-establish themselves in society.

The Probation Service, being a small world, is a world where we often have personal links with other organisations, and in the 1980s, when I was a senior probation officer, I was delighted to learn that my friend and colleague John Adams had become General Secretary of this Trust ...

...Well, time moves on, and since then not only has John moved in to the Langley House Trust, and then moved on, but the Trust itself has had to undergo enormous changes in the last 10 to 15 years - and I am conscious that the Inspectorate has played a part in this.

Not only did we prepare two thematic inspection reports at the beginning of this decade, just as I was joining the Inspectorate for the first time, but of course it was also two years ago that we wrote the report concerning the case of Anthony Rice.

I'll return to some of the implications of that in a moment, but I thought I'd mention first that I was very touched to receive last year an invitation from Julian Perkins to visit Elderfield in person, some 18 months after that report - he and all the staff there were keen to show me their work overall, and in much more informal and different circumstances, something I was very happy to do.

I found a gap in my knowledge - it had not previously registered with me that Elderfield was the very original Langley House Trust '*project*', as we now call them, established in 1959, although of course I had been very aware of Elderfield's long tradition.

This caused me to reflect yet again on the changes that the Criminal Justice System has sought from Langley House Trust projects, and other providers of accommodation for offenders, over the years.

I had had some direct experience of managing changes like these myself in the 1990s as an Assistant Chief Probation Officer in Berkshire, where one of our four probation hostels in the county had been established just after the Second World War in the small village of Old Windsor as a home for boys – that had been its original purpose at that time.

Subsequently, its gradual transition over the years to, first, a bail hostel for men of all ages, and then into accommodating the more acute of those male offenders, usually on release on licence from prison – this was a major change for some of the longer term staff, and also for the residents of the village.

I was aware of how much importance we needed to place, not only on the needs of our staff, but also on the need for maintaining *very well-managed relationships with the local community*.

This is never easy, and one difficult or distressing incident can, for a while, undo many months of positive *relationship-building*.

Of course I appreciate that many of you know this already, but my point here is to confirm my recognition of this, and to continue to encourage you in your never-ending task of continued working with your local communities.

This of course leads me to say more about the difficult transition that many of you have had to make yourselves, particularly in the last 10 to 15 years –

- You have had to take on people, usually direct from prison, often with much worse criminal histories than the people you might have taken on in the past.

It was some eight years ago that the Trust invited this Inspectorate to undertake a thematic review of your Fresh Start Projects – projects designed to replace your former half-way houses with a more structured regime of support for those homeless offenders, usually ex-prisoners, who needed this structured approach.

I hope you realised what you were letting yourselves in for when you asked us to do this! –

- I've looked up that report, published in 2001, and I note that we set eleven recommendations for the Trust alone, some of which consisted of several elements, plus another seven for the then National Probation Directorate.

We said you should “issue Policies and Practice Guidelines”, and “set specific standards for the supervision and care” of your residents, introduce “value-for-money benchmarks” and “set targets” for improvement....

Alongside these heartwarming suggestions, we had some specific practical ideas too for staffing levels and for closer working with Probation staff - so I hope you found at least some of these useful and of practical benefit to your work.

There is no doubt that when you are a voluntary organisation working with government nowadays, you have to demonstrate, with evidence, that you are carrying out effectively what the paymaster wants you to do, which is why I hope that our 2001 report helped you achieve some of the changes you were having to make at the time.

Mind you, I imagine you would much prefer to experience another report like that to the one I had to write about the case of Anthony Rice, and I am very conscious what a distressing experience that was for everyone involved.

This is not the occasion for a lecture on that subject, but equally it would be wrong to pretend that it hadn't happened - I will simply emphasise here the importance of ensuring that with

certain cases you and your Prisons and Probation partners have the full knowledge you need in order to make the difficult decisions you often have to make -

- And don't make assumptions about you believe that they know or think about any particular case.

The more general point I have been recently making about this kind of work is also very relevant here though: -

- no one is, or no one should be, asking you to be like a *prison in the community* -

- your work is not about *locking people up* -

- but your work with the more difficult residents does sometimes include a high level of indirect Control, often setting some very *Restrictive* rules -

- and then you are holding those residents *accountable* for *sticking to those rules* –

- You have to show that you worked closely with your Probation, Police and other partners in taking all reasonable action to keep to a minimum the Risk of Harm that those residents might pose to others.

That is *tough* for you, in my opinion – you came into this work to help people, and it doesn't come easy to implement *restrictive* interventions like these on the people you came in to help –

- In the language we use in the Inspectorate, you are finding on the one hand that your Probation Service partners still want you to *Help* and *Change* your residents with a regime of what we call *Constructive interventions* – that's the more familiar work –

- but at the same time they also want you now to exercise a measure of *Control* in many cases, operating what we in the Inspectorate call *Restrictive* interventions -

The position is that you have told your partners that that's what you'll do, and you are taking government money for that purpose, so now this is very much a case of implementing your side of the agreement you've made.

I think that that is a very hard thing for a voluntary organisation, and it's hard too for your staff and volunteers.

- I know that that is something that you have worked hard on – and I wish you well with that struggle.

And just a final general note here from me about the nature of the task of *managing people's Risk of Harm to others*:

For the Inspectorate one of our key roles is to make it as clear as we can to Ministers, other politicians, and to the general public *what it is reasonable to expect* when working with offenders in the community –

- Hence we regularly say that it is impossible to eliminate risk, and that Serious Further Offences will happen from time to time, most unfortunately -

- so what we look for if we have to review a case is not to *criticise people for failing to achieve the impossible*, but to look and see *what actions could or should have been reasonably possible* to at least keep the risks to a minimum, and assess how well they were carried out – it's what I sometimes call a 'test of reasonableness' – did people do *all that they could reasonably be expected to do*?

Anyway, that was my difficult note in what I have to say, and it's a relief and a pleasure to me to return to our main theme today – a celebration and a thanksgiving for what the Trust has achieved with real people over the last 50 years.

I was enormously struck, as I'm sure was everyone else here, with the testimony from Graham Farrell:

He has made an enormous change in his life, and I'm sure that everyone here would agree that the foremost credit for that changed life should go to Graham himself – in the end each individual has to change their own life himself or herself.

But Graham's testimony illustrated what can be done by others in the right circumstances to help an individual to make the necessary change or changes to his own life – and clearly an enormous credit must go to a number of Langley House Trust individuals – staff, volunteers, and perhaps other residents and maybe even neighbours – that have enabled Graham to make this huge change to his life.

This does give me the chance to confirm that the heartbeat of the work you do, and the work that the Probation Service still does, is still about Help and Change, and to confirm how much that Help and Change work can still achieve -

- The simple truth is that every individual is a unique individual, and the key to this work is, as ever, doing the right thing with the right individual at the right time and in the right way – easy to say, but difficult to do!

The Control element I mentioned earlier does not replace or displace the Help and Change elements – it is an additional element serving a complementary purpose in those particular cases where it is needed -

- the kind of work that Graham experienced from the Trust can and will therefore go on, I very much hope.

Graham spoke of being “given a chance”, and how he was encouraged and enabled to make his own decisions, and thus how he was able to “fill a void” ...

... He also rightly described himself as “unique”, and it is important to remember that different people need different things ...

So although this is now a much more difficult time for you as an independent charity, working with the State - by no means always a comfortable relationship – what I am saying to you is that your principles have stood you in good stead for 50 years, and enabled you to help many individuals to make wonderful changes to their lives –

- So if you manage the continuing changes that you have to make, holding to these principles, though applying them in the right way, doing the right things with the right individuals, you will continue to have a sound platform for further success in the future –

My very best wishes for that continuing success.

Andrew Bridges  
HM Chief Inspector of Probation  
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