

## Training and Employment in an Economic Downturn: Lessons from Desistance Studies

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**Summary:** This paper examines the possibilities for offender training and employment in an economic downturn. It begins with the recognition that labour markets have collapsed and training programme design has been complicated by uncertainty around future opportunity. The examination is based on the findings from desistance studies, which highlight a process contributing to offender reform that has to do with acts of giving. If these insights are incorporated into training programme design and other criminal justice initiatives, then a whole new field of possibility opens up. The paper examines the desistance paths of offenders and in particular the role of employment as part of the desistance process. It concludes with an outline of possible training and employment activities that would utilise desistance study insights.

**Keywords:** Desistance, economic downturn, employment, reform, generativity, opportunity.

### Introduction

Two important facts stand exposed with the downturn, and collapse, of some sectors of the economy: the central role of employment in offender desistance, and the adaptation of training programmes to local labour markets in support of the employment objective. Employment has long been considered a key component of, especially, an adult male offender's desistance path. The economic downturn in the first instance has reduced the opportunities for desisting offenders, while it has also complicated training programme design by offering no obvious existing labour market in which to adapt. They have all contracted.

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The question is ‘where to from here?’, with ‘here’ representing a radically contracted labour market and tight and deteriorating budgetary environment. Implicit in the question of ‘where’, however, is a trajectory, a yet to be defined future point that depends not only on economic factors but also on how we as criminal justice professionals understand the possibilities for future growth. It is the contention of this paper that the study of desistance offers invaluable insights that not only deepen understanding around recidivism and reform, but also illuminate future training and employment opportunities that are consistent with an offender’s responsivity and motivation to change. To realise such insights, it is necessary to *unpack* the objects and processes to which the terms ‘desistance’ and ‘employment’ refer. For instance, desistance as a process of personal change away from offending behaviour includes both the offender’s own understanding and the new life circumstances they may inhabit, of which employment is *normally* a part. How that understanding interacts with their new life circumstances, or even the desire for a change in life circumstances, has been the subject of desistance studies. It is no longer accepted that offenders simply age out of crime; rather, in addition to or as part of the ageing process, institutions such as employment – as well as the offender’s self-understanding – play a part. Implicating self-understanding in the process makes desistance a highly individual process. But it is a process with strict socio-cultural underpinnings, by which is meant there is a value, or desire, for socially *accepted* conditions such as being married or being employed. In other words, desistance is towards what is, generally, socio-culturally construed as acceptable.

Employment is part of the *idea* of what is acceptable, and as such it has a value beyond the normal benefits associated with it such as remuneration and daily structure. It also has the potential to express what Maruna (2001) described as a generative impulse, the desire to give something back to the offender’s community or the next generation, an act of giving that has been strongly implicated in offender reform. It is argued here that this insight from desistance studies opens up a whole field of activity that heretofore, in this country at least, has not been explored. The generativity impulse suggests that training programme design and work may be adapted to the needs of less well resourced groups in society rather than just local labour markets, which currently are not functioning. To make this argument the desistance paths of offenders must be explored, with reference to differences arising from

gender and age. In addition, desistance must be placed in its proper context as a criminological study, which implies it has its own limits. The structure is as follows: the limits of desistance studies are traced by way of context to the discussion of the narrative, cultural and control basis of desistance; the contribution of employment to desistance is then outlined; and finally the subject of offender training and employment in an economic downturn is discussed.

### **Disentangling desistance**

Desistance studies are one emphasis within a broader strand of research and theory that has been referred to as developmental and life-course criminology (Farrington, 2005).<sup>1</sup> Specifically it is the study of ends, whereby the criminal career, characterised in general terms as having a peak age of onset between 8 and 14, and a peak age of offending between 15 and 19, reaches a peak age of desistance between 20 and 29 (Farrington, 2005). Optimistically, it has been found that the majority of offenders do stop committing crime, and *how* is obviously a major research question, though not without its conceptual difficulties.

For a start there is the problem of definition, in particular if time is factored into the description as a necessary condition. For example, when desistance is considered as an event it presupposes some idea of when it happened, which is logically difficult to establish (Maruna, 2001).<sup>2</sup> Desistance is more accurately understood as a process and not as an event, one in which there is a cessation followed by a refrainment from further offending. This introduces a useful distinction between what Maruna and Farrall (2004; cited in McNeill, 2006, p. 47) have termed 'primary and secondary desistance' to denote the difference between (1) the original act of stopping and (2) the processes that subsequently support desisting behaviour. It is a question of understanding personal change, but given that the primary reference point is crime, such

<sup>1</sup> Under the criminologist David Farrington's typology, developmental criminology 'focuses on especially the development of offending but also on risk factors', while life-course criminology focuses on the effects of life events and life transitions on offending, as well as risk factors (Farrington, 2005, p. 3). In recognition that these are essentially an interlinked set of issues, the description 'developmental and life-course criminology' is used to capture connections between the onset of offending, its maintenance and the desistance from offending.

<sup>2</sup> For example, to say that desistance occurs after a certain time is arbitrary and probably misleading, for there will always be exceptions. But likewise to link it to the last offence is to place the act of desistance at the point of the crime, which is illogical (Maruna, 2001).

understanding has been criticised for its overly narrow focus on legal transgressions (or their absence) to explain personal development, when a concentration on antisocial behaviour might be more adequate (Gadd and Farrall, 2004). The point is that some important offences are less readily apprehended or less clearly defined, e.g. receiving stolen goods and varying degrees of abuse in domestic relationships respectively, and as such may go unnoticed even though they are, possibly, true reflections of the reforming offender. In addition, desistance studies, as a branch of criminology, are subject to the same biases as their parent. For example, the focus is primarily on the adult male offender and much less so on the female offender (Walklate, 2003), with gender differences receding further with age as it is the gender-neutral category of 'youth' that is often under investigation for young people (Wikström and Butterworth, 2008).

Such concerns, however, should not be seen as a failing of the subject, but rather as the outcome of a critical engagement that has led to the development of a more nuanced understanding of the desistance process. Most offenders do age out of crime, but there is debate as to how. A central stimulus to that debate was Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) claim that crime, in being the result of 'low self-control' – considered as a stable trait of the individual – is not conducive to changing social influences such as pro-social others or employment. Rather, the offender was thought simply to age out of crime over the life-course<sup>3</sup> (as cited in Gunnison and Mazerolle, 2007, p. 233). The claim has since been overturned: social influence does matter, but to what extent and in what way? It is not possible to trace the contours of the debate fully, but following Farrall and Calverly (2006), four key pieces of recent work must be mentioned, from which insights can be drawn, namely Maruna (2001), Giordano *et al.* (2002), Laub and Sampson (2003) and Bottoms *et al.* (2004) (as cited in Farrall and Calverly 2006, p 13).

### **The narrative basis of desistance**

As a crude organising point, desistance studies can be separated according to the unit of analysis used to understand desistance, i.e.

<sup>3</sup> Gottfredson and Hirschi argue that low self-control comes from poor parenting and socialisation practices. The 'criminal propensity' (their criminality) of any one criminal is instilled early in life, but remains relatively stable across the life-course (as cited in Farrall and Calverly, 2006). In other words, although socialisation continues to exert an influence throughout the life-course, it is limited by what was set in the early years and this implies a restricted role for social influence on offender desistance.

individual level processes versus the exteriority of social control acting on the person. Maruna (2001), for instance, starts from the premise that ‘to successfully maintain ... abstinence from crime, ex-offenders need to *make sense* of their lives’ (emphasis in original), which is achieved in the form of a life story or self-narrative (Maruna, 2001, p. 7). In other words, to desist from crime, ex-offenders need to develop a coherent, pro-social identity for themselves. Overall, the objective of Maruna’s research was to ‘identify the common, psychosocial structure underlying’ the narratives encompassing this identity, which he refers to as the ‘phenomenology of desistance’ (Maruna, 2001, p. 8). His findings were striking: desisters ‘displayed an exaggerated sense of control over the future, and an inflated, almost missionary sense of purpose in life’, despite their often difficult circumstances (Maruna, 2001, p. 9). They additionally recast their criminal pasts as the necessary prelude to a ‘new calling’ and distinguished their non-offending selves as the ‘real me’, i.e. who they were before the onset of the criminal career (Maruna, 2001, p. 9). All of this Maruna describes as the ‘Redemption Script’: the ‘re-biographing’ of the life-story to justify and support change.

Maruna also identified among desisters a powerful impulse towards generativity, by which he meant the agentic desire to achieve and accomplish something of worth. Specifically it was a desire to contribute something to their communities, especially those at risk of becoming enmeshed in the criminal lifestyle: a phenomenon known as the ‘wounded healer’ (Maruna, 2001, p. 11).

Of particular importance in the current context is this generativity impulse, which has to do with work and hence will be returned to later. For the moment, two points are worth mentioning in relation to Maruna’s research. Firstly, the ‘exaggerated sense of control’ that desisters feel over the future, which can be reframed as ‘optimism’ or ‘hope’, has been found elsewhere to be related to having an identified pathway out of crime and to the number of obstacles the offender faces (Farrall, 2002; Burnett and Maruna, 2004, respectively). Farrall, for instance, categorised probationers in the UK according to their motivation to change, identifying ‘confidants, optimists and pessimists’. He found that motivation was directly related to the number and depth of obstacles the offender faced<sup>4</sup> (Farrall, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> The categories of obstacle to desistance identified in Farrall’s research were ‘no obstacles expected, friends and family, financial reasons, drugs and alcohol, social problems, personal characteristics, other responses’ (Farrall, 2002, p. 74).

On the surface this suggests that Maruna's desisters had similar pathways and manageable obstacles, but this was not the case. Maruna describes, on the contrary, difficult life circumstances that highlight the second point worth mentioning in relation to his work: that the 'Redemption Script' of the 'Real Me' represents, potentially, an under-utilised variable in the reform process, namely the idealised 'self' of the offender. This is evident from Maruna's desisters who overcame the obstacles they faced in part because of a change in perspective or self-understanding. The inference for probation work is that engagement and motivation can be deepened by identifying and working with the non-offending aspects of the offender's 'self' and then addressing the barriers to its realisation.

### **The cultural basis of desistance**

Yet as important as Maruna's contribution is, it has been identified as primarily singular in its approach (Gadd and Farrall 2004), leaving the 'Real Me', as the preserve of the individual, somewhat distant and unelaborated ... what is it exactly? Much has been written about the nature of the 'self' and its narrative embodiment by other disciplines,<sup>5</sup> but in terms of desistance, and training and employment, the work of two other recent groups of theorists is particularly important – Giordano *et al.* (2002) and Bottoms *et al.* (2004).

Giordano *et al.* (2002) explored female desistance and proposed a four-part theory of cognitive transformation. They found that, contrary to Sampson and Laub's social control theory, which we will turn to presently, social institutions such as marital attachment and employment were *not* associated with desistance.<sup>6</sup> This will be challenged in the next section, but to elaborate on Giordano's theory: the first part of cognitive transformation is 'openness to change', which is the offender's responsiveness, while the second relates to the offender's 'exposure to a particular hook or set of hooks for change' (Giordano *et*

<sup>5</sup> This work highlights the cultural, historical and institutional articulation of the 'self' as distinct from a primarily individual focus, which would seem to complement existing desistance studies (for instance Holstein and Gubrium, 2000; Wertsch, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> Sampson and Laub (1993) proposed a theory of informal social control acting through institutions such as marriage, employment and the military, with each providing structural determinants of desistance (as cited in Farrall and Calverley, 2006).

*al.*, p. 1000). This is important because it connects personal change to environmental stimuli, such as being offered a job, and means that offender responsiveness and opportunity are interdependent. It is reminiscent of Farrall's (2002) work on 'motivation and the obstacles to change', reported above, but goes further in the third step by naming the ability to envisage an alternative self as part of the change process. Giordano calls this the 'replacement self', and fundamentally it is culturally derived. The observation comes from noting that the most successful female desisters 'crafted highly traditional replacement selves (e.g. child of God, the good wife, involved mother)' which they associated with their successful exit from criminal activities (Giordano *et al.*, 2002, p. 1053). This raises the question as to why, as the expression of agency, these women become enmeshed in what can be described as repressive life circumstances.<sup>7</sup> One possible answer is that such are the cultural references available to them that there is actually little choice.

The last part of the four-stage model of cognitive transformation occurs when past behaviours are no longer appealing, but the idea of a culturally derived 'replacement self' warrants further elaboration. It is also reminiscent of Bottoms *et al.* (2004) who, in describing the transition from conformity to criminality and back again, question the cultural basis of that conformity. They compare it to 'the American Dream'<sup>8</sup> transposed to an English setting: that there is a collectively held ideal of having a safe job in a stable company, enough money, luxuries and girlfriend (Bottoms *et al.*, 2004). It is a male dream that Bottoms *et al.* outline, but it seems familiar enough to apply to the Irish setting and further illustrates the point that Maruna's 'real me' has cultural antecedents. Furthermore, it suggests importantly that irrespective of the rehabilitative capacity of employment, it seems safe to describe it as a culturally reinforced 'hook for change', as the reason why offenders may engage more fully with the Probation Service and other agencies of the criminal justice system. But following Giordano

<sup>7</sup> Giordano *et al.* give examples of repressive life circumstances by quoting respondents as follows: 'he don't trust me around men ... he don't want me being around men'; 'he don't like me to work at all' (Giordano *et al.* 2002, p. 1053).

<sup>8</sup> The American Dream described by Bottoms *et al.* (2004) is that everyone can succeed with hard work, with success expressed in terms of power, important job and material possessions.

*et al.* and others, the culturally informed ‘replacement self’ is gender- and probably age-specific, which means that for each sex, at different ages and for different socio-economic backgrounds the exact form of the ‘ideal’ may change. However, in a recent study of the problems and needs of newly sentenced prisoners in the UK, whereby young offenders were compared to adults and males to females, it was found that 48% prioritised employment and skills deficits over health and family problems and sought help in these areas (Stewart, 2008), which supports the idea of employment as a societally held cultural value.

### **Informal social control and desistance**

So far each of the desistance theories has emphasised to varying degrees the interaction of the individual with the environment to explain desistance. The last piece to be reported on as per the review by Farrall and Calverley (2006), Laub and Sampson’s age-graded theory of informal social control, is different. It takes a more structural approach to offender desistance. The theory was first presented in 1993 and provided the stimulus to the theories already discussed; for example, Giordano *et al.* (2002) suggest that their theory of cognitive transformation is compatible with Sampson and Laub’s theory of informal social control. It is placed here, outside the chronological order, because it deals directly with employment as a transition point in the criminal career, thereby providing a logical flow to the next section.

The basic premise of the theory is that ‘persistence in crime is explained by a lack of social control, few structured routine activities, and purposeful human agency’ (Sampson and Laub, in Farrington, 2005, p. 165). Desistance from crime, on the other hand, is explained by the opposite, a confluence of social controls, structured routine activities, and purposeful human agency. Such social control derives from institutions such as marriage, work and the military because in the short term they provide ‘situational inducements’ away from crime and in the long term they provide commitments to conformity (in Farrington, 2005, p. 175). It is a matter of structural change leading to attitudinal adjustment, which is to say that marriage and, more importantly in the current context, employment provide a positive set of conditions the

offender pro-socially grows into.<sup>9</sup> The most current treatment of the theory comes from Savolainen (2009), who in order to test the theory applied it to Finland because that country represented a different cultural, historic and economic context to the original application. For each institutional case – marriage and employment – the theory held up, but particularly so for employment, which was associated with a 40% reduction in recidivism (Savolainen, 2009).

The area of employment will be discussed further, but for the moment all the theories can be reflected in the following statement from McNeill (2006, p. 47), offered by way of summary: ‘desistance resides somewhere in the interfaces between developing personal maturity, changing social bonds associated with certain life transitions, and the individual subjective narrative constructions which offenders build around these key events and changes’.

### **The contribution of employment to desistance**

Some of the earliest thinking on offender desistance has involved employment. Rowbotham (2009, p. 122), for instance, outlines the role of employment in offender desistance at the London Police Court Mission *circa* 1907: ‘Missionaries would seek to ensure that a potential desister could return to, or become a member of, a law-abiding neighbourhood and so wider community, through being employed’. Regular income was linked to self-respect and hence to desistance from drunkenness and crime, and to that end visits or letters to employers were a common feature of the work of the mission. This seems strikingly current, especially given that criminal justice initiatives such as the Linkage Service are involved in those very same tasks.<sup>10</sup> Yet the contribution of employment to desistance has been questioned despite its long standing as a criminal justice intervention. It is difficult to identify an exact answer as to why, but in part it may be explained by the ravages caused by Gottfredson and Hirschi’s (1990) since overturned

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that this is the opposite to Maruna’s emphasis on narrative re-biographing as part of the ongoing maintenance of desistance.

<sup>10</sup> The Linkage Service is a guidance and placement programme funded by the Probation Service since 2000. The primary objective of the Linkage Service is employment for offenders and to that end it organises and facilitates, following guidance with the offender, access to training, education and employment. From 2000 to June 2009 it made 5,846 placements, of which 1,757 were in employment (source: Linkage Service database records).

assertion that age affects crime directly and does not interact with other causal variables such as employment. But it also may have something to do with how work is understood, which is primarily as a static variable, by which is meant that there is something overly general about the statement 'employment promotes desistance'. If changes in the Irish labour market in recent decades are considered, e.g. from agriculture and 'import substitution industrialisation' to multinational corporations, service sector and construction growth in the Celtic Tiger (Boucher and Collins, 2005), then the nature of employment becomes less static, and its role in desistance more open to discussion. Each of these sectors represents vastly different working conditions, skills requirements, values and rewards, and as such, also represents different opportunities for reform that may or may not be appealing to the offender. In addition, how employment is perceived depends on the level of welfare provision in the State: hypothetically, the greater the State guarantee of economic and social resources, i.e. through welfare, the greater the effect on the motivation to work (Savolainen, 2009, p. 301). This is not to say that people will not work, but rather to suggest that it will affect how people perceive work.

The point of all of this is to suggest that the term 'employment' obscures the multiple points of difference that exist between various sectors, jobs and eras, with each offering varying degrees of opportunity and appeal to the offender. In addition, even if it is a single job that is being considered, e.g. mechanic, the perception and value placed on that job are subject to gender and age differences. Employment as a contributing influence to desistance should therefore be seen as a dynamic variable that changes according to the economic sector it is part of and according to the perception of the person viewing it.

This implies that employment as a 'hook for change' varies but appears to be greatest for males over 26 years of age and even for marginal employment opportunities at the minimum wage (Uggen, 2000; Uggen and Staff, 2001). It also appears, contrary to Giordano *et al.*'s finding, that it is not associated with desistance for women: that employment *is* important to female offenders, but not in isolation from other factors such as accommodation and family relationships, which take priority and are organised first (Sheehan *et al.*, 2007). It has been found elsewhere that desistance occurs earlier for women than it does for men, in some cases occurring between the ages of 14 and 15, suggesting

processes that are specific to gender<sup>11</sup> and intimating that it is perhaps better to ask how employment contributes to those processes (McIvor *et al.*, 2004). The same can be said of young male offenders, who are at the peak age of offending – how exactly does employment, in all its variety, potentially affect their lives? In fact, in general terms, how can the contribution of employment to desistance be understood?

### **The general contribution of employment to desistance**

The most current thinking is that employment is central to the desistance process in multifarious ways: employment has socio-cultural value; employment structures daily life, thereby reducing the opportunity to offend; employment gives people a sense of identity and a role in society; it engenders commitment and belief in that the job can be seen as beneficial and worthy by the offender; it can help shape people's routines by the scheduling within most jobs; it can increase self-esteem, use the individual's energies, provide financial security, provide daily interaction with non-offenders; and it can facilitate ambition (Farrall, 2002, p. 152). It is worth noting that any one of these could act as a 'hook for change', and broken down as such, they are not necessarily gender- or age-specific. Rather it is a question of linking the 'hook' to the 'real me' of the offender so as to outline steps that include training, education and personal supports that result in the independence of the desisting offender. However, such steps do not take place in isolation from other 'structural' events such as parenthood, and hence desistance can be seen as potentially involving a dual transition. An example of this would be through family formation and employment, whereby parenthood may change the value placed on employment in the pursuit of a more stable lifestyle (Rhodes, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> The lower desistance age indicates a different pathway for women, who not only are thought to mature earlier than males but also explain their offending differently, for example by alluding to the moral dimension of the crime, as in identifying with its wrongness and feeling shame as a result, as compared to males, who offer much more utilitarian explanations such as the damage to future prospects that apprehension implies (McIvor *et al.*, in Maruna and Immarigeon, 2004). There is also parenthood as an organising point for most female offenders because of its prevalence and the role of the mother as the primary caregiver, which may explain the other finding that females take much more active steps to dissociate themselves from anti-social peer groups than young men do ((McIvor *et al.*). This phenomenon has been called 'knifing off', the severing of past relationships and other aspects of the offender's life in pursuit of the desistance objective, and is subject to ongoing debate as to its role and influence in the desistance process (Maruna and Roy, 2007).

This suggests an important interaction between employment, self-identity and social relationships and highlights the type of non-economic function that employment may serve for the offender. Specifically employment can be described in constitutive and performative terms. In that employment forms part of a more pro-social role, it can be considered as providing a constitutive function, which is to say being 'pro-social' and law-abiding is constituted by certain activities of which employment is one. But in that it also encompasses 'recognised behavioural routines, or scripts for their enactment', it serves a performative role whereby a new identity is expressed through the act of being employed (Rhodes, 2008, p. 10).

### **Work and generativity**

Employment may also however play a more direct role in the desistance process, especially if it includes the type of generative activity described by Maruna, i.e. some form of activity based on the impulse to achieve something of worth and contribute to the community. Many jobs fall under this broad description, but for anyone familiar with one-to-one work with offenders this is especially evidenced by the often cited desire to be an addiction counsellor, or some other form of helper. Irrespective of how realistic this is, it indicates a desire for change that may also reveal 'hooks' that keep the person engaged. The phenomenon has been described as the 'wounded healer' and when utilised has been associated with a 'sense of achievement, grounded increments in self-esteem, meaningful purposiveness, and obvious restorative implications' (Toch, 2000). More specifically, the principle has been tested by Uggen and Janikula (1999) in relation to volunteer work and found to be positively associated with pro-social behaviour because it allows for the utilisation of strengths that promote individual dignity (as cited in Burnett and Maruna, 2006). Burnett and Maruna (2006) provide a quote from de Tocqueville (1835) that is worth repeating: 'By dint of working for one's fellow-citizens, the habit and the taste for serving them is at length acquired'. Also noted is the social aspect of helping: in that it is always for someone, it includes a sense of community that has the ability to overcome isolation where it is felt.

Yet none of this is simply to present an argument for volunteerism; rather it is to note an important principle that seems relevant in the economic downturn. Offender reform involves imagining an alternative

reality and in part that vision is informed by the offender's reflection in the eyes of others. To contribute something and accomplish something are important aspects of that reflection and of desistance. But fundamentally in the current context they are not solely dependent on economic factors. Generative forms of working may include traditional forms of employment such as addiction counsellor, care worker (if appropriate to the offender) and project worker, but they may also include the abovementioned voluntary work and new forms of community service, which if taken together offer a continuum of opportunities that all support offender desistance. The question is how do we realise these opportunities in the current climate, or, put differently, how do the insights from desistance studies alter our perception of what is possible in the current climate?

### **Offender training and employment in an economic downturn**

At the height of the Celtic Tiger it was an innovation to adapt training programmes to local labour markets in order to impart skills that gave the offender an advantage in the jobs market. With the collapse of many sectors of the economy, in particular the construction sector, this is no longer possible and the question returns – how do we prepare probationers for employment? On first reflection this may seem premature because of the current shortage of employment opportunities: the question 'prepare them in what?' might be asked. Yet the situation is perhaps not as dire as the current labour market suggests if insights from desistance studies are factored in. For instance, generativity suggests that the acts of helping, or contributing or achieving, can play a fundamental role in the desistance process.

This poses the question ... how can we develop opportunities for offenders to engage in these activities, which is to say, how do we adapt training programmes and services to the *needs* of others, by which is meant less well resourced groups in society who currently have unmet needs? This would link what we do (training in necessary skills) to groups in need of support (services that fulfil the generativity impulse). Additionally, depending on the type of service offered, it should reduce the cost to the taxpayer because it is the State that supports less well resourced groups in society. One example of 'necessary skill' comes from the evolving green sector, i.e. energy production, energy reduction and recycling, which is fundamental to Ireland's future. Eventually when the

economy improves, consumers will purchase green services and products provided by the private sector, but there will be some groups that will not be able to afford them, e.g. the elderly and the disadvantaged, and some schools and community groups existing on very tight budgets. Therefore an example of a 'generative' service is one that would reduce the energy costs, or improve the living standard, of some group in need. It is meaningful in a desistance sense because it contributes something to that group, but in a socio-economic sense it imparts skills the new economy will need when it takes off, thereby improving employability.

The important point is that desistance studies highlight that training programmes can be adapted to the needs of the less well off and this has the benefit of both training offenders in future skill needs and applying that skill to less well-off groups that currently survive on State funding. Such an approach has the potential of continuing the general benefits of employment outlined above, as generative programmes could provide both the 'constitutive' and 'performative' functions that employment plays within an offender's desistance efforts, and would also provide greater opportunities to satisfy the generativity impulse. It depends on how we, as criminal justice professionals, organise the delivery of such 'generative' services, and it is here that the real innovation lies. Some form of social enterprise is needed to deliver the service and act as the 'middleman' between the end-user and the training centre that imparts the necessary skills. For the moment, though, it is a useful exercise to ask, in addition to the question 'what skills do we need?' the further question 'who do we provide them for?', for it is in this that opportunities outside normal labour market conditions will be identified.

## **Conclusion**

Desistance studies draw our attention to some important facts about offender reform: that offenders identify alternative versions of their 'selves' – the 'real me' (Maruna) – during the desistance process; that these 'replacement selves' (Giordano *et al.*) are culturally informed and as such follow traditional outlines of what is desirable; and that various institutions, such as employment, offer avenues that both structure and express the alternative selves of desisting offenders (Sampson and Laub). This places employment as potentially, or ultimately, essential to the desistance efforts of reforming offenders and as such employment has been identified as a legitimate and necessary focus of probation work.

The question for this paper was how to realise this legitimate focus in a collapsed labour market.

Ironically, the recession may actually support the desistance efforts of some offenders by adjusting the value they place on employment. For instance, Giordano *et al.*'s culturally informed 'replacement self' may assign greater value to education and training than it did during the Celtic Tiger because of the collectively understood shortage of what they lead to. This means that offender responsiveness and engagement, through training and employment, may increase as the supply decreases. So there is perhaps an opportunity to engage criminal justice clients more fully around the desire for a scarce resource. In addition, desistance studies, in outlining the type of subjective and social transformation processes involved in reform, also highlight a central tendency within that process: what has been referred to as the 'generativity impulse'. It suggests that there are areas of activity that can be pursued even amid a collapsed labour market, and this implies that employment initiatives continue to play a fundamental role in probation work, even in an economic downturn.

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