



**“Are you in or out?”**  
**How working in woodlands**  
**can help build communities**  
**(the example of O&N schemes)**

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## Offenders and Nature (O&N) Schemes

1. Policy context

2. Conceptual framework

3. Evidence elements of 'inside' and 'outside'

4. Key points

### Definition: O&N Schemes

O&N schemes involve individuals sentenced via the criminal courts to work in green space, carrying out conservation and forest management tasks

### Definition: Offenders

Adults and youth with a custodial sentence, probationers, 'anti-social' youngsters

## Offenders & Nature Schemes

- ➔ **Partnership**-based initiatives: shared responsibilities, costs and benefits
- ➔ **'Volunteers'** working on nature conservation and woodland sites. One **'stage 2' resettlement scheme** (earn wage – available on release)
- ➔ **Labour-intensive** tasks to improve **access, amenity and biodiversity**: e.g. brush clearing, path construction, build small timber/brick/stone constructions, mountain-bike trails, tree planting, tree pruning, fencing, coppicing, rhododendron-clearing
- ➔ FC: 1,500+ probationers and ca. 100 prisoners
- ➔ Part-time to full-time; 3 months - 2 years
- ➔ Adult prisoners, youth offenders, probationers, 'anti-social' youngsters (participants aged 12 to late 50s)



Policy /  
Drivers

FC, NE, SNH, Woodland Trust, Wildlife Trusts, BTCV *etc.*:  
Reconnect people and nature (role of trees and woods)

Linking nature/green space with social policy priorities:  
health - education - jobs - social inclusion - law & order

Public benefits (now and future)  
e.g. improved access and facilities/opportunities (esp. for deprived communities), sustainable communities

Diversity action plan (Defra/NE): 'Outdoors for All'

Prisons Estate Biodiversity Action Plan

SEU (2002) 'Reducing Re-offending by Ex-Prisoners'  
Addressing underlying factors of crime: poor education, lack of employment, drug & alcohol misuse, poor mental & physical health, attitudinal & behavioural problems, lack of life skills, poor/no family network, poor/no housing, debt/lack of finances

Cross-government green paper by Home Office (2005)  
'Reducing Re-offending through Skills and Employment'

Planet Payback (2007): Green probation work

Environment - Social - Criminal Justice



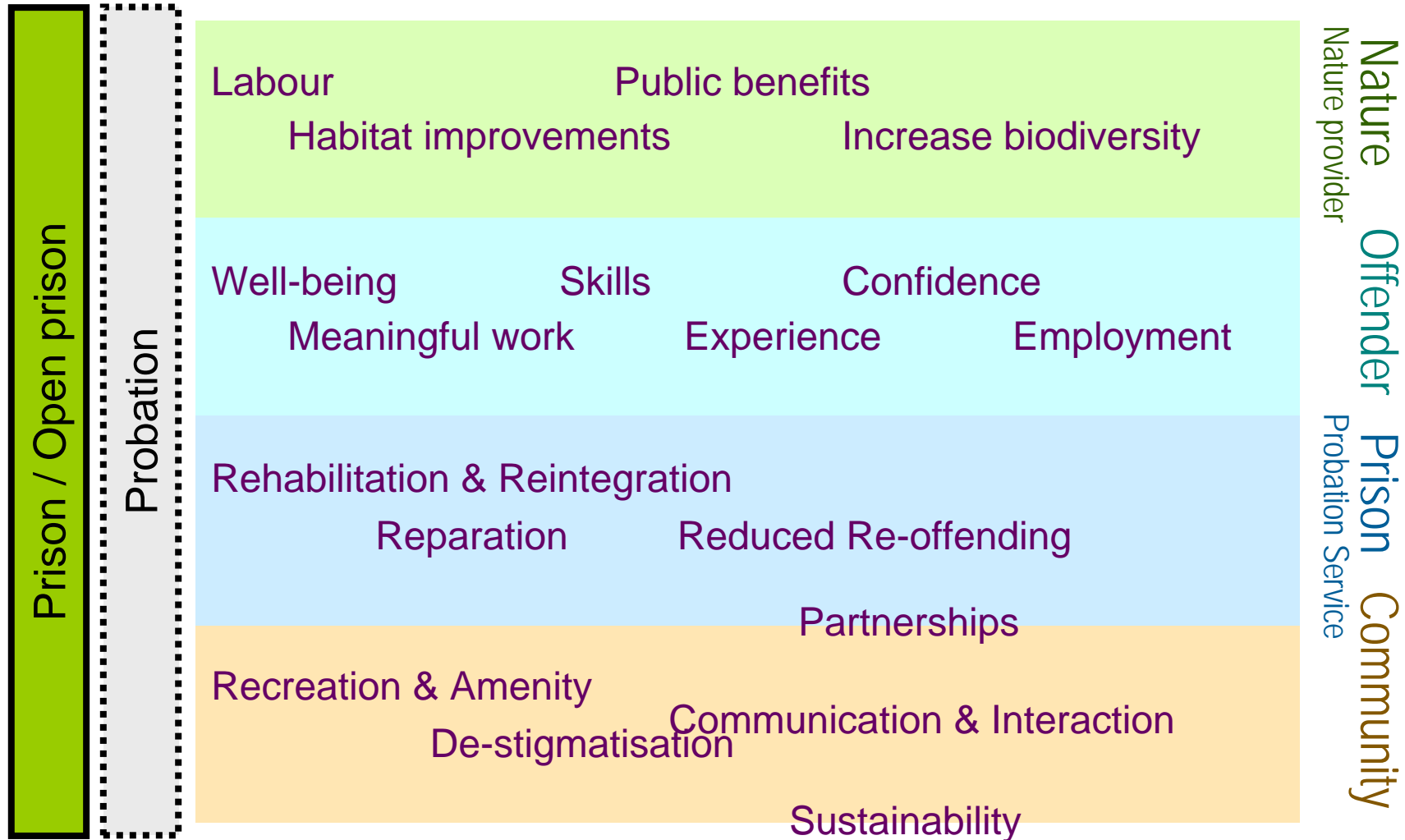
## Existing needs and structures

|                 |   |                                  |
|-----------------|---|----------------------------------|
| <p>Practice</p> | <p>Arson attacks on FC managed land, esp. forests near deprived neighbourhoods</p> <p>Conservation &amp; management work &gt; staff &amp; funding</p> <p>Conservation volunteer set-up</p> <p>Probation and Prison Services: work placements and skills training → suitable &amp; meaningful work</p> <p>GP referrals for health (e.g. mental health, depression, stress, obesity, addiction)</p> | <p>Soc. Env. Econ. CJ Health</p> |
|-----------------|---|----------------------------------|



# Impacts of O&N Schemes

based on exploratory fieldwork, FC-wide O&N survey 2007, literature



## Issues:

How to 'operationalise' desistance?

“to desist from crime, ex-offenders need to develop a coherent pro-social identity for themselves” (Maruna 2001: 7)

Process – combination of 'things'

- ▶ **Identity** - individual and collective
  - ⇒ Linked to other concepts such as **self-efficacy**, **self-esteem** and models of **behavioural change**
  - ⇒ Labelling, **stigma**, social exclusion
  
- ▶ What other socio-psychological factors might we consider?

“**Desistance**” = “the end of a period of involvement in offending”  
(Farrell and Calverley 2006, p.2)

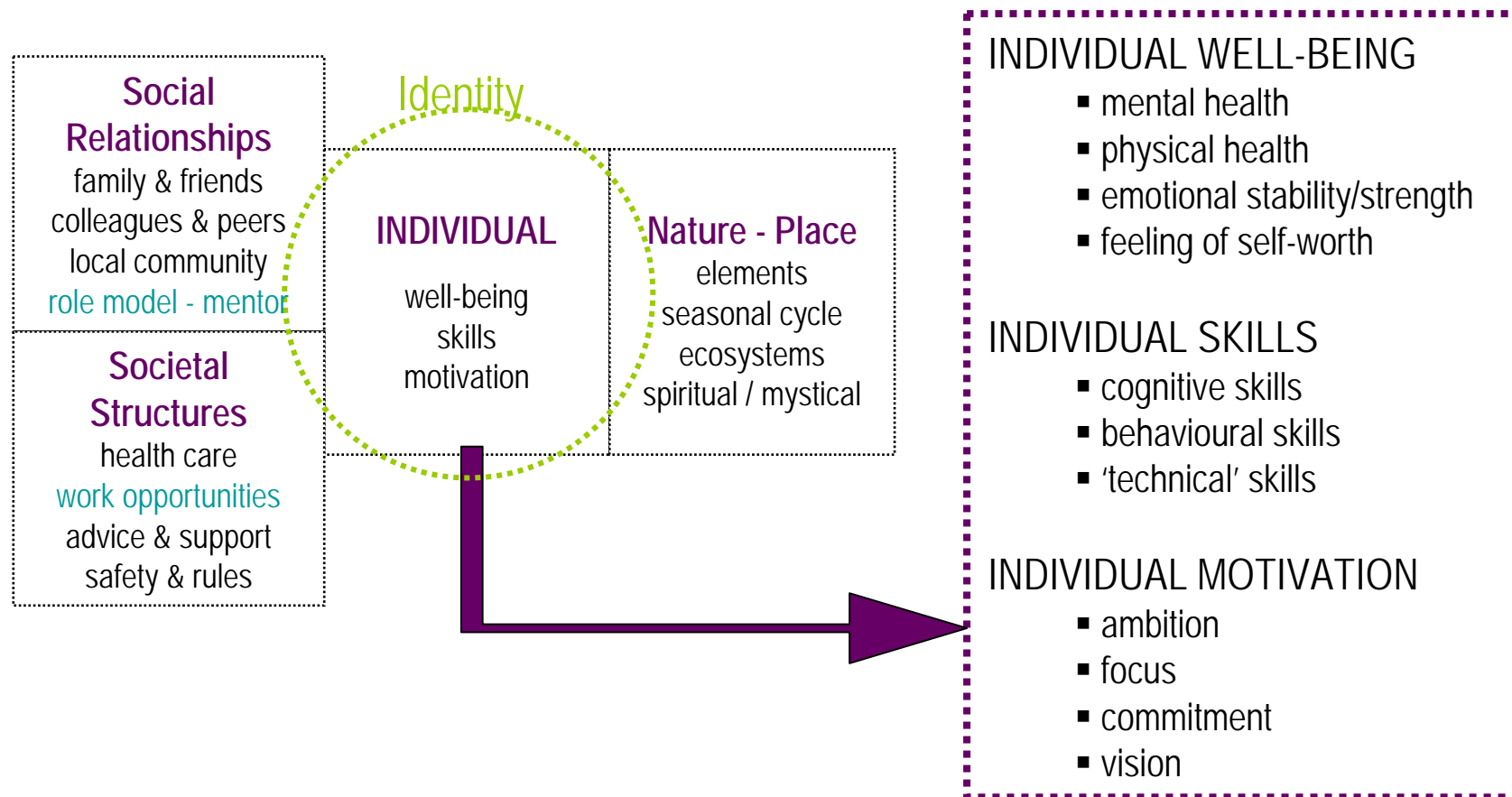
‘Restorative’ or strengths-based model

“... meet community needs, build community capacity, and repair harm caused by crime to affected communities”

(Bazemore and Stinchcomb, 2004, p.18)

Good lives model (individual & community wellbeing)

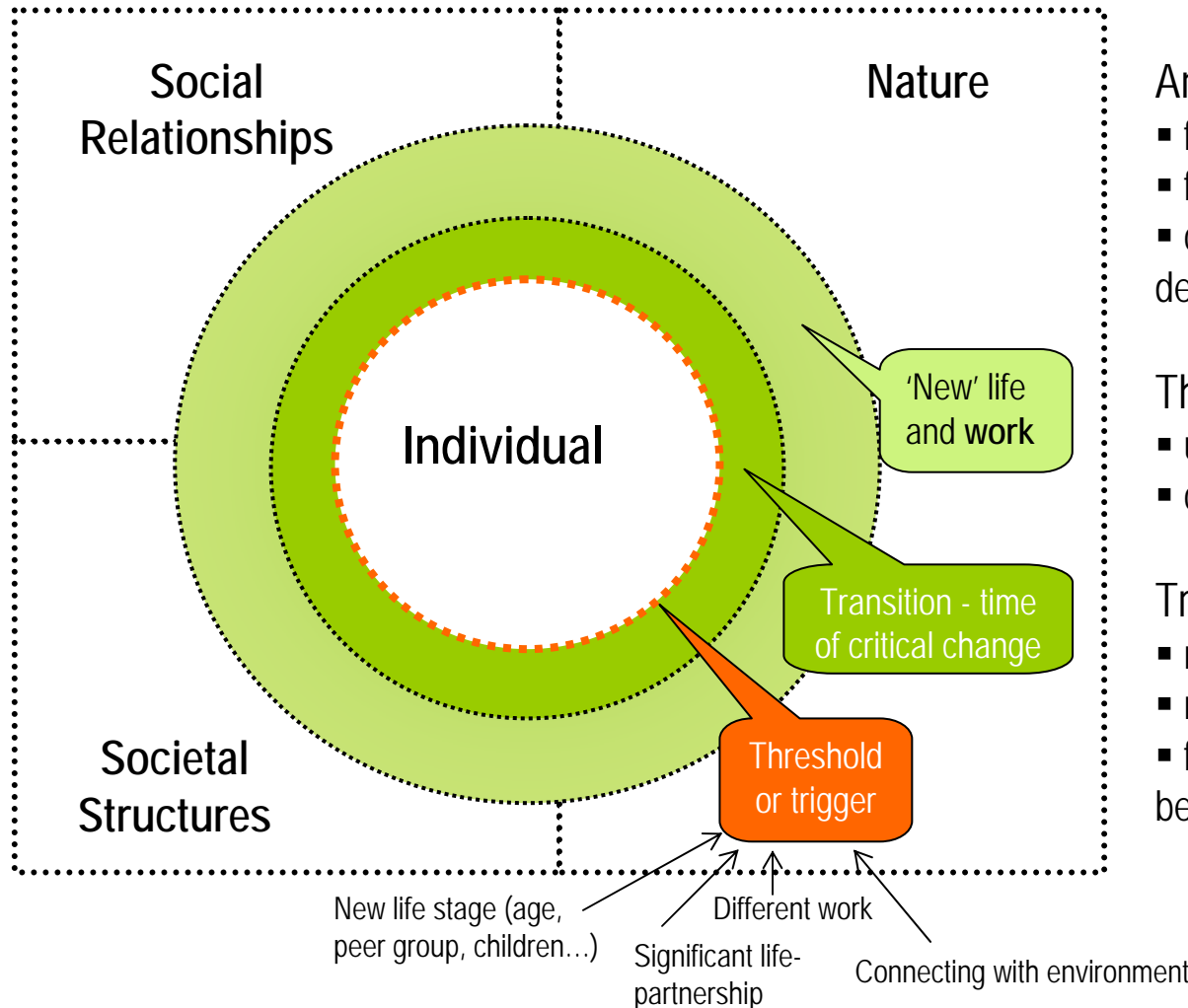
## The context of desistance (the case of environmental volunteering)







# What role does nature play in desistance?



Answer: Difficult to say

- for some really important
- for others 'nice' but not essential
- combination of factors influence desistance

Threshold or trigger

- usually combination of factors
- can be 'sudden' or gradual

Transitions

- not well recognised / researched
- not well supported
- failing even on basic things (e.g. being met at the gate)

## Pilot Study (2008-2009)

### Focus groups / interviews with offenders (N=17; M15/F2)

Obtain offender accounts to identify role of different 'parameters' in any stated aim to desist from crime

### Interviews with resettlement/scheme managers (N=4; M2/F2) and supervisors (N=5; M5)

Obtain their perspective on the schemes and their role in desistance; observed changes in O&N participants

### Establish which themes are emphasised the most

Which of these themes are specific to O&N schemes (from offender and supervisor/manager accounts and perspective)

### Look for apparent trends and conflicts

(relevant to theory / concepts, policy, practice)

## ► Confidence, health, well-being

“My **confidence has grown**, it has grown a lot and I have lost weight which is good. I have realised that I **enjoy working outside**, whereas before I had never worked outside properly; so I enjoy working outside and I just **feel healthier in myself**; so it has been good.” (*Female Prisoner, 20s, 11 weeks into an O&N scheme*)

“I can **talk to civilians** now... I can actually go to a shop, and **not be afraid**, do you know what I mean ... and I can pay for it and look after myself” (*Male Prisoner I, 27, 168 days into an O&N scheme*)

## ► Trust

“Being in a **prison environment**, having a lot of criminals locked together [...] there is **not really a great deal of trust in there...**” (*Male Prisoner G, 42, 3 weeks into the scheme*)

“... getting the **trust** back again, you know, a lot of people trusting you again. [...] it’s about **being in the public** and **being trusted**; even at the prison to let us out is a trust thing and for [names of FC supervisors and manager] and everybody else here to trust us to do things as well, you know, it gives us **confidence** to know that people are trusting us again...” (*Male Prisoner A, 26, 7 weeks into the scheme*)

► Social identity - feeling part of society

“It’s nice **feeling part** of, ehm, part **of society again** as well ... instead of being behind a wall or a fence where you are cut off from the rest of the world ... **it’s nice to get back out into the world** and **meet other people**” (*Male Prisoner G*)

“**I don’t feel any different** when we are out [in the forest; i.e. treated the same as everyone else]... feeling normal again; like a civilian.” (*Male Prisoner A*)

“They treat us like **people, not prisoners.**” (*Male Prisoner S, 25, 38 days into the scheme*)



► Social inclusion - treated the same as other colleagues

“... the guys are **part of the squad**... I just don't think of these guys as prisoners. You started off, first week or two, you know, you think, have I done the right thing here? And within the matter of a few days, you know, these guys are part of your squad ... **We see a side of them that probably no one else ever does** ... they are just glad to be out.” (*FC Beat Manager, started running scheme 4 years ago, Stages 1 and 2 resettlement*)

## ► O&N work experience - paid work

“It’s **experience** for me; **learning new techniques** and more about the forest and how to maintain it. What actually goes into maintaining the forest.” (*Male Prisoner S*)

“I’m planning ahead... the last thing people want to do is going out there basically with **£45** in their pockets; they’re going back into crime ... I’ll be walking out of here with around 12 grand. I can put down a **deposit for a flat; I can furnish it**. You know, it is basically straight into a **paid job**, so it is ideal for me [referring to demand for forestry workers in Wales].” (*Male Prisoner I*)

## ▶ O&N work experience - satisfaction

“You’ve done a good day’s work and you are pleased with that ... I love the way it [the scheme] runs and I think it runs really well” (*Male Prisoner S*)

“This has been fantastic for me, absolutely ideal ... I was planning to go for my parole ... If I didn’t have this project, maybe I would go for my parole.” (*Male Prisoner I*)

“Learning the trade ... enjoying it, basically ... get the experience under your belt, pay your taxes [laughs].” (*Male Prisoner J, 15 months into an O&N scheme*)

**OUTSIDE** - forest management / conservation work

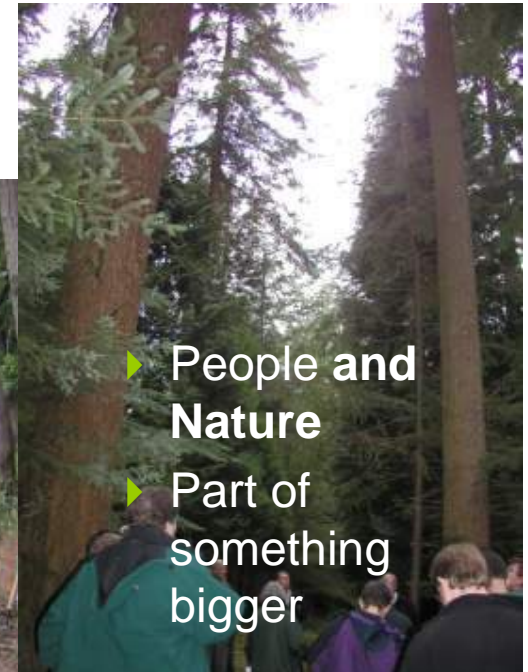
Any community placement:

- ▶ Work experience
- ▶ Skills (transferable)
- ▶ Interact with others (staff participants / community)
- ▶ Reparation
- ▶ Work reference

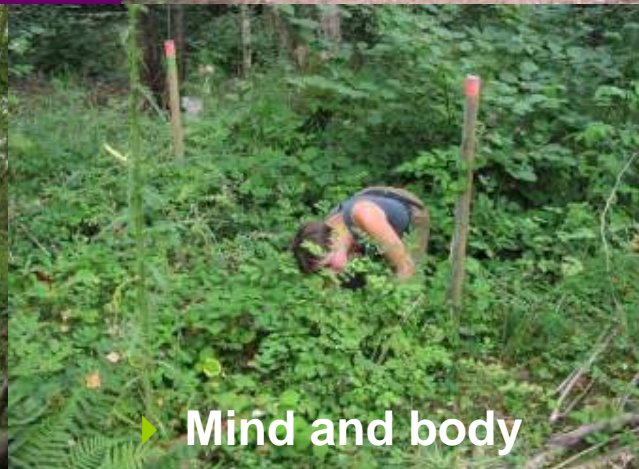
- ▶ **Work: stamina**
- ▶ **Meaningful & visible**



- ▶ **People and Nature**
- ▶ **Part of something bigger**



- ▶ **Restorative nature**
- ▶ **Trust - H&S - Care**

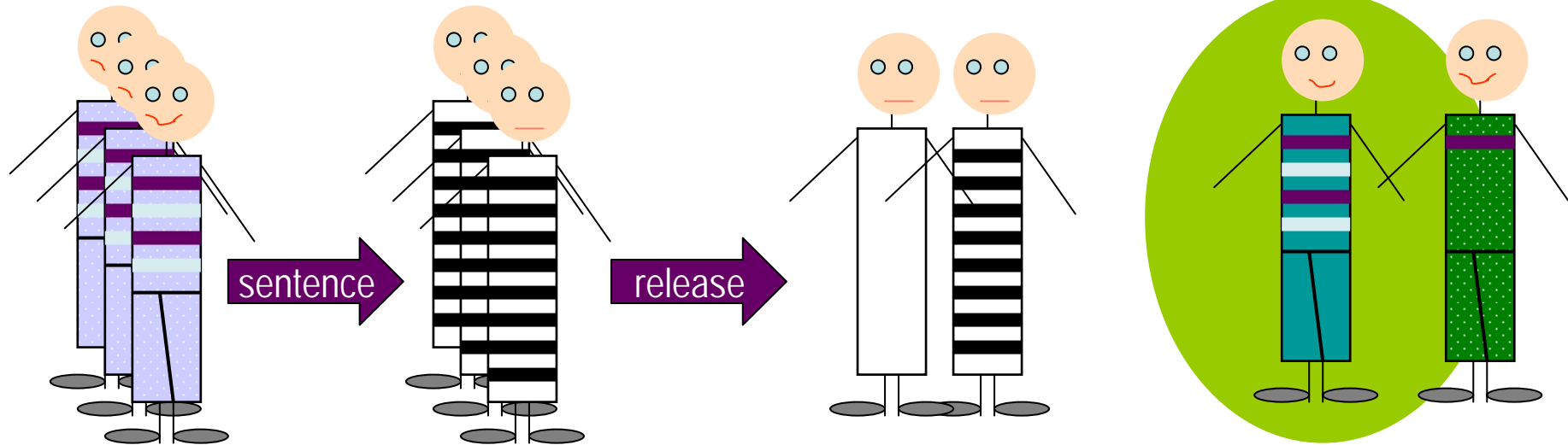


- ▶ **Mind and body**



- ▶ **Land-based industry**





Label

disadvantaged, misbehaving, troubled, crazy, normal

Person

Offender

Scenario 1

Ex-Offender

Scenario 2

Person

Influences on Identity

family position  
 duties (maybe in training or work)  
 pursuing interests  
 peers

institutionalised  
 air of authority  
 prison routine / probation duties  
 feeling worthless  
 training (but little work) / work (but little training)

lack of opportunities  
 lack of money  
 lack of support and acceptance  
 feeling empty, unsure  
 feeling angry, resentful  
 relying on old network

colleague  
 experience, skills, money  
 'normality'  
 opportunities  
 support  
 healthy environment  
 purpose, meaning





- ▶ Schemes emerge(d) from **practical needs**
- ▶ They fit well with a range of **policy agendas** and **desistance** concept and literature
- ▶ Wide range of **benefits for all involved**:
  - ⇒ meaningful work placement, training, certificates
  - ⇒ reparation (good for environment and society)
  - ⇒ environment (nature and people) that facilitates reflection, positive change, self-worth
- ▶ Being in a natural setting can help offenders to **reconnect** with their environment, themselves and societal demands
- ▶ **De-stigmatisation** - positive identities/current debates on high visibility vests
- ▶ **‘Normality’** vs. depersonalisation in prisons
- ▶ **...problems**: e.g. politics, resources, what if...

## Past work / recognition

O&N **seminar**, London, 13 February 2007  
FC-wide **survey** of O&N schemes, June 2007  
12-page **overview document** 2007 (hardcopy & pdf)  
Howard League Community Programme's **Award**, 2007  
4-page **policy-practice document** 2008 (hardcopy & pdf)  
**Ecos article**, Carter & O'Brien 2008, 29(2): 33-41  
Willan **book chapter**, Carter & Pycroft 2010, *What Else Works? Creative work with offenders*, 211-235.

## On-going / to finish

**Website** <http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/offendersandnature>  
**Steering Group**  
**Support to new/ongoing FC schemes**  
**Journal article** on pilot evaluation study  
**'Handbook'**: setting up and running schemes, sharing and learning from past experience





# THANK YOU!

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“Thank you for the opportunity it has given me in life  
that I may not have had.  
My time with the Forestry Commission  
has changed my outlook to life and work.  
I really believe for the first time I have a future.”

O&N scheme participant, HMP Dartmoor

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