Motivational Interviewing: An Appropriate Model for Engaging Clients with Drug Abuse Problems in the Probation Service

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Summary: Motivational Interviewing (MI), initially developed to assist those with alcohol addiction issues (Miller, 1983), is also a useful strategy in probation work with offenders. A ‘problem behaviour’ as defined by the criminal justice system may not be identified as such by the offender. Nonetheless, the Probation Service may be charged with the task of changing that behaviour, and an approach such as MI, which seeks to work with the offender and not against them, is worthwhile, effective, respectful and, this paper will argue, an appropriate intervention tool and model. Following on from Loughran (2006), this paper sets out the continued relevance and practical application of this approach in guiding supervision and intervention with drug-using offenders some six years later. As a Probation Officer in current practice, the value of employing this approach on a daily basis informs this paper. MI and the Cycle of Change model are employed by Probation Officers in key tasks such as preparation of pre-sanction reports, development of case management supervision plans, contracting and agreeing goals, encouraging compliance, managing non-compliance and reducing recidivism.

Keywords: Motivational Interviewing, Cycle of Change, behaviour change, interventions, offenders, probation supervision.

Introduction

The focus of probation work has increasingly developed greater emphasis on responding to criminogenic targets in keeping with ‘what works’ principles, alongside encompassing principles of effective risk assessment and risk management. Motivational Interviewing (MI) is grounded in evidence-based practice of ‘what works’ (Clark et al., 2006; Saunders

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