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VALUING VOLUNTEERS IN CORRECTIONS: LEARNING FROM THE VOLUNTEER PROBATION OFFICER SCHEME IN JAPAN¹

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Abstract

The world of corrections is witnessing growing recognition of the contributions that can be made by well-coordinated and thoughtfully integrated volunteer schemes. One of the most impressive and longstanding examples is the Volunteer Probation Officer model in Japan. In both its breadth and depth of engagement with community, it is perhaps one of the finest examples worldwide of *What Else Works*. This paper uses the example of the Japanese 'Hogoshi' model to illustrate how the role of volunteers can be seen as fully consistent with our evidence base for how to best engage both service-users and our communities in realizing sustained reintegration. Six key features of the Japanese VPO scheme are discussed that may account for its success and that could (and should!) be emulated in other contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

Community-based support for individuals who have fallen into criminal conduct was essentially originated by volunteers. In America, for example, John Augustus, a Massachusetts boot-maker by trade, is credited with being the 'Father of Probation'. Augustus believed that abusers of alcohol, and other unfortunates, could be rehabilitated 'through understanding, kindness, and sustained moral suasion'. In 1841, Augustus attended a police court hearing to bail out a 'common drunkard'. The offender became the first probationer. He was ordered to appear in court three weeks later for sentencing. He returned to court a sober man, accompanied by Augustus, and to the astonishment of the judge and all in attendance.

In the UK, the notion of Police Court Missionaries was created under the Probation of First Offenders Act of 1887 enabling magistrates to refer offenders to a volunteer who would try 'by personal influence, with material help, if necessary, to persuade those who had found their way into the dock to lead a sober and steady life in the future'.¹

Volunteers have made a long-standing and significant contribution in reforming our *institutionalized* approaches for dealing with offending, whether prisons or community supervision practices. Importantly, volunteers have also stood steady in keeping the original spirit of understanding and support for offenders alive and well. In many respects, volunteers have always implored corrections to do more, and to do better in treating offenders with decency and humanity. Perhaps surprisingly, however, the contribution of volunteers has not been recognized typically as either essential or as evidence-based. It has been seen, and continues to be seen, more as a 'nice to do' adjunct to professional correctional practice rather than as a central requirement for having true impact. This article argues that corrections should much more actively embrace the value of volunteers as true partners in the challenge of offender reintegration. It will highlight the Volunteer Probation Officer (VPO) scheme in Japan as an exemplary model that shows what can be achieved when a Volunteer Scheme is well organized and fully integrated with Professional Correctional Practice and not just loosely appended.

WORKING TOWARDS 'DESISTANCE' IN OFFENDING

One of the core messages of the increasingly recognized 'desistance' paradigm is the fact that true rehabilitation and reintegration requires more than just a focus on 'personal' or 'individual' change in offenders (Maruna & Immarigeon, 2004; Porporino, 2010). Despite all of the dedicated efforts of professional correctional staff in delivering programs and services to change well established 'criminogenic risk' factors, that 'change' may or may not be realized. The desistance paradigm, perhaps expressed most ably and succinctly by Professor Fergus McNeil, highlights four distinct types of 'rehabilitation' – not just the personal – but the social, legal and moral dimensions that have to work in the same direction (McNeill, 2006; 2012). The social dimension is about acceptance, belonging and access to opportunities in one's community. Without enhancing the community's ability to assimilate (and support) offenders towards reintegration, perhaps no real rehabilitation is possible, no matter what we can do with our change-oriented programs and services. The legal dimension requires that we aim to eliminate the stigmatizing and exclusionary effects of conviction. And the moral dimension speaks to the need for reparation in earning some form of redemption as a

¹ *British Social Work in the Nineteenth Century*. By A. F. Young and E. T. Ashton. New York: The Humanities Press, Inc., 1956.

citizen of good character. In many respects, it can be argued that volunteers may be better placed to help offenders realize these other forms of 'rehabilitation'.

Offenders ultimately can't remain rehabilitated through sheer force of will – they need to see movement towards successful social integration, citizenship and participation. The 'desistance' framework acknowledges that this fundamental change in identity is a slow and evolving process that we can't rush or force. Attitude change follows identity change, not the other way around. But professional practice often is characterized by an urgency to request attitude change, to monitor and overly emphasize (and even penalize) lapses, rather than accept while patiently helping to re-align effort. Corrections professionals, moreover, are not attributed automatic pro-social legitimacy. They are inevitably seen as working for the 'system', and having to enforce the rules of the system. Volunteers, on the other hand, can serve as impartial role models, as the catalysts and the reinforcers for this crucial identity change to emerge and strengthen.

Can correctional practice somehow incorporate the 'force and influence' of volunteers more deliberately in order to legitimize their role in helping offenders move towards desistance? This article elaborates on why a Volunteer Scheme such as the one that Japan has sustained for more than 60 years may offer a truly transformative, alternative model for supporting professional correctional practice, not just for parole or probation practice but more generally all correctional practice directed towards helping offenders reintegrate.

THE VPO SCHEME IN JAPAN

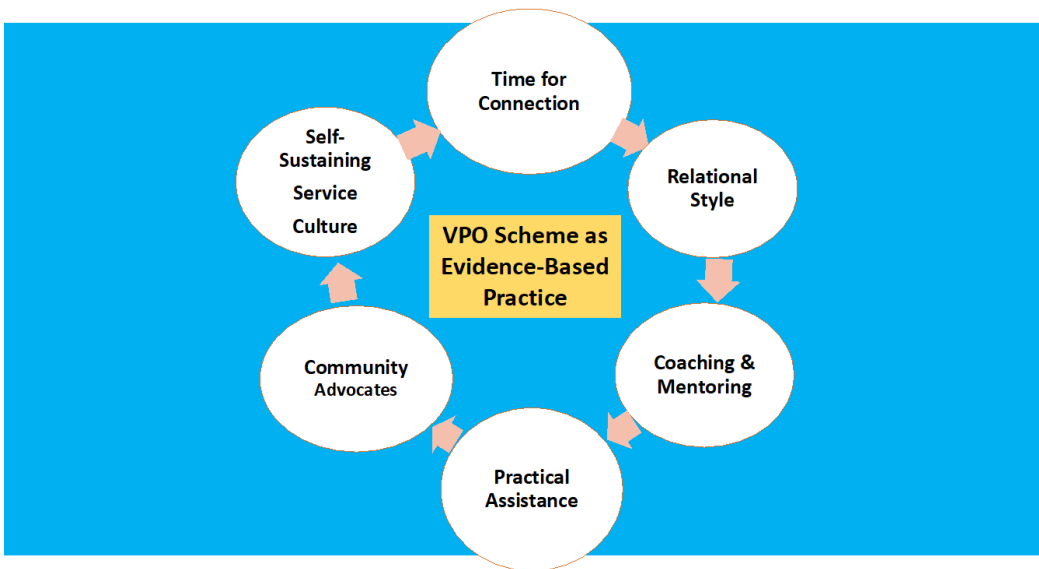
Japan has one of the lowest incarceration rates in the world (45 per 1000,000) and it has entrenched an approach to community supervision that is nothing short of bold and all-encompassing. Now being emulated increasingly both in the Asean region and beyond, the well-established Volunteer Probation Officer (VPO) scheme is not just considered an adjunct or minor component of community corrections; it serves as its very backbone. The VPO model is unique in capitalizing on the efforts and the energy of a mini-army of VPOs (more than 40,000) and it has been referred to by some probation scholars as a 'third sector template' for probation practice and delivery of community corrections services (Ellis, Lewis & Sato, 2011). Similar VPO schemes have now been adopted in a number of countries (e.g., Thailand, Philippines, Kenya, Korea, Singapore and China), but the Japanese VPO scheme remains the most impressive in both scale and breadth of involvement of VPOs. A number of reports in recent years written in the English language have described the history, development and functioning of the Japanese VPO model (Akashi, 2017). Most comprehensive is the book 'Volunteer Probation Officers and Offenders Rehabilitation' that was prepared by the Ministry of Justice Rehabilitation Bureau organizing committee after the Third World Congress on Probation that was held in Tokyo in September of 2017. Detail describing the VPO model will not be repeated here. Rather, the article is written at least in part from the perspective of personal exposure to the Japanese VPO scheme over the last number of years and trying to understand why it is working as well as it is.

I first became aware of the Japanese VPO scheme when I had the privilege of lecturing for the United Nations Asian & Far East Institute (UNAFEI) at one of their International Training Courses in Fuchu, Tokyo in 2012. Fortuitously, I had the double privilege of meeting a group of Japan's VPOs ('Hogoshi') and was able to visit a number of Japan's Offender Rehabilitation Support Centers that are staffed

by VPOs. A few years later, I was also invited to attend the Second Annual VPOs Meeting that was held in conjunction with the Third World Congress on Probation where hundreds of VPOs were in attendance from both Japan and internationally.

As I interacted with these VPOs and listened to their stories about why they had become involved in this work, I was touched by the repeated theme of wanting to give back to their communities and assisting others who had been less advantaged in their lives. In their recounting of a number of case histories of clients they had worked with, I was left awestruck by the warmth and compassion that was expressed, the level of commitment to help re-direct individuals who were stuck in living often lonely and chaotic lives, the intuitive understanding of what might have led these individuals into pathways of crime, and the patience and optimism to 'stick with it' despite the usual setbacks. What could account for this kind of very human spirit and dedicated enthusiasm in spite of the fact that they were working with difficult individuals who faced very difficult circumstances with multiple issues and needs and a history of failure that could be expected to have crippled their resilience to bounce back and try to improve their lives? Why were VPOs in Japan able to engage so well with offenders, and why in turn did they seem to get so engaged by this work, receive satisfaction and remain so personally committed over time. My reflections led me to ask whether this kind of reliance on volunteers could have implications for the transformation of correctional practice more broadly.

We know what doesn't work with volunteer schemes in criminal justice. Schemes that are too short-term, under-resourced, not well coordinated or supervised, where volunteers are inadequately trained, and where there is inconsistent and/or lack of any intensive contact with offenders tend to make little difference. But reverse all of these conditions and impact begins to appear in clear and measurable ways (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2007).²



² Another good example of a well-coordinated volunteer effort that originated in Canada and is now spreading internationally is the Circles of Support and Accountability (C.O.S.A.) framework where a group of well trained and carefully screened volunteers (up to 5 or 7) become a 'circle' of 24/7 support for a given offender, and where the offender meets with the circle as a group and then again individually with each circle member as often as once a week (Wilson et al., 2009).

I'm going to argue that the VPO model in Japan gives us some insight into at least six essential elements of successful volunteer support initiatives ... and argue further that these elements are fully consistent with the evidence-base we have about 'what works' in community supervision.

DEVOTING TIME FOR CONNECTION

You can't help if you don't connect ...

In contrast to professional community justice workers who have to deal with ever growing caseloads where they are bombarded every day with some client crisis or problem and where they have to squeeze in time on their schedules to have some personal contact with their offenders, in between the paperwork they have to negotiate, and the meetings they have to attend, VPOs have the luxury of only a few clients they deal with at a time. The majority of VPOs in Japan are in their elder years (averaging about 65 years old). They are recruited with the understanding that they will have the time and energy to devote to their VPO duties. Most of these VPOs are retired, are both financially and emotionally stable, in good health, undistracted by the usual stresses of earlier stages in life, having left behind productive careers, not needing to worry about earning further income, and looking for some meaningful way to still 'make a difference'. With relative peace and clarity of mind, they have the time to listen to offenders, get to know them, and get to connect with them before beginning to give advice or counsel.

The initial motivational engagement phase of working with offenders, considered so crucial in all of the literature on effective practice in corrections, does not have to be rushed. It can be attended to flexibly, and it can begin to occur both at a 'time' and 'place' convenient to the individual offender – not just in the probation office at a given time on a given day, but in a coffee shop, a park, or even in the VPOs own home over a cup of tea. This is not forced engagement following some structured motivational technique but rather naturally evoked engagement between two people with different sets of experiences and backgrounds where each can learn from the other.

Though the notion of 'respect for the elderly' in Japan may enter the dynamic, more likely is the fact that the absence of any power imbalance, as in the classic probation officer dilemma of being both enforcer and supporter, allows for a more human connection to take place. Time allows trust to develop and trust becomes the fuel that powers pro-social influence. From the offender's perspective, as trust unfolds, there is no ambiguity or suspicion about the VPOs motives. The VPO becomes seen as a steadfast and non-judgmental 'helper' pure and simple, in an uncomplicated relationship-building process, where the offender may genuinely experience a caring other, perhaps for the first time in their lives. VPOs in turn receive an uplifting sense of having had a positive influence on someone else's life. The literature on aging is clear on the importance of social networks as a protective factor for the elderly. The relationships VPOs nurture with their offenders, and with their fellow VPOs, undoubtedly contributes to a zest for living a continued and worthwhile life ... a zest that quite likely may also infect the offenders they work with.



A SUPPORTIVE AND RESPECTFUL 'RELATIONAL' STYLE

How you relate determines how others will respond ...

In a number of early ethnographic studies of probation practice (Bailey & Ward, 1992; Ditton & Ford, 1994; Rex, 1999), a particular blending of style and skills emerged as *core* in importance in working effectively with offenders. More recent research looking at variation in the 'relational' skills of probation staff shows clearly that more 'relationally' skilled supervision is more effective (Chadwick et al., 2015). Contemporary notions of 'motivational' practice point to the same qualities (Miller & Rollnick, 2002; McMurren, 2002; Porporino & Fabiano, 2007; Prochaska & Levesque, 2002; Stinson & Clark, 2017). A recent qualitative study of probation practice (Lewis, 2014; 2016), that is fully consistent with other studies looking at probation officer qualities influencing desistance (Robinson et al., 2014), has narrowed in on 5 key dimensions --- *acceptance, respect, support, empathy and belief*. It is this adroitness in enabling a positive relational climate with the offender that in turn can effect a significant change in beliefs and behavior. The conclusions from all this research are strikingly consistent ... a 'relational revolution' is needed in criminal justice where offenders are given opportunities to project their voice and be heard with respectful and genuine interest so as 'to alleviate feelings of social exclusion and reconsider their identity' (Lewis, 2016, p. 163). This is fully in accord with the principles of the 'desistance' paradigm that calls for far more attention on the factors that can help offenders find their way 'out of crime' rather than the just the risk factors that have propelled their lives 'into crime' (Porporino, 2010; Maruna & Immerigeon, 2004; McNeil, Raynor & Trotter, 2010). The VPOs I met in Japan, perhaps in part because of their maturity and range of life experience, seemed to me to adopt a calm and responsive relational style, effortlessly and naturally, that could help offenders navigate through their struggles. To breakthrough credibly with offenders, the message giver may have to display certain characteristics, and be able to deliver the message in a trusting interpersonal relationship, where it may be seen as safe to self-disclose meaningful and sensitive information. The VPOs I met impressed me as these kinds of genuinely credible 'message givers.'

COACHING TO SUPPORT AND MENTORING TO INSPIRE

Coach me to deal with the NOW; Mentor me to imagine my FUTURE ...

In the business management literature, a distinction is made between the focus of 'coaching' and 'mentoring' (McCarthy, 2014). The terms are often confused in criminal justice. In summary, the mentor in the leadership development literature is seen generally as person-focused and future-oriented; the coach, on the other hand, is seen as task or performance-focused and mostly present-oriented. The mentor is someone who is personally involved and displays an obvious personal interest – in a sense a respected 'friend' who cares about you, your future and your long-term development. On the other hand, the coach concentrates on helping you develop specific skills for the task, and coping with the challenges and performance expectations that you are facing in the present.

The most distinguishing features of the mentor is how they are able to 'listen and understood me' and how they can 'build my confidence and trust in myself, and empower me to see what I can do'. The mentor serves as a sounding board, creating a two-way mutually beneficial learning experience where

the mentor provides advice, shares knowledge and experiences, and gently teaches in a Socratic questioning style to encourage self-discovery. A coach can be more directive in pointing someone to some end result. Though the other may choose how to get there, the coach should be strategically assessing and monitoring progress and giving advice for effectiveness and efficiency.

One has to stretch very little to appreciate the fact that one of the essential skills that correctional staff should master is the ability to oscillate between being both 'coach' and 'mentor' to the offenders under their care. Again, in my interactions with the VPOs I met, I saw evidence that they remained attuned to both of these aspects of their work. Offenders need coaching to deal with the many facets of their lives, in the short-term, that can create 'clear and present danger' – a return to substance abuse, managing their emotions and especially their anger and depression, dealing with conflict with loved ones, boredom, the discouragement of continued unemployment ...etc. Coaching offenders with realistic options and strategies they can use to cope with (and hopefully resolve) their issues can be clearly invaluable. The coaching is unlikely to take hold as a one-shot intervention. But repeating and reinforcing, clarifying and adjusting, and repairing ruptures in the relationship whenever necessary all work towards helping the offender remain positive even in the face of inevitable setbacks. It is the kind of supportive 'stick-to-itiveness' that I noticed in the case histories that VPOs presented on that afternoon in Tokyo.

Beyond the coaching effort, where the need to do it becomes almost immediately apparent in beginning to work with offenders, mentoring begins to take center stage as the relationship unfolds and offenders begin to find some semblance of stability in their lives. Once again owing to a combination of their age, their life accomplishments, their experience and their intimate knowledge of the community context and the opportunities it can present, VPOs in my view illustrated the potential to serve as powerful and empowering role-models. They could nudge and influence offenders in realizing they can achieve not just basic adjustment – but their full potential. A consistent finding in positive psychology is that 'implementation planning' (the how, when, and where of goal pursuits) works only when there is strong autonomous motivation to strive for the goal, and when consistent approach-oriented strategies are applied. In working with offenders, it means that we should be helping them with their planning skills for the future, practically and concretely, and that we should remain by-their-side as their approach-goals emerge, and not just be there to admonish and call out what they should avoid.

One of the essential tenants of the 'desistance' paradigm is that over the longer haul what will support desistance are the *positive* qualities of sustaining hope, maintaining a strong sense of self-efficacy, and re-defining one's sense of self and identity. This necessitates that the individual achieves at least some of their personal aspirations, both for new meaning and for gaining pro-social legitimacy (Porporino, 2010). The VPOs I met seemed to be acutely aware of this basic tenet of the Good Lives Model (Ward, 2002).

PROVIDING MEANINGFUL PRACTICAL ASSISTANCE

Give me food and shelter before you give me INSIGHT ...

In the case histories that the VPOs presented that afternoon in Tokyo, there was repeated emphasis

on efforts made to give offenders some level of 'practical assistance' (e.g., a suggestion or referral for possible employment, a place to sleep for the evening, a warm meal, transportation, help in acquiring some official document, support in entering a substance abuse program ... etc.). We know that desistance seems to be accompanied by active, offender-led, *agentic* resolution of social obstacles (Farrall, 2002; 2004). It is this sense of 'agency' experienced by the offender -- where they feel they have been able to personally surmount some significant concern or obstacle in their lives -- that in turn seems to strengthen motivation and resolve even further (Burnett & Maruna, 2004). Curiously, much of our standard community supervision often fails to recognize (or is unable to respond to) the often indirect or vague requests for practical assistance received from offenders. Instead, supervision tends to lead with standard options rather than complement emerging offender 'agency' motives with timely and contextualized practical support (McNeill, 2006). To paraphrase a dictum regarding what works generally in intervention, for support to make a difference, it has to be the right support, offered at the right time, and in the right way. In the end, the individual should believe that though the support was helpful, it was their own efforts that made the greatest difference.

As I listened to my group of VPOs, I began to appreciate how they fully accepted their role as 'practical helpers' -- who should use their contacts, their connections, and their influence in the community to help offenders surmount some of their key obstacles and deal with some of their most immediate concerns. These VPOs moreover seemed to understand the importance of 'agency' and how it can 'lift the individual up' -- perhaps because 'agency' had been so important in their own lives. Even in their elder years, these were individuals who took control of their lives and agreed to take on a significant new challenge as VPOs. A good deal of ethnographic research on probation practice points to the fact that 'good' practice should remain attuned to giving timely, concrete and meaningful 'practical support' that can begin to improve the quality of life for offenders, even if only in small ways (Farrall, 2004; Mair, 2004; Robinson et al., 2014). VPOs seemed to me to be ready, willing and able to play this role.

VPOs AS COMMUNITY ENGAGERS AND COMMUNITY ADVOCATES

You can't engage your community if you don't know your community ...

There is clear and unambiguous evidence to support the buttressing of active community involvement for successful offender reintegration. For example, over a period of more than a decade, the well-respected Urban Institute in America conducted perhaps one of the most comprehensive evaluations ever of prisoner reintegration initiatives across the nation. They explored the pathways for successful reintegration and concluded that when key elements are addressed -- in the areas of employment, housing, substance use, physical and mental health, family, and community supports -- success is consistently improved.³

Most communities in most parts of the world are still restrained by the attitude that offenders' well-being and adjustment is a correctional services responsibility and not a community responsibility. Because of their status and their interconnectedness in their local communities, VPOs in Japan are ideally positioned to counter this sentiment and to promote instead the proposition that the responsibility is *joint*. When the community gets involved and the offender succeeds, it is both

3 For a summary listing of research reports, see: <http://www.urban.org/center/jpc/returning-home/publications.cfm>

the community and the offender that benefit. VPOs in Japan have entrenched themselves as local ambassadors, reaching out to the community in a myriad of ways – in all of the various community events they participate in, social gatherings they attend, discussions they have with their neighbors, presentations they make to other association meetings, contacts they have with employers and business people, the exposure they may get in the local media ... etc. There is an unleashing of energy and creativity needed to engage communities and help them see that offenders, with the right support, can indeed become an asset instead of a liability. Government institutions have a difficult time to orchestrate this kind of momentum. Though it may perhaps be difficult to measure how and how much, I am convinced that VPOs in Japan are creating this momentum, as ambassadors for a community-responsive, reintegration philosophy for corrections, both at the local and national level.

A SELF-SUSTAINING CULTURE OF SERVICE: VPOs AS RECRUITERS OF OTHER VPO'S

We reap what we sow ...

The last stage in implementing effective practice is often the most difficult. Once good practice has been entrenched, it has to be sustained. Too often in corrections we fail to sustain effective practice and it ends up becoming fragmented, spotty in quality and generally truer 'on paper' than in reality (e.g., outlined only in policy). Establishing and preserving continuity for an overarching culture of committed service to clients is especially difficult.

One of the most significant informal functions of VPO's in Japan is to look for, identify and recruit other VPOs. In most correctional jurisdictions, recruitment of volunteers (not to mention the right kinds of staff) is an up-hill struggle. Recruiting the right kinds of volunteers is even more difficult. The public has a stereotyped view of offenders, often assuming them to be dangerous, unpredictable and uncooperative. Some volunteers may be attracted more because they are curious or intrigued – and not because of any particular dedication to support and assist others who are troubled and disadvantaged. Because they have done the work, VPOs are more likely to have a deep appreciation of the characteristics and qualities that are needed. They can remain alert in looking for, identifying, educating, informing, and encouraging others to take on the role of VPO. From personal experience and real examples, they can point to what makes the work both rewarding and meaningful. The VPO system becomes self-sustaining, with one generation of VPO's recruiting and then guiding and advising the next generation in order to preserve a culture of service.

Noteworthy is the fact that being appointed as a VPO in Japan also carries some level of prestige. For example, individuals who apply to become VPO's are screened and then officially appointed by the Ministry of Justice. They became part of a 'community of VPO's' both locally and nationally as members of a recognized, structured and rather dynamic National Association of VPO's. The system, in essence, is effectively and easily sustainable because it feeds and nourishes itself. Of course, Professional Probation staff also play an active role in continuing to engage VPOs through various training seminars, encouraging the sharing of practice-based experience in treatment meetings held at Rehabilitation Support Centers, and in recognizing the work of outstanding VPOs with recommendations for particular commendations. But it is the continued networking of VPOs themselves that seems to be the glue keeping the VPO scheme dynamic in the present and sustainable for the future.

CONCLUSION

A VPO who wanted to share her experiences presented a short case study at the Third World Congress on Probation that perfectly illustrates the potential force and influence of these dimensions of practice that I have just outlined. The case was about a young offender who had a very difficult and rebellious early adolescence and fell into drug use. The VPO worked with the young man for a lengthy period seeing him regularly every week and thinking she had established a good relationship. The young man was working and going to school. However, in time he relapsed back into drugs and one day assaulted a peer. He was sent to training school. The VPO was disappointed but thought there was nothing more she could do. But the young man's mother visited the VPO at her home and asked that she not abandon her son. So, she didn't. She visited the young man every week once again while he was in training school. As the young man's release approached, she advocated with the young man's previous employer to re-hire him. The employer obliged. The young man did exceptionally well this time around, completed his probation period, and he continues to visit the VPO to give her the occasional update concerning his life. The VPO concluded that she learned to not give up and that everyone can change if someone 'stays by their side'.

In the last few years, the relatively informal, supportive, offender-focused approach that developed so naturally with the tradition of the VPO scheme in Japan has been challenged as perhaps 'too soft'. It has also been noted that recruitment of new VPOs is becoming increasingly difficult owing to the steady urbanization of Japanese society, the fracturing of community relations, and a situation of growing financial hardship among the elderly. Japan is among the most quickly aging countries in the world. Japanese society is changing and the recruitment of VPOs will have to adapt and adjust to those changes. Whether VPOs will be able to counteract public perception and remain dedicated to their original goals and aims will remain to be seen. Whether government, in concert, will be able to work to support these original goals and aims, and see them for the 'evidence-informed' practice that they really are, will also remain to be seen. Criminal justice practice should not be categorized as either soft or hard. It should be seen as either smart, evidence-informed and community responsive – or NOT.

Of course, it could be argued that it is naïve and idealistic to suggest that what might work in Japan (and some other cultures) might also work in cultures where more punitive public attitudes prevail. Obviously, there are real cultural differences. In Japan for, example, it is considered a kind of duty and genuine honor to give back to one's community in some fashion as a volunteer. As already noted, one of the most significant informal functions of VPO's in Japan is to work on recruiting other VPOs. In most western correctional jurisdictions, recruitment of volunteers is more a matter of simply waiting for them to come to us ... rather than making any meaningful and active effort to go to them! Some volunteers may be attracted more with dis-ingenuine and naïve motives – and not because of any particular commitment to extend a helping hand. The right volunteers can make a huge difference; the wrong kinds of volunteers can lead to cynicism and suspicion among corrections professionals towards the whole idea of volunteers. We also have to stop thinking of volunteers as just a 'free' resource. In Japan, VPOs have clearly defined roles and they are not just taken for granted. They are supported, respected and acknowledged, even at the highest levels of their Ministry of Justice.

It's also true that the public is often punitive and holds a stereotyped view of ex-offenders. But these

views can change ... even at the societal level. A very notable example is the Singapore Yellow Ribbon Project, launched in 2004 as a broad-scale annual campaign to engage Singaporeans in supporting ways of giving offenders a 'second chance'. The incredible achievements of the Yellow Ribbon Project have been documented extensively, including the explosive growth in number of employers and community volunteers who are now contributing concretely to giving individuals that 'second chance'.

An important Declaration on Community Volunteers Supporting Offender Reintegration was endorsed during the last 14th UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice held in Kyoto, Japan. The Declaration called for an "international network of community volunteers in the supervision and reintegration of offenders, to provide technical assistance and to urge member states to enact laws to anchor community volunteers for the purpose of fostering volunteering, raising awareness among the public and establishing systems of community volunteers." The Japanese Ministry of Justice is now also spearheading a campaign for UN endorsement of an international *Hogoshi* Day. Valuing the role of volunteers will hopefully continue as an influential movement in the world of corrections for years to come.

When we cut through to the core of all the research and all the theorizing about 'What Works' with offenders, one conclusion comes to the forefront. Corrections is fundamentally about how to influence change in others through the building and leveraging of relationships. When we get this right, whether in prisons or in community contexts, we can help transform lives. This is what makes corrections a noble profession and this is what makes the VPO model in Japan an innovative, far-reaching and important component of community corrections that I believe should be preserved, applauded and emulated wherever and however possible.

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