

L A Y

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# IMPLICATIONS OF WORK-BASED COMMUNITY INTERVENTION ON DESISTANCE EFFORTS

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## Introduction

This report details findings from a research project done in 2017 as part of a Masters in Sociology at the University of Glasgow. The project was done with Community Safety Glasgow's Enterprise Centre and Recreate volunteer programme. I sought to learn more about the desistance process in the context of the Enterprise Centre and Recreate through five major objectives:

- Understanding the **goals** motivating practices within the Enterprise Centre and Recreate
- Understanding **act desistance** for clients and the changes they may undergo in their behaviour
- Examining **identity desistance** to explore whether clients incorporate new, non-criminal identities
- Examining **relational desistance** by exploring changes in the clients' social relationships
- Exploring factors relevant to the Centre and Recreate's **efficacy in** supporting desistance

## Methodology

Ten participants were interviewed about their experiences and perceptions of desistance at the Enterprise Centre and Recreate. Five of the participants were "clients," or people with convictions completing existing community payback orders or in the process of volunteering. The remaining five participants were "supervisors," or staff running the Enterprise Centre and Recreate volunteer service.

I used an interview guide with relevant topics when talking to participants. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed into text before analysis. Interviews were analysed for both expected and unexpected themes relevant to desistance. Patterns were noted across interviews and incorporated into the themes.

The University of Glasgow ethics committee approved the project before any data was collected of participants were recruited for interview.

## Key Findings

After interviewing participants, analysis revealed six themes relevant to understanding the desistance process at the Enterprise Centre and Recreate.

- **Work-Site Goals:**

The work-site goals are a set of discourses that emerged through conversations and motivate on-site practices. The most prevalent goals were breaking the cycle of reoffending, ensuring the program is an economically productive alternative to detainment, and treating clients with human dignity.

- **Act Desistance:**

Act desistance involves the maintenance of crime free behaviours. Client conversations revealed progress in avoiding problem behaviors, such as excessive drinking. Supervisor conversations suggested that clients became more open and trusting across time.

- **Identity Desistance:**

Identity desistance involves the incorporation of pro-social, non-criminal identities. Clients explicitly denied changing identities. However, clients gave evidence for developing new roles as learners and community members while some saw a return to being the person they wanted to be. Supervisors aided the process by avoiding the use of stigmatized identity labels, like "criminal" or "offender."

- **Relational Desistance:**

Relational desistance involves people with convictions finding social acceptance, strengthening existing relationships, and building new relationships. For clients, this largely came through restoring family ties. Unfortunately, employers who have not seen the work of clients first-hand still treated clients as stigmatized.

- **Desistance Inhibition:**

Conversations revealed factors inhibiting the desistance process. Personal and social challenges acted as barriers and constant sources of stress for clients. A lack of training variation limited the skills clients could acquire on-site. Clients commonly held doubts over the programme's effectiveness, making desistance and employment feel unlikely.

- **Desistance Support:**

Conversations revealed factors supporting desistance. Clients found great use in the technical skills and 'soft-skills' (computer literacy, CV building) learned on-site. Building employment networks for clients through work-placements frequently led to jobs. Efforts made towards raising self-esteem were beneficial to clients who used their newfound confidence to develop new identities and maintain desistance efforts.

## Conclusion

The Enterprise Centre and Recreate volunteer programme present a promising model for work-based desistance support in Glasgow. Providing a place for CPOs and providing continued volunteering opportunities, the sites provide a case study for effective work-based practices in supporting desistance and finding employment.

The researcher gives the following suggestions for properly supporting the multiple faces of desistance:

- **Act desistance support** means ensuring that varied, useful training is available to clients seeking to learn new behaviors. It also means meeting the specific needs of people who would benefit from support with avoiding problem behaviors.
- **Identity desistance support** means programmes should aim to make the possibility of new roles seem reachable and ideal, while making clients aware and proud of their new identities.
- **Relational desistance support** involves repairing the networks clients have at their disposal. For the Enterprise Centre and Recreate, this can happen through building partnerships with employers or bringing in representatives that can see the quality of client work first-hand.

Making a route to employment clear will help clients achieve their work goals and support desistance. While there is work to be done researching similar organizations across Scotland, the Enterprise Centre and Recreate effectively support desistance through work.

## Future Research

**Longitudinal studies** should explore the life outcomes of people who went through the programmes. These studies should use a lens of desistance to understand how the process continues outside of the programmes.

**Comparative research** should examine differences in desistance across Glasgow. While other work-based programmes exist in the city, not all areas of the city are equally resourced. The distribution in resources may impact the efficacy of similar-minded programs.