

# Supporting Desistance: Practice and Beyond....

*Professor Fergus McNeill*  
*University of Glasgow*

- Frameworks for thinking
- Desistance from crime
  - Desistance and rehabilitation
  - Four forms of rehabilitation
- Comparing RNR and desistance
- Some conclusions

- A Level 1 Theory ‘global and multifactorial, necessarily broad in focus and lacking sufficient detail to directly shape the design of specific interventions. They are hybrids (Ward *et al.*, 2007): informed partly by aetiological theories, but also incorporating the underlying values and assumptions of intervention, therapy strategies, change processes, programme context and setting, and implementation, all in an abstract, ‘high level’ way. Their purpose is to provide general parameters in which rehabilitative endeavours will operate, and the support developments on the other two levels’ (Polaschek, 2012, p.5).
- Ward and Maruna (2007)
  - General principles; aetiological assumptions; practice implications

# The RNR proposition...

- If...
  - You match level of service with level of assessed risk of reoffending
  - You target criminogenic needs
  - You practice in ways that respond to the learning styles of participants
- Then...
  - You'll get less reoffending that would otherwise have been the case.

- What works to reduce reoffending?
  - But based in fact on reconviction data, which is a highly flawed measure of processing not behaviour
  - And implies that such an outcome can be simply attributed to interventions, when many other factors will be important
  - And is, in any case, an insufficient outcome for **justice** interventions, both from the perspectives of victim and offender

# What are desistance theories?

- Not theories **for or of** rehabilitation
- Not based on evidence about **interventions**
- Not underpinned by **evaluation**
  
- A set of theories about how and why people stop offending, based mostly on observational, exploratory research, sometimes qualitative, sometimes quantitative, sometimes mixed methods, often longitudinal

# The desistance proposition?

- If
  - You pay attention to how and why people stop offending
  - Recognise the complex interactions between personal and social aspects of that process
  - Examine what helps people desist
- Then
  - You might be able to get better at helping them to desist.

# Problems with questions

- How and why do people stop offending?
  - Isn't easy/possible to know they have stopped
  - Isn't easy to disaggregate influences
  - Doesn't necessarily guide interventions or support practitioners to achieve legitimate goals for which they are held accountable
  - Relies on reflective, skilled practitioners to explore and support complex processes using autonomy of judgment.



# Common questions?

- What sorts of criminal justice interventions might help people move more swiftly, safely and securely away from offending, towards desistance from crime and social integration?
- What interventions might hinder?

1. Desistance is a process of personal, human development
2. That takes place in and is shaped by its social and cultural contexts; hence also a social transition
3. That involves movement away from offending (volume, frequency, severity)
4. *And movement towards successful social integration, citizenship and participation*

Primary/Formal

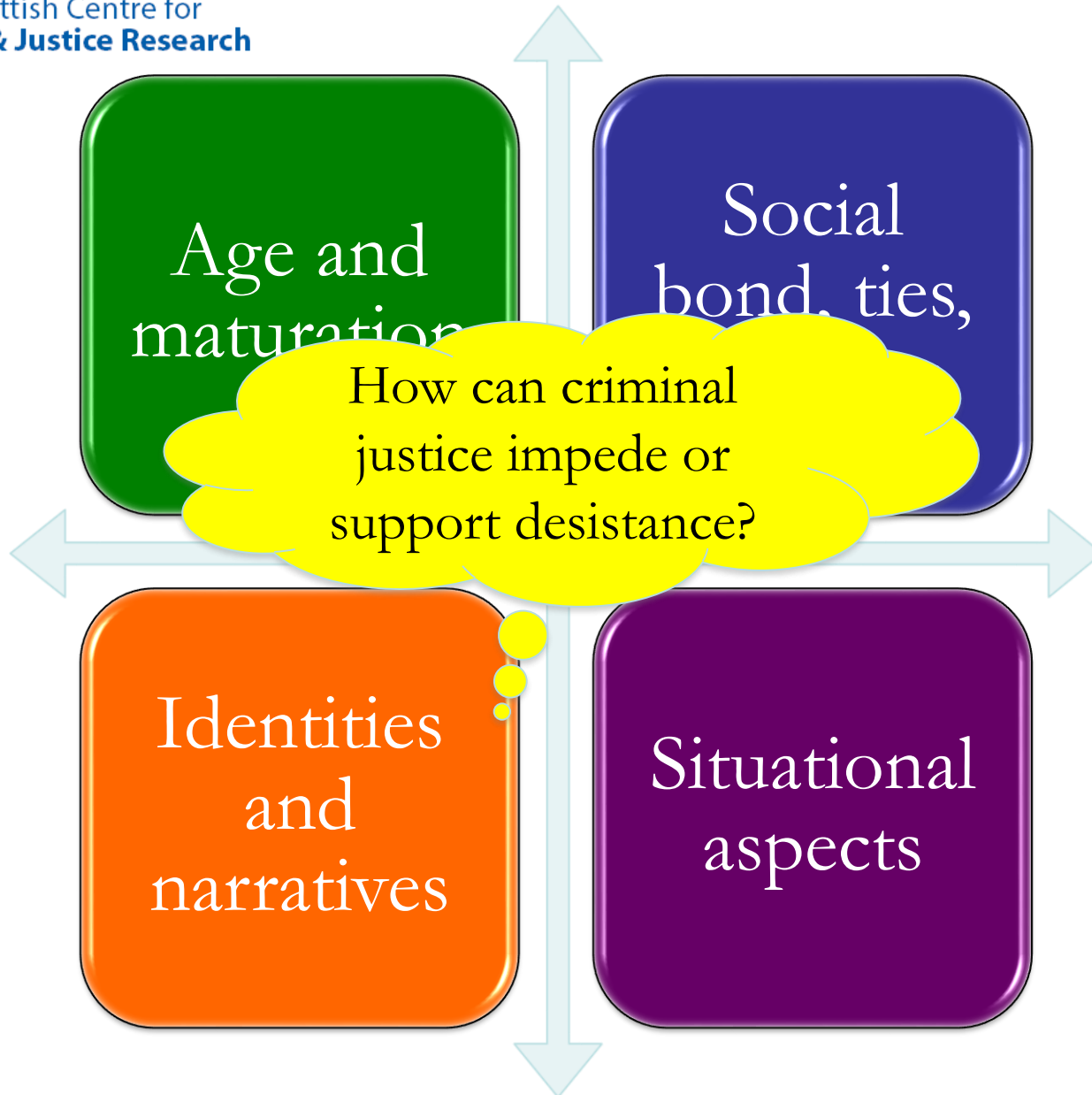
- Behaviour

Secondary/Substantive

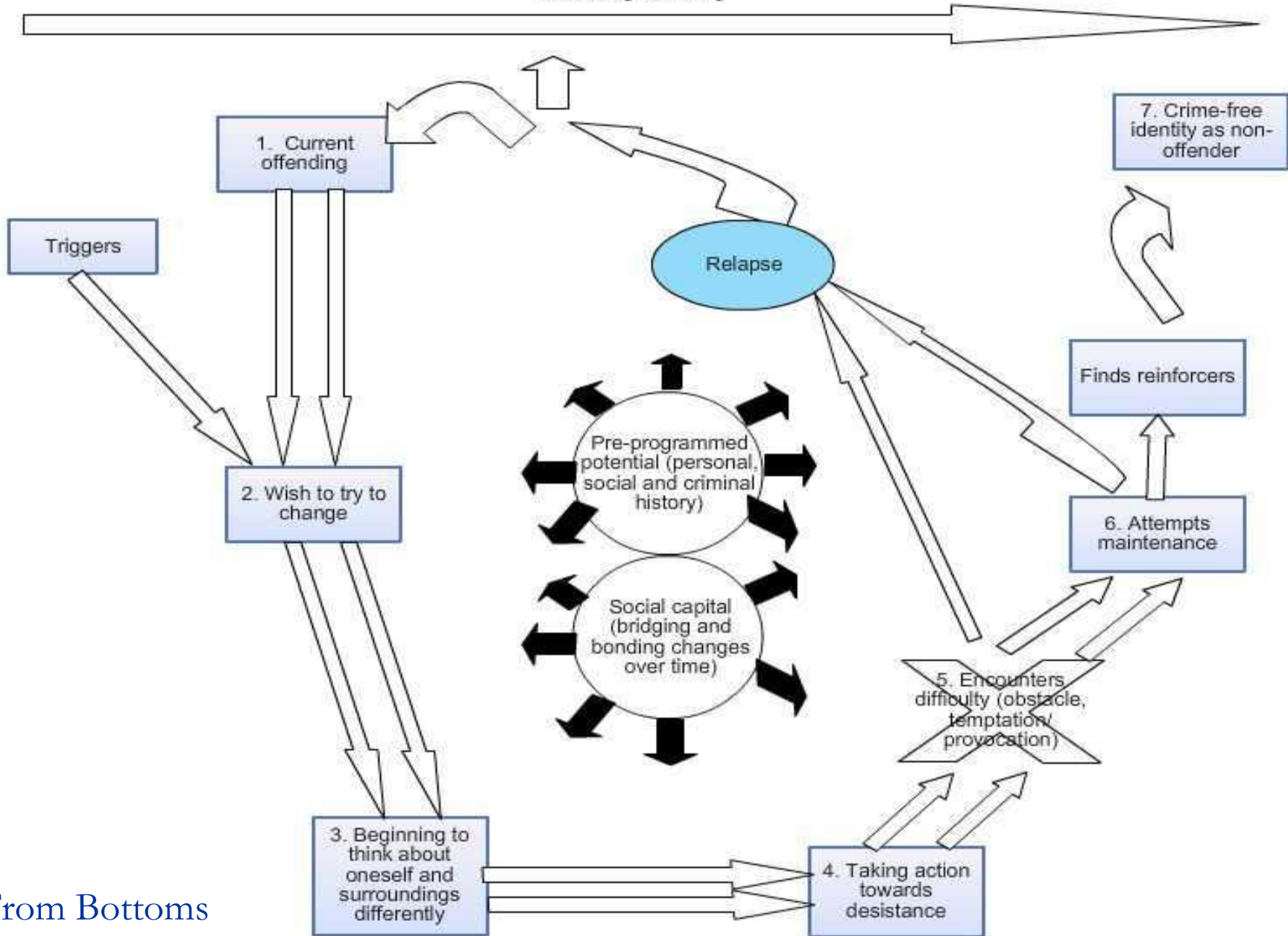
- Identity

Tertiary/Secure

- Belonging

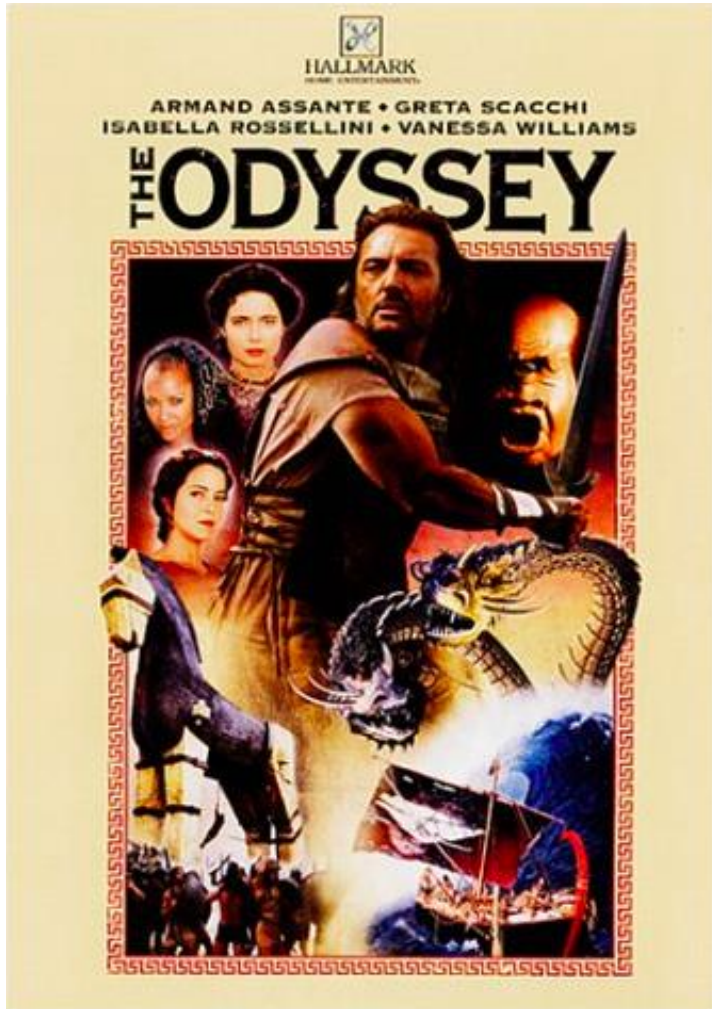


decreasing offending



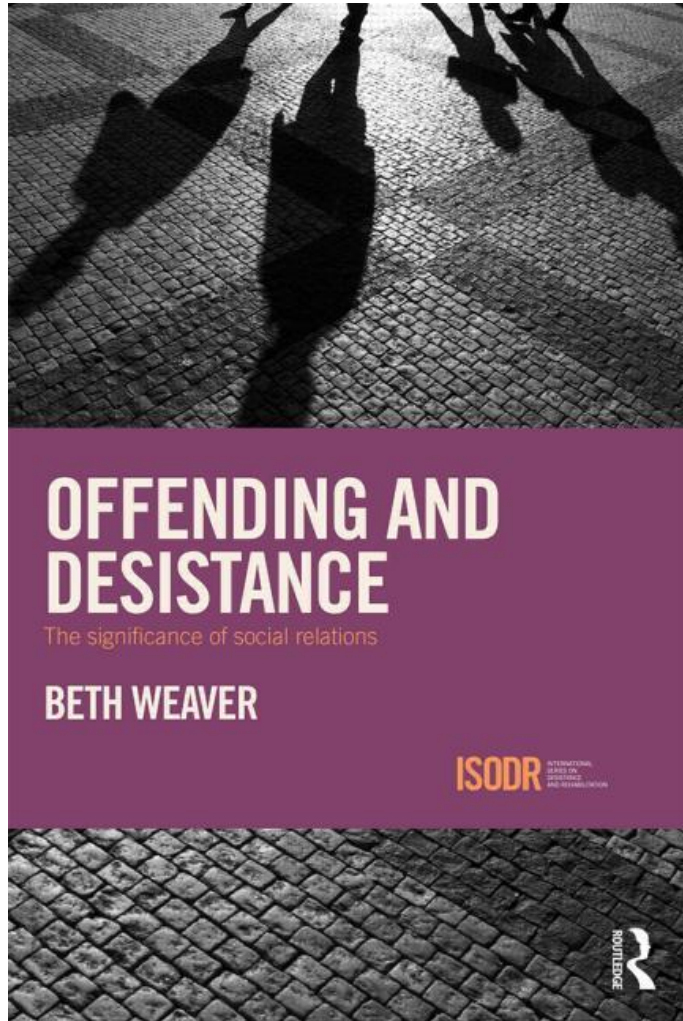
From Bottoms  
and Shapland  
(2011: 70)

# Key aspects of desistance journeys



- Ambivalence and vacillation
- Re-biography
- Turning points
- Subjectivity, meaning, identity and diversity
- Hope and agency
- Social capital
- Recognition and de-labeling
- Generativity

# Co-producing desistance



# Supporting desistance

Realism

- Manage lapses and setbacks

Individualisation

- Respect subjectivity and diversity

Hope and agency

- Build self-determination

Relationships

- Social relations and social capital

Recognition

- Language and representation matter

Routines

- Practical supports



# The pains of desistance

- Schinkel and Nugent (forthcoming)
  - Two very different samples... similar experiences
  - The pains of isolation
  - The pains of goal failure
  - The pains of hopelessness
- Structural and cultural barriers to desistance and reintegration

# Integration as a positive social good

## Personal Re/Integration

- The re-development of the self
- Capacity building

## Social Re/Integration

- Desistance supporting communities
- Collective efficacy and reciprocity

Desistance

## Judicial Re/Integration

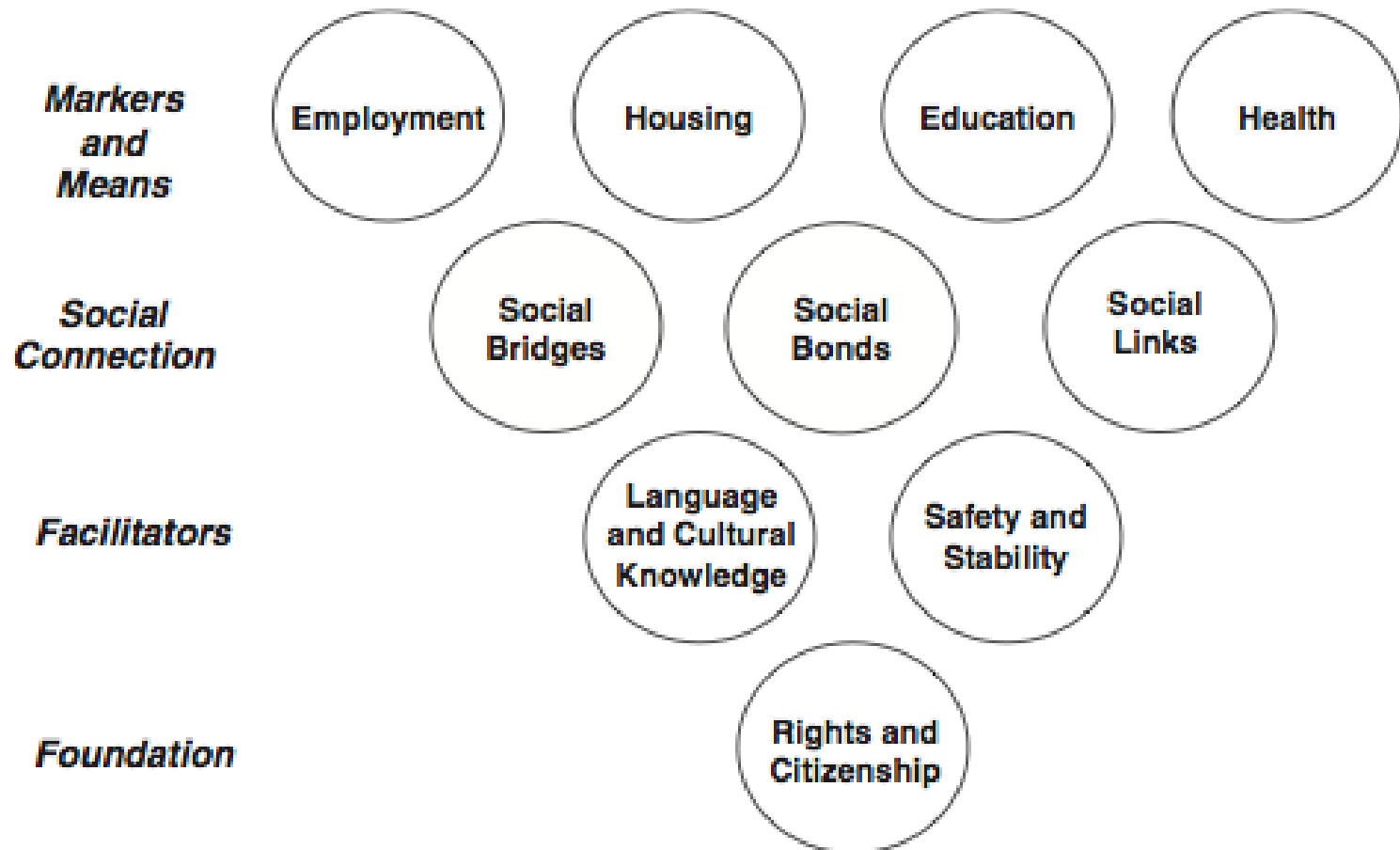
- Formal de-labeling
- Certification and ritual

## Moral Re/Integration

- Negotiating shared values
- Building solidarity

# Integration as a positive social good

## A Conceptual Framework Defining Core Domains of Integration



# Comparisons are odious but...

	RNR	Desistance
Disciplinary basis	Correctional psychology	Criminology, sociology, social work, social psychology
Evidential basis	Evaluation research PCC	Explanatory, observational research, mixed methods
Normative goals	Crime reduction/public safety	Crime reduction/social and criminal justice
View of the 'offender'	Bearer of risks and needs (and protective factors)	Potential desisting citizen
View of the intervention	Producer of change	Accelerator of change
Focus of intervention	Criminogenic needs (tending towards individual)	Desistance opportunities and obstacles (tending towards social)

- People who have offended can and do change their behaviour
- They **can** be supported to change
- They **should** be supported to change, if they want that support
  - the right sorts of **relationships** are key to that process
- The **social contexts** of change matter a great deal
- Rehabilitation is central to criminal justice
- We should be **evidence-based** about how we pursue rehabilitation

- Clarity of purposess
  - Normative issues; principles and values
  - A serious engagement with what justice interventions stand for... and against.
- An expansive conception of EBP
  - Explanatory, observational research **as well as** evaluation research
  - A wider set of metrics for success
  - A serious engagement with a range of evidence that might shape social contexts, institutions and cultures, as well as practices