Desistance Research and Probation Practice: Knowledge Exchange and Co-producing Evidence-Based Practice Models

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Summary: Criminology, by its very nature, has always been an applied discipline, yet in recent years there has been a consistent push to encourage academic researchers to engage with the ‘real world’ and demonstrate the impact their research has on wider society outside of so-called ‘ivory towers’. This paper describes one such effort at ‘knowledge exchange’ funded by the UK’s Economic and Social Research Council that sought to bring the academic research on ‘desistance from crime’ to a wider audience than the one that would typically read academic research. The project involved the development of a short documentary and a series of workshops involving researchers, practitioners, policy-makers and (most importantly) ex-prisoners and their families. Implications of this experience for co-producing evidenced-based policy-making are discussed.

Keywords: Desistance, knowledge exchange, evidence-based policy, probation.

Introduction

Academics are (in)famous for our pointy-headed irrelevance and most of our made-up jargon words are duly ignored by the general public in preference for plain language whenever possible. The word ‘desistance’, then, may be one of the ugliest and strangest academic jargon words to somehow have crept its way into policy and practice discussions outside

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