

My Experience working in the Westville Correctional Facility

This is my 4th yr working in the Female section of the Westville prison doing Journey work. It has been a time of amazing learning. I now have a totally different opinion of who criminals are and how and why they operate the way they do. It has really driven home the truth that our emotions drive our behaviour and that we- as humans -seldom get taught anything about how to deal with emotions. If anything – we learn to be strong, brave and silent about them. The women in prison- whether they have committed a crime or not- have generally learnt to shut down completely. When we see them smile and hear them laugh it brings us relief. When we hear them cry and weep it brings a glow. Now at last they are really feeling.

In Zulu- the home language of 95 % of those we work with- there is not even a word for “emotion”. I was fortunate to grow up on a farm in Kwazulu Natal and have a smattering of Zulu. When pushed without an available interpreter- I have facilitated process work in Zulu. I asked for some words to be translated and when I asked for several words similar in meaning- the same Zulu word was offered. There are few shades of happy and sad- angry and peaceful. The Zulu people are generally a proud and strong tribe where the women ‘know their place’ and are lucky to have a man take them in. It leads to many issues of low self esteem and inability to express any softness and yet most of the women we work with have the same issues as any women anywhere. Their main concern is for their children and how they are coping outside without their mother.

We have learnt now to carefully set our intent, before arrival, for easy access to the offenders we want to see on a particular day. Some of them are referred by the Social Worker- some by other Members (of Staff) as they are called and most often by other offenders. The commitment level of most of them is not great and we make an effort to praise and thank those who always arrive when we ask for them. It makes our time spent more effective. We have become used to the security measures and have our own access tag now. We pose a dilemma for them in one way as they don’t know where to place us in their system. We don’t fall under Religious workers- of whom there are many and who have a Member specifically in charge of them. We are not employed by

Correctional Services nor are we medical. So we wait to be escorted to the section we need to get to. Some days the security set up is strictly adhered to and other days we are allowed to walk in unescorted to our specific section.

This year- with 4 regulars in our Journey Practitioner team and 1 irregular Journey grad volunteer- we are working in 3 sections, with the extra team members varying the section they go to.

1. B2. The Section where juvenile Unsentenced or awaiting trial offenders are kept.
2. C Section. This comprises the main body of offenders. C 1 where long term are placed- C2 where medium term are placed and C3 where short term are placed. The Kitchen section also falls under C Section and those working there can be from C1, C2 or C3. The kitchen Offenders live in the Kitchen area too.
3. The Workshop which is where most of C3 go daily to sew a variety of prison garb. The Workshop offenders are escorted daily to the Workshop.

This scheme has worked well. In previous years whoever of the team was there would all go together to C Section – or B2 and it took longer to get organised. Those who worked in the Workshop had to stay behind for the morning and it created problems for the Members. Now they expect us on a Tuesday and a Wednesday. In C Section- I try to do at least one group session a month. I work in the dining hall of C1. I send a note out to the other sections in C and the Kitchen and let them know we are doing a group session so that those who can attend and who feel they need a session- come. We have some who have been involved for 3 to 4 yrs now. They form the core group who bring us new offenders- talk about how they feel and are general Journey assistants. When we do one-on-one work with someone who doesn't speak English we try to use an interpreter who has done Journey work and is from another section. This is to safeguard confidentiality. I also make sure the interpreter states to the other offender that confidentiality is in place.

Those who are there long enough- are offered 3 one-on-one sessions. We used to offer 4, but find we have so many waiting now for one-on-one sessions that we have reduced it in general to 3. We use our discretion if we feel a 4th is really necessary. The last one is generally a Life's Purpose process. We have learnt to do the

regression in a simple way for those whose needs are simple and have found this process has a huge impact on nearly all of them. It gives them renewal and purpose. When checking on previous offenders we find after our programme, they often start courses like computer - teaching – electrical- hairdressing- sewing- or they attend school which many of them have never done. It generates a feeling of satisfaction for them and has allowed them to have hope for their future.

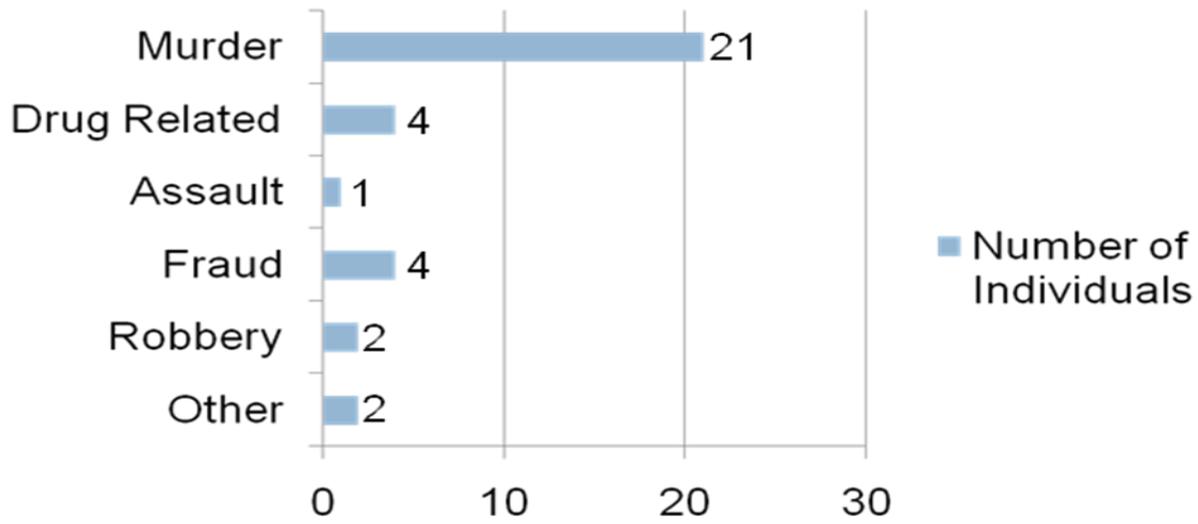
In Section B2 – and also to a certain extent in the workshop- the offenders are often not there for too long. Group work is offered and where possible one-on-one work. In B2 a lot of the offenders have drug- related issues having got into crime to feed their habit- or being there for possession of drugs. We also discovered a new term- Loitering. It is really prostitution!

We are often approached for items of clothing- food etc. This is usually before they get to know us and value what we do. All people going in sign a form agreeing to the terms of working there and there is a strict rule that we may not take anything in- or in fact anything-like letters out. The safety regulations stipulate that we have to be within sight of a Member. This is not adhered to and I have been locked up in the section when they are short of staff and the Member needs to go somewhere briefly! I have yet to feel insecure though and we in fact feel appreciated and of huge value.

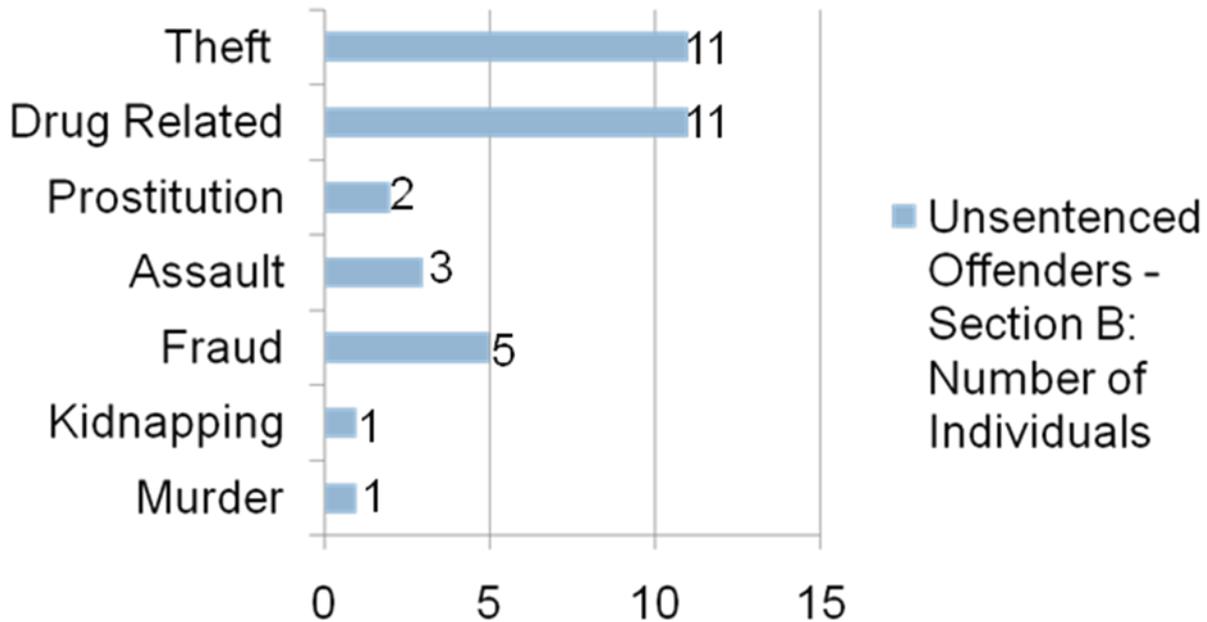
Last year we worked with 100 women in total. Some of them did only group work and then we didn't get their details. A few of them were Members and we also didn't include stats for them. As can be seen by the tables below- murder in this country is a huge issue. There is a lack of self value to the extreme where human life then has little value. If you swear at me- I'll stab you- kind of mentality. A lot of these women are here for killing their violent partner or for killing his new girlfriend in a drunken rage. Before working here- I had no idea of the extent of people sentenced for murder. We have cases of women who are sentenced after being framed. We always hear them. We have no idea if they are telling the truth or not. All we can do – is teach them to love themselves despite being where they are, and appeal through the system.

Below are stats of those we worked with last year.

Sentenced Offenders – Section C: Number of Individuals



Unsentenced Offenders - Section B: Number of Individuals



We treat them all the same and help them to forgive themselves and anyone else. As we know- it is not the story that counts. There have been some incredibly sad stories. There is a huge amount of sexual abuse and rape is often a memory they go to.

1. We worked with a woman in her twenties who at 11 yrs old was kept in a cage by her mother and sold to a group of men who raped her continuously for days on end.
2. Another who hitched a ride in a car and was taken to a field and raped. After that ordeal and staggering onto a road – a group of men picked her up and gang-raped her.
3. A woman whose brother set up that his friends could gang-rape her.
4. A woman whose boyfriend sold her to another woman and her boyfriend to rape and to beat up.
5. Countless who have been raped by fathers-uncles- cousins – brothers, besides the very common sexual abuse by husbands or partners.

We worked with a psychologist who was framed for fraud and in prison. She said show me a black woman in this country who hasn't been raped. That may be an exaggeration – but does show how common it is.

Another memory they often go to is the day of arrest and the day in court. The shame and humiliation they feel is huge.

Before we work with them- we ask them to choose 4 emotions that are most common from a list of emotions.

After we work with them – we present the same list of emotions and ask them to choose again without showing them their previous list.

It is hugely gratifying to note the shift in them.

Each year we have been there- we have increased the number of offenders we reach as the table below shows. We are greeted by so many smiling faces now and of course a hug- on our way in and way out again- on the ramps and in the corridors.

	2007	2008	Total
Number of Individuals	37	61	108
Number of Individual Sessions Rendered	124	153	277
Number of Group Sessions Rendered	15	79	94

The close co-operation from the Social workers, Case supervisors and other Members has made our work far easier and the social workers and case supervisors are now taking cognisance of the individual reports submitted by Journey Outreach three times a year. They have gained new insight and understanding of the offenders' emotional well being and progress made over a period of time

This programme is now recognised as a serious and effective rehabilitation programme in the female section of the Westville Correctional Centre. In fact it was referred to as the most effective programme available in this section by Mr Muthusamy, the Operations Manager.

And so we feel that this work is invaluable. Inroads have been made and the impetus must go forward.

I add some case studies without names, some comments from Members-and some of the letters written by offenders after completing their one-on-one sessions.

Offenders' Feedback –

Offender No.1

Member's feedback after Journey work:

"She has a positive attitude and behaviour. She is also ready to integrate into the community".

Offender No. 2.

Member's feedback after Journey work:

"At the time of arrival she was bossy and a bully, not caring for anyone; always getting punishment. But since she attended the Journey Outreach course, results are "WOW", she is behaving so well."

"After Journey Form"

"The Journey process has done wonders for me because I'm more self-driven and I have a very big sense of humour now. I've learned to let go of things that I've bottled up inside for so long. I'm more forgiving to others and I've learned to be mostly proud of who I've become ever since I've started the Journey Process. I've got no more anger inside of me, I'm not depressed anymore infact I'm happy about myself."

Offender No 3. (19 yrs old)

She became a street kid at age of 11 years. When she was 13 years old she was raped and then gang raped in the same day. She believed that she would never get over her trauma and be able to forgive.

Her "After Journey Form" was written in Zulu. She only had praise for Journey work, filled with love & gratitude for the programme.

Her friend's feedback after Journey work:

"She has changed her life, she is looking good and she behaves better and is so positive. I think the Journey Outreach helped her a lot."

Member's feedback after Journey work:

"She has made a very huge change in her life since she's been here. Not only in her physical appearance but emotionally as well. She's a well behaved child with lots of discipline and positive attitude."

Offender No.4

"After Journey Form"

"I know now what I want in life. Prison has given me a whole new view of life. I know what I want and that is, success and happiness. Prison has thought me a lot. I would love to go back to school and build a better future for myself and my family. I miss my family a lot. Thank you for the Journey Outreach program to make me wake up and see my mistakes."

Offender No.5.

This offender has been arrested nine times although only convicted this once. We were asked to work with her as she had such huge anger issues and the Unit Manager felt she really needed help. Her life story involved a really difficult childhood and she was raped x3 by 3 different men whilst a teenager. She claims contacts in high places in Government and ran a very successful business. After her 4th one-on-

one session- a Life's Purpose session- she is ready to take on life in a very different way and wants to use her influence to get Journey work into schools and also Correctional Facilities.

"After Journey Form"

"Well to be very honest- I'm shocked at what such a program can do in your life. I never thought that there were such inspiring programs available for people in my situation. I feel so good after learning about deep parts of myself and my thoughts on life that I never knew existed. It's great to be me again! The person hidden from goodness & life always was- but never really emerged properly due to past experiences.

The Journey certainly does it for me. It gives me the ability to progress and surface from the very hurt and confused places in my heart and mind.

We all have issues, but some of us are afraid of dealing with them. I am glad I did. It was worth every moment. Different problems have different solutions. I'm grateful for the chance to change. Change is good. I needed it so badly.

Thanks to those who have made possible the chance to change. May God give you more knowledge & strength to keep giving the good to others.

I FEEL GOOD and somehow today I know that it only gets better!
Thanks so very much!!

Yours sincerely

Prisoner >>>>>>>>>

Offender No 6.

She murdered her adult step- daughter in a rage over money.

4 words chosen to describe emotions pre Journey : Anger/Hurt/Shame/Regret

4 words chosen after Journey : Happiness/Peace/Freedom/Joy

"After Journey Form"

I've been very motivated because before I was friendly but was having changing moods and was mean. Now I am a happy person all the time because all the pain is released from my life and I learned to forgive everyone who hurt my heart. I'm very well with this Journey. It done a lot in my heart and build me like new. I'm in a new world now.

The member in charge has noticed a huge shift.

Offender No 7.

In prison for fraud.

4 words chosen before Journey : Sadness/Humiliation/ Regret/Shame

4 words chosen after Journey : Gratitude/Peace/Freedom/Acceptance

"After Journey Form"

It has helped me heal from the inside out. I did not realise how my past had affected my future. I really enjoyed The Journey. It has been a cleansing process for me and I feel free from all the baggage I was carrying previously without knowing I was carrying it. I have learnt to love myself, forgive myself and heal myself.

Offender No 8.

"After Journey Form"

Thank you Journey. You have helped me hugely. Now I know about forgiveness and I can apologize to those I have hurt. I have learnt to deal with my issues and leave other people to work on their own issues. I am no longer aggressive to other people. Thank You Journey. You have really helped me

Each offender we work with thanks The Journey for the changes and shifts they have noticed in their beings from Journey work. We –who offer the process work, add our heartfelt thanks to those from all over the world who support this programme through donations. It adds such value to our own lives and we are eternally grateful for the time and opportunity allowed to make a difference in the lives of those who are incarcerated and are prepared to change on the inside. We pray that Society and the Community at large give them a second chance on their release.