

Book Review
by Ron Best

Working with Young People in Secure Accommodation: From chaos to culture (2nd Edn)
Jim Rose

Routledge (2014) ISBN 978-0-415-84322-5

Some years ago, when I was researching how schools and related institutions support young people who self-harm, a friend arranged for me to visit a secure unit for young offenders in the north of England. Never having been to such a place before, I did not know what to expect and had only the stereo-type image of a prison to go on. Thankfully, it was not like that at all. The unit was small and the buildings modern and light. But there *was* the constant locking and unlocking of doors as I was guided through the building, and an unpleasant feeling that my freedom to leave later was in the hands of the person with the keys. When I was shown one of the young people's rooms, I was struck by how *empty* it was: virtually nothing that signified the presence, let alone the personality, of its occupant. For a moment I felt angry that some young person was being denied the comforts of personal effects, but then my guide explained to me that this was about the *safety* of the child. There were so many ways in which a disturbed youngster could damage themselves - for example, unpicking the seams of a cuddly toy and choking themselves on the stuffing - that such items were permitted only when staff felt confident of the child's state of mind. This was not only about control - and not at all about punishment - but very much about *containment* and *care*.

These concepts - care, control and containment - are themes which reverberate throughout Jim Rose's excellent book. The 'chaos' and 'culture' of the subtitle are about the chaos which is all too often typical of the life experiences of young offenders, and may be reproduced unless secure units develop a culture of care. If they don't, there is little chance of the young person coming to terms with their past and realising a very different future.

The aims of the book are set out in the Introduction: '.... to stimulate and encourage those who on a daily basis are involved in looking after young people in secure units' (p. 2), but also those in management roles within the units, and those who have some external management role in regard to secure accommodation (p.3). It is not (the author tells us) either 'an academic textbook nor a research thesis' (p.4), but has a strong emphasis on practice. That may be so, but what it has to say about practice is very-much informed by sound theory and underpinned by research findings.

I am not acquainted with the first edition (2002) of this book, but it is clear that much has happened in the intervening years, and Jim Rose has contextualized his account clearly in recent history. As someone new to the field, I found the second chapter ('Setting the Scene') an invaluable introduction to the organization of provision and the three main types of accommodation currently available: Local Authority Secure Children's Homes (LASCHs), Young Offenders' Institutions (YOIs) and Secure Training Centres (STCs). Of concern is the variation in values, attitudes, expectations and routines among these different institutions and the lack of a single, coherent and coordinated model for action in the field (p. 35). This chapter also describes the characteristics of the young people who are accommodated, the risk factors that obtain, and the kinds of emotional, social and interpersonal challenges which they pose for staff.

In Chapter 3 ('Ideas matter'), concepts from psychoanalysis - unconscious meaning, projection, transference, acting-out, containment and a range of defence mechanisms including denial, displacement and sublimation - are applied to illuminate the challenging behaviour with which care staff are confronted, but also to point out that these may apply also to the staff! The

significance of the quality of early attachments for relationships in the unit is also stressed. Here and elsewhere in the book, but especially in Chapter 4 ('It's the stories that are important'), how these emotional and interpersonal processes play out in the unit is skilfully illustrated in a number of fascinating (and moving) case-studies.

The next three chapters are, as the author puts it, 'in many respects, the core chapters' of the book (p.9). In Chapters 5 and 6 ('What happens inside?' Parts I and II), the daily realities of unit life are explored, drawing out the essential knowledge, skills and personal qualities that are needed by staff if they are to manage the challenges presented by the young people. The fundamental importance of *relationships*, both for containing emotionally-charged behaviour and modelling alternatives, is shown to rest on the values and the culture that pervade the unit. Jim Rose shows how what might appear trivial aspects of daily life - getting up, meal-times, going to bed etc - comprise routines that are the very embodiment of that culture. Less 'trivial' issues discussed are working in teams, handover procedures, group meetings, communication, the resolution of conflict and handling complaints against staff. As elsewhere in the book, the author is at pains to show how the interpersonal dynamics of the unit are as much the product of what the staff and the organization bring to the encounter as they are of the young person's issues. And of course, what happens 'inside' is complexly connected with what happens 'outside', from Government requirements for education, through inevitable stigma and social prejudice and the impact of family culture and circumstances at visiting time, to issues surrounding re-settlement and re-integration at the time of release.

There is little doubt that many - hopefully most, ideally all - of those who work in secure accommodation do so because they care about young people and have their best interests at heart. But given the complexities of the system and the personal challenges they pose, caring is not enough: there needs to be an efficient, well-resourced and smoothly functioning organisation to provide the infrastructure for care, and staff need opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills and understandings necessary to translate that care into action. In short, what is needed is good *management* and a thorough *training*. These are the foci respectively of chapters 7 ('The art of management?') and 8 ('Making the impossible even more difficult').

It is in chapter 7 that Jim Rose's own professional experience as the Principal of a newly-built secure unit is especially valuable. He shows that management of staff is as prone to the effects of anxiety, insecurity, emotional turmoil and marginalisation as working with the youngsters, and that, whether one is a first-line, middle- or senior-manager, there's a balancing act to be played between whom one manages, fellow team-members and those above to whom one is accountable. None of this is unique to secure units, of course, and those working in mainstream schools would learn much from this chapter. As for training, provision is varied and patchy, and for some staff, non-existent, and this can (as the chapter heading signals) only make a seemingly impossible task even more difficult. The outline and justification for a curriculum for the initial training of staff, and the parameters of provision for continuing professional development, make chapter 8 essential reading.

The final chapter brings together the threads of the book's argument, to contribute towards a model for secure units as environments in which a shared culture of the right values can facilitate those all-important relationships through which young people are cared for and their emotions and challenging behaviour contained.

Working with Young People in Secure Accommodation is an excellent introduction to the field. It is well-written, and at around 200 pages, surprisingly comprehensive. Whatever the opportunities for staff-training in the future - and it seems clear that much better provision is needed - I would be surprised if there is a better book anywhere which would serve as the core text for such a programme.