

Criminon™ – theory of change

Introduction

This document outlines the theory of change for Criminon courses in both diagram and narrative formats.

Theory of change is a process for articulating how a project is intended to work, often in a diagram, and with a particular focus on how the activities delivered are intended to lead to outcomes and impact for service users. It is valuable for a number of reasons, including:

- It provides a clear description of how a project is intended to work, which is itself a basic requirement of many funders and commissioners and the first rung of most evidence hierarchies¹.
- By highlighting the key elements of a project, a theory of change directs us to what evidence we need to collect to test project (and what evidence we don't).
- By taking a team-based approach to preparing a theory of change we can both improve its quality and help strengthen teams by building a common understanding of how projects work.
- It helps us to report research findings and assess whether projects have made a difference.

Theory of change

What is Criminon?

Criminon (meaning 'without crime') is the name of a number of established international public-benefit organisations which was established in New Zealand in 1972. They deliver self-study / distance learning courses to offenders and ex-offenders, facilitated through trained tutors. Typically 70% of course participants are aged between 25 and 45 years old (Jun 2012-Jun 2014 data). In the UK, Criminon UK is a self-funded national registered charity assisting in the rehabilitation of offenders and ex-offenders with the aim of preventing future criminality.

Criminon utilises criminal reformation technology developed by author and humanitarian L.Ron Hubbard. Through many years of research and having worked as a Special Officer for the Los Angeles Police Department in the late 1940's, Mr. Hubbard postulated that a person truly becomes a criminal only after he has lost his self-respect. As early as 1952, he began a criminal rehabilitation programme with juvenile delinquents. The restoration of the individual's appreciation of his or her own worth is a central aim of the programme.

A key component of the programme is 'The Way to Happiness[®]', a universal common sense guide to better living. This is accredited through Laser Learning Awards as 'The Restoring Self-Respect Course' and, as with all courses, has theoretical and practical elements. The idea behind this is that the criminal code of the offender is then being replaced with a non-criminal code which assists in creating positive changes in attitude and behaviour.

¹ <http://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/StandardsofEvidenceGuide.pdf>

The programme is broken down into several courses which address the following:

- Reading and Learning Skills
- Ability to solve problems
- Self-respect and confidence
- Anti-social conduct
- Drug and alcohol abuse

Each of the courses contain practical drills and exercises as well as study. Criminon's literacy, drug awareness and latest practical morals course are accredited by Laser Learning Awards who are affiliated with Kent University. This accreditation provides offenders with an additional recognised certificate and gives them credits towards further education. To support participants, Criminon's trained volunteer tutors engage with offenders by mail and tutor them through the lessons.

The need

Criminon courses are based on the assumption that those with a history of crime may have missed an education in some or all of the following; basic morals and ethics; have poor literacy skills; inability to learn; problems with drug addiction; difficulties with family relationships and an underlying lack of positive character - which can all contribute to a continuation of the offending cycle.

The aim

At an overall level, Criminon courses aim to help participants; gain self-respect; gain the confidence to live a future without crime; and make a sincere and honest decision to change.

In the longer-term the aim is to reduce reoffending, through the attitudinal changes described above, reduced substance misuse, increased employment and an increased desire to contribute to and participate in society.

How it is intended to work

Referral to the course tends to be by word of mouth through the prisoners themselves. In practice this has also been through educational departments, chaplains, other organisations and prison officers. An individual's interest is generally prompted by the initial thought that they would like or need to change and a desire to do something useful with their time. Another driver of participation is that starting on the course is a simple and short process; courses are free to the prisoner and potential participants are not obliged to commit to anything at the outset, so can feel free to start engaging with the material.

Courses are suitable for a wide range of abilities, and take into account the relatively low levels of literacy in the prison population. Indeed two of the accredited courses are designed for a lower literacy group with a reading/writing age of 11-12.

Tutors are matched to individual participants and this one-to-one relationship is maintained throughout their participation in the course and future courses. This enables relationships to build up over time and should lead to increasingly open and honest communication. The voluntary nature of the relationship between tutors and offenders also helps to create a bond. Often the tutor's help is acknowledged in their testimonials and post-course evaluation.

Each tutor will typically work with around 10 participants at a time, corresponding with them around once every 3 to 4 weeks. Most Criminon tutors have at least five year's experience and are closely supervised by sharing samples of their work. Initially tutors have to go through a careful selection and training process.

The distance-learning approach is an economical way to engage directly with offenders one-to-one. It also means participants can engage with the courses in their own time, on their own terms and when it feels right for them. For some offenders this may be a better way to engage with ideas around rehabilitation.

The courses encourage participants to approach and engage with the material from their own experiences and perspectives. This means that the material is relevant rather than abstract and the conclusions reached are their own and therefore more powerful and credible.

Aside from providing new knowledge and new ways of looking at things, a key mechanism of change is giving offenders direct and positive experience of learning, which for many will contrast to earlier experiences of schooling. As such, the courses aim to help participants assume new identities as 'effective learners', which may become a platform for greater successes in other areas.

Another key aspect of the courses is an emphasis on helping others, relationships and contributing to society. This is enhanced through encouraging participants to apply things they have learned to their daily lives and to report their experiences back to their tutors.

Intermediate outcomes

In terms of knowledge changes, the courses aim to teach participants the basic life skills they have not learned previously. Amongst other things, these include communication skills, basic morality, literacy, understanding substance misuse and parenting skills.²

In terms of attitudinal changes, the courses initially aim to encourage participants to feel more hopeful about the future and - through incremental progress – an increasing sense of self-worth. Gradually participants should feel more confident in themselves and their capacity to learn and to live crime free lives. Ultimately the desired attitudinal change is self-sufficiency, responsibility and a greater capacity to learn by themselves.

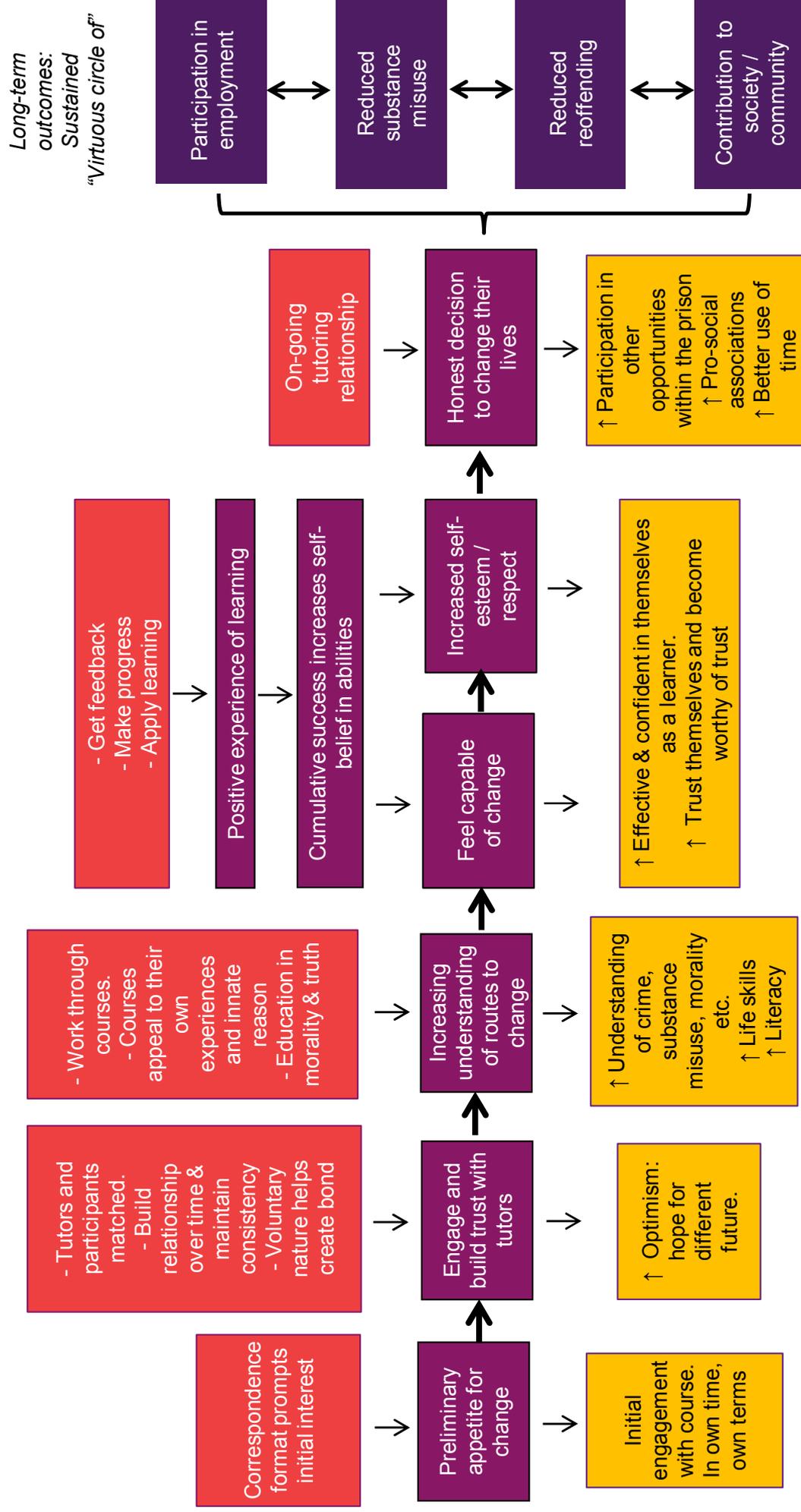
In terms of behaviour change, the courses aim to encourage better use of time and engagement in more productive activities within the prison. The courses also focus on increasing communication, openness and positive relationships with others.

A diagrammatic version of the theory of change is shown on the following page:

² More specific outcomes for each course are listed below.

HIGHER LEVEL OF THEORY OF CHANGE FOR CRIMINON COURSES

The theory of change diagram below seeks to represent the overall Criminon course process and its main outcomes, (although it doesn't capture the specific outcomes of individual courses). The central theory of change runs through the middle, while above and below we show those activities and outcomes most relevant to each stage. It's important to recognise that progress is cumulative, so that an outcome achieved by a participant at an early stage may contribute to success at a later point (it's not possible to display all the potential interrelationships in the same diagram)



Detailed outcomes for individual courses

The following table goes into more detail by describing the outcomes targeted by each course. The letters in brackets refer to whether they outcomes should be referred to as changes in; k) knowledge / skills; a) attitudes; or b) behaviour

Restoring Self Respect

- Understanding of virtues (k)
- Care for themselves (a & b)
- Care for their families and friends (a & b)
- Understand the impact of their behaviour on others (k)
- Taking responsibility for their actions (a)
- Increased acceptance/tolerance of others (a)
- Respect for self (a)
- Respect for others (a)
- Self-control (b)
- Ability to help others (b)
- Trustworthiness (a)

Understanding and Overcoming Addiction:

- Increased understanding of the physical and psychological effects of drugs and alcohol (k)
- Understanding of why people use drugs and alcohol (k)
- Understand of addiction (k)
- Understand of what helps to overcome addiction (k)
- More able to help others overcome addiction (k)
- Increased self-control (a)
- Negative attitudes to drugs and alcohol (a)
- Reduced substance and alcohol abuse (b)

Learning How to Learn/ Learning Skills for Life

- Understand the factors that have prevented them studying and learning (k)
- Develop learning skills (e.g. learning how to use a dictionary) (k)
- Improved vocabulary, understand that words have different meanings depending on the context. (k)
- Knowledge of tools they can use to help them study (k)

- Identify their own strengths/capability as learners (k)
- Confidence as an independent learner (a)
- Rethink/reassess their own abilities (a)
- Feel positive about learning / that it's a good thing to do (a)
- Going on to study other courses (b)

Communication Tools

- Understand different forms of communication (k)
- Understand the impact of negative communication (k)
- Understand how to respond in different scenarios (k)
- Increased acceptance/patience (a)
- Communication skills (through practice) (b)
- Improved ability to listen (b)
- Improved ability to communicate (b)
- Better self-control (b)
- Improved ability to deal with and respond positively in different situations (b)
- Reduction in negative communication and behaviour (b)

Successful Parenting Skills

- Understand how to deal with an upset child (k)
- Better understand the viewpoints of children (k)
- Increase in positive communication with children (b)
- More nurturing (b)
- Increased aspirations for children (a)
- Increased confidence as a parent (a)
- Identify themselves as a good parent. Increased pride in parenting abilities (a)
- Better communication in families (b)
- Improved approach to dealing with upset/angry/negative children (b)



- Less confrontational when communicating with families (b)
- Stronger relationships with families (b)

Handling Suppression

- Understanding different traits in people (k)
- Understand and recognise positive and negative traits in people (k)
- Understand the dangers associating with certain types of people (k)
- Skills in identifying and handling negative influences (k)
- Increased positive associations (b)
- Reduced association with negative peers (b)
- Increased resilience to negative influences in their lives (a)

Personal Integrity

- Understanding right and wrong (k)
- Ability to judge right and wrong for themselves (k)
- Understand the meaning of morals, ethics and justice (k)
- Understand the impact of their behaviour on others (k)
- Understand right/wrong from an ethical/moral standpoint rather than a legal standpoint (a)
- Taking responsibility for their actions (a)
- Improved decision-making (b)
- Increased responsibility (b)

The Conditions of Life

- Understand and use tools/formulas that they can apply to improve any aspect of their lives (k)
- Increased personal efficacy (a)
- Improved ability to analyse their lives and problems they face and to develop solutions (k)
- The ability to plan and apply themselves to problems/situations (b)



Next steps: Evaluation

The theory of change would be strengthened by reference to external research and literature that would support both the change mechanisms suggested and the relevance of the outcomes stated for reducing reoffending.

The theory of change could also be reviewed to determine the key evaluation questions that would enable Criminon to assess whether it is effective at delivering theory of change and achieving the stated outcomes

Individual data collection approaches (e.g. questionnaires) should therefore be orientated to testing the theory of change.