

## An exploratory investigation of the groupwork programme Feeling Safe Standing Strong with offenders

### Introduction

Feeling Safe Standing Strong was introduced to HMP Woodhill in February 2007.

Feeling Safe Standing Strong (FSSS) is a group work programme based on protective behaviours.

"Protective behaviours is a practical and down to earth approach to personal safety. It is a process which encourages self empowerment and brings with it the skills to avoid being victimized by helping to raise self esteem and personal confidence; improving communication skills; developing problem solving skills; empowering people to make appropriate behavioural choices; enabling people to feel and keep themselves safe"

(Protectivebehaviours.co.uk)

Protective behaviours' main concepts are that everyone has the right to feel safe and that nothing is so awful that you cannot talk about it with someone you trust (see Protectivebehaviours.co.uk; Bassett & Lee, 2007). Protective behaviours have been used to assist with victimisation; for instance, to provide children with strategies to avoid being sexually abused. It was first conceived in United States of America as abuse prevention and then widely practised in Australia, and is used by the police there (Protectivebehaviours.co.uk).

Literature searches demonstrated the lack of research on protective behaviours. The only academic study found was Mazzucchelli's (2001) pilot study which researched group-work based on protective behaviour principles aiming to enable adults with learning disabilities to increase their knowledge of personal safety skills and apply them in everyday life. Despite this lack of empirical and academic research there are numerous reports of protective behaviours being used and anecdotal evidence of the positive effect of protective behaviour (Rose, 2004; Poole & Tomison, 2000; protectivebehaviours.co.uk).

It has been found that for offending behaviour programmes to be most effective they must meet the three following principles (Bonta & Andrews, 2007; Andrew & Bonta, 2006).

- **Risk principle:** The level of services/dosage need to be matched to the offender's risk of re-offending
- **Need principle:** Treatment targets need to be criminogenic and accurately assessed to ensure treatment is appropriate
- **Responsivity principle:** To maximize the offender's ability to learn from a rehabilitative intervention, this is best if it is cognitive behavioural treatment and is tailored to the learning style, motivation, abilities and strengths of the offender.

(Andrews & Bonta, 2006).

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It has been found that if all three principles are adhered to, then recidivism can be reduced by up to 35 %, with this dropping if only two and then one principle is adhered to. If none of the principles are adhered to offending behaviour intervention has been found to have little, and often negative effect on recidivism (Bonta and Andrew, 2007). Therefore, this report investigates how FSSS adheres to the three principles to assess effectiveness.

## **Data**

The research had qualitative and quantitative assessment and analysis. The qualitative research involved focus groups with participants, the researcher observing one course of FSSS, an interview with another observer of the course and feedback sheets completed by participants at the end of the course.

Forty-three participants took part in the quantitative part of the course; nine participants who did not complete FSSS; thirty-one participants who completed FSSS completed pre-course psychometrics and 22 completed post course psychometrics. The sample was an opportunity sample consisting of prisoners at a High Security Local prison who took part in FSSS. Psychometric measures were administered before and after the group-work. OASys and ORGs2 risk of reconviction scores were collected on individuals and OASys need areas of thinking and behaviour; attitudes; lifestyle and associates; and emotional well-being (see Taylor, 1999 for ORGs2; for OASys information see Howard, Clarke & Garnham, 2006). Adjudications were recorded for one month before and after FSSS.

The psychometrics included:

- Psychological Inventory of Criminal Thinking Style (PICTS) (Walters, 1995a, 1995b)  
This measures the extent of criminal thinking styles. A higher score indicates a greater need and therefore the desired change is a decrease in scores.
- Locus of Control (LOC) (HM Prison Service, 2002)  
This measures the extent to which individuals feel events in their life are either controlled by external factors or under their own control. The aim is to move towards a more internal locus of control. This is demonstrated by an increase in scores.
- Low Self Esteem Scale (Thornton and Jones, 1989)  
This measures how low offenders' self esteem is. The aim is to increase self esteem, which means the desired direction for this scale is a decrease in score.
- Inventory of Interpersonal Problems (IIP) (Milne, 1992)  
This measures difficulties that the individual may have with relating to others. It is therefore hoped that scores decrease with intervention.

## **Evaluation**

### **General feedback from participants:**

General feedback from participants on FSSS was positive. Participants reported that FSSS had been a positive experience, although they had fears about it before as they

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did not know what to expect. Participants reported that FSSS had a good group atmosphere. See the below table for general feedback from participants.

**Table 1: General feedback on FSSS**

<b>Positive feedback course</b>	
Learnt a lot, helped me	"situation that could get me in trouble instead use what we learnt to see what comes out of it"
Very helpful	"Very helpful" "Brilliant" "Good and useful" "Thoroughly beneficial"
Recommend	"I really would recommend this course to anyone"
Learning	"Learning curve"
Fun	"sometimes great fun" "enjoyed it"
Refreshing	"Good, refreshing course"
<b>Stress</b>	
Stress	"can be stressful at times"
Triggers	"thinking of the past can bring up triggers"
<b>Fears before</b>	
Feelings	"I was worried about talking about feelings"
Worry	"Apprehensive at first" "Didn't know what to expect"
Wrong impression	"people had wrong impression of course"
<b>Group atmosphere</b>	
Good people	"there was good positive people in the group"
Relaxed	"relaxed environment" "good and relaxing"
Good	"Good environment"
Team	"Feel like a team"

## **Risk principle:**

The course was primarily targeted at short-term prisoners because of its short duration and the lack of other interventions for this group. Group members were not selected in terms of risk level. The last two groups were selected on need according to OASys.

There was found to be associations between risk level and treatment change. For self esteem lower risk (ORGs2) was associated with higher treatment change. However, low risk offenders were not significantly different to other offenders. This may have been due to the small sample size. Higher locus of control treatment change was associated with higher risk levels according to OASys.

The results do not suggest any definite risk of re-conviction classifications who should undertake FSSS. However, due to the small sample size this needs continuing research to draw conclusions on selection of offenders in terms of risk.

## **Need principle:**

Criminogenic Needs should be targeted for offending behaviour programmes to be effective. (See Bonta and Andrews, 2007). Bonta and Andrews (2007) identified that the seven major criminogenic needs are:

- Anti-social personality pattern
- Pro-criminal attitudes
- Social support for crime
- Substance Abuse
- Family/marital relationships
- School/work
- Absence of pro-social recreational activities

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To assess FSSS in terms of Need Principle, psychometric evaluation occurred (to assess for thinking/attitude change) and qualitative feedback was obtained from participants.

**Table 2: Feedback on FSSS related to criminogenic need**

<b>Stop trouble</b>	
Believe will reduce crime	"Crime will drop dramatically in just me alone"
Not be in prison	"If used the skills we probably wouldn't be here now"
Goals	"I've realised I have goals to achieved and am ready now to do so"
<b>Increases perspective taking</b>	
Think family	"It made me think about kids and Mrs"
Others rights	"People have the right to feel safe and I take that right away, burglary etc" "I learnt the importance of keeping everyone safe"
Others opinions	"Find yourself think about others' opinions more" "Consider other people more, we've all got different opinions, think about their feelings"
<b>Think about things</b>	
Actions and consequences	"I will continually think of my actions especially the thoughts, feelings and outcomes bit"
	"makes you stop and think" "Think of consequences before actions"
My actions	"My actions aren't always right"
<b>Use every day</b>	
Focused today and future	"In everyday life its very good on keeping focused for today and the future"
Already using skills	"I'm already using skills learnt" "Use it straight away... way talk to staff helped me to be polite"
Goals	"Keep focused on my goals and what I want from life"

The above table illustrates that FSSS appears to assist participants to work towards a pro-social life and not offend. The main two areas identified as improving on FSSS were increasing perspective taking and self control. This would fit with the overall aims of encouraging participants to consider others' rights and to be responsible for their own behaviour. This provides support that FSSS assists by providing skills which group members feel assist them not to offend. Participants report using skills already and that they help to keep them focused on future goals.

The quantitative research was inconclusive in terms of effectiveness in relation to thinking and attitudes related to offending and interpersonal problems. Participants showed significantly higher self esteem after completing FSSS. Higher scores on OASys were associated with higher treatment change on locus of control, indicating participants were taking more personal responsibility. This was found for OASys thinking and behaviour scores, attitudes score, and lifestyle and associates. Higher treatment change on inventory of interpersonal problem was associated with higher scores on attitudes, and thinking and behaviour. It was suggested that group-members are selected using thinking and behaviour; and attitudes sections of OASys, as well as on self esteem.

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Overall, this study has highlighted the positive effect of FSSS on offenders, other than self esteem, none of the statistical findings were significant. Further research is needed to assess the extent of the observed positive change and to investigate if this translates into behavioural change.

## Responsivity principle:

The responsivity principle has two parts to it:

- General responsivity – cognitive social learning methods
- Specific responsivity – takes into account strengths, learning style, personality, motivation and bio-social characteristics of the individual

(Bonta and Andrews, 2007).

**Table 3: Responsivity feedback**

<b>Time-tabling</b>	
Good to have weekend	"I liked the break over weekend"
Tiring two sessions per day	"It was tiring doing in morning and afternoon"
Rushed	"It felt rushed at the ends"
Intense good	"morning and afternoon keeps you going before get frustrated and throw my towel in" "Good full one week"
<b>Different was good</b>	
Music bowl	"The bowl was good too the noise it made"
Creative	"Using games and cards creative ways of getting group to think"
Games	"The Games made you get into it" "The Games broke it up" "Games work well"
Style	"Style was intriguing"

Table three illustrates that participants varied on whether sessions should be as intense or not. The style of the course was seen as being different, but this was seen as being positive and making it easier for group members to "get into it".

**Table 4: Feedback for course facilitators**

<b>Feedback to facilitators</b>	
Great and very helpful	"The tutors were great and very helpful to me" "they were there if you struggled" "Done very, very well"
Warm	"They made you feel welcome" "feel accepted"
Nice people	"Well nice people"
Respected	"felt respected by them" "Respectful of our experiences" "Didn't feel like a prisoner"
<b>Responsivity developments</b>	
Some needs to be more relevant	"support networks not always relevant to individuals, need to ensure appropriate" "Think about target audience"
Right level	"need to ensure language pitched right level" "Couple of times I found it hard"
<b>Facilitators skills development</b>	
Socratic	"Questions need to be Socratic" "Need to explore more"
Group facilitation	"Throw back to the group" "Improve group control"
Develop challenging	"Rolling with resistance" "Be careful challenging"
Ownership	"Be useful to have more ownership of outside issues and problem solving"

Table four provides feedback specifically for course facilitators, identifying they had a warm style and that group members felt respected. To further increase course facilitation skills it would be useful for them to develop pitching the course more

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specifically at the level of group members, develop Socratic questioning and group facilitation skills.

In general the responsivity principle was met in terms of group members engaging with group-work and reporting to enjoy it. One area of development would be an increased awareness of the programme before attending it; a strength of the group work was the "different style".

### Dropouts:

When comparing treatment completers to non-completers, there were no significant differences, however there appeared to be a trend (results approaching significance) on thinking and behaviour need scores on OASys, non-completers had lower scores, indicating lesser need. This highlights the importance of using thinking and behaviour according to OASys to assist with selection of group-members.

### Comparison with other group-work:

**Table 5: Feedback in comparison to other group-work programmes**

Comparison to other programmes	
ETS	"bits like ETS" "helpful having done ETS, like booster" "As like ETS I picked it up easily" "ETS more in-depth"
Undermines CBT model	"When say emotions before thoughts, need to acknowledge different to CBT, but not necessarily right, as all offending behaviour programmes based on this"
Better than others	"Better – its more intense, others just drag"
SDP	"learnt more on SDP than FSSS"

As reported in table 5, when comparing FSSS with other offending behaviour programmes, some felt it was better due to it being more intense. However, more group members reported that they learnt more from other group-work programmes. This was not mutually exclusive with participants identifying the FSSS was effective as a booster course. It is important to note that FSSS is a shorter than other offending behaviour programmes.

### Conclusion

Overall, significant improvement was found for self esteem of group members, other treatment changes were inconclusive. Feedback on FSSS demonstrated that those that undertook it reported positive experiences and the responsivity principle was supported. It is recommended that selection of group-members occurs around OASys' needs and self esteem. Further research is needed to fully assess treatment change and to assess behavioural change.

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[www.Protectivebehaviours.co.uk](http://www.Protectivebehaviours.co.uk)