

Brook House Interview 8 Notes

Charlie Francis (DCO) – 18 July 2017 and 20 July 2017 (interviewed twice)

4 mins - describe to someone who knows nothing

5.15 first impressions - noisy

No dramatic change - extra beds, 60 in total, no new staff

9 It only takes 1 or 2 people to really change the feel of a wing. Population changes in a month (Skitt)

11 talks about 'rapport'

12 Good staff? Listen to them, help them. Good answer. If I say I will, I'll do it

13.45 bad staff? Don't care. Self-harmers haven't been given something simple. Some just see it as a job, C&R stuff.

15 do you get a lot of abuse? Oh yeah. Been called everything, punched, kicked, bitten twice

Feels safe with colleagues but got each other's back, it could all change

20 'You've got to know the people you're working with, cos you're working with them 12 and a half, 13 hours a day. So you do form friendships. We know each other, we've worked together for so long, so you know if something's on their mind or if something's not quite right. You just know. [...]

[Can you tell me a bit about what you think the word 'experienced' means?]

The experience bit is knowing what and how to handle them. A lot of the new ones come in, they think it's all bend them up and fight them. Or they're here [...] The easiest way to put it is: a lot of them think they're worth nothing, if that makes sense. They all go on. We have a sheet for them. In it is written what they're here for, what they've done or whatever. I *never* read the sheet. I never read their sheet. I take them at face value until something happens, *then* I will go and read their sheet. But I think a lot of people here will read what they've done and then make their own decision on, y'know, 'He's a wrong 'un, he's a wrong 'un all the time'. So that's how they deal with him. He's a wrong man. He's wrong. That's how we deal with him. Whereas, y'know, yes he might have done his time, he might have done whatever it is, and he might have changed.

Y'know, people do change when they've been [...] A lot off them are foreign national prisoners, especially down here [E wing], we get a lot of them down here. Some of them have changed. Not all of them, but some of them have changed. So I just take them at face value. That's probably where my, call it experience I don't know, but that would be me. But a lot of them make it a point. You see them coming, a new person comes on the wing then first thing they do is on the computer to read what they've done, and they've made their own decisions straight away – 'they're wrong' – and that's the way they treat them. Okay, yes, you get some that have done stuff that, y'know, really makes you wanna go and...but you just deal with it. You try and block that bit out. After all, they're a person. That's the way I treat them is they are a human being, they are a person. They're not an animal, you can get people with that kind of attitude. They're not gonna be what's classed as an experienced officer because they've just got that mindset that the way they are.

It's handling them and how to know. ... It's working with your colleagues, on your wing, knowing your wing, knowing what you've got on your wing, and who is on your wing. Straightaway you've got to identify your what's called 'troublemakers'. You do get people that are *always* causing trouble on the wing. As far as the newbies, some of them are all trouble. Some of

quicker. We tend to try and engage with them as much as possible. A lot of them initially they just wanna lay there and feel sorry for themselves. Then we try to strike up a rapport, gain their confidence and then try to break the ice. A lot of them have got...somewhere in there there's a chink. They put this suit of armour on...we look for the chink and try to get in. It could be something completely random, we pick up on. We start making headway, start talking to them, saying 'Immigration have already told you this doesn't work, your best bet is use your solicitors use the courts.' Some of them have got family, some haven't. So we try to explain to them, 'If you succeed in killing yourself, what's your family gonna do? How are we going to explain to them, "Yes, your father was in here in custody and he killed himself"?' Apart from that, if you do succeed, it's *us* that go to court. It's not you – you're gone – it's *us* that are actually in court, charged with your manslaughter because you're in our care. That usually gets into them. Some of them say they don't care, they don't care, but then a couple of days later they go, it's nothing to do with you it's my choice, but you go well I'm sorry you're gone, you can't turn round and say it was my choice to kill myself: you're not here. Y'know, it's us that have got to take responsibility for it. And then they start thinking, they start thinking and they start opening up and that's how we can get to what the proper root of the problems are. Why they've done what they've done.

4.30 [How often do you find that self-harm is connected to somebody's case? Is that often what people say?]

A lot of it is. It is connected. Some of it's not. Some of it is attention seeking. Got a couple down here at the moment, they want something and they feel the only way to get it is to do what they do. A lot of them haven't got much money. One in particular hasn't got any money but he smokes. We used to have an allowance for tobacco, so when desperate we'd give them tobacco. Some of them have abused it so they've removed it. And because he was so used to getting the tobacco, he's started putting ligatures on *just* to get tobacco. Nothing to do with his case. Just attention seeking. You know it's not serious because the ligatures aren't tight.

I've actually saved probably three lives and the ligatures are tight. It could be a cord. I had one gentleman actually put a belt around his neck and he actually got the clasp done up. Because if you self-strangulate, after a while you're gonna just pass out and the pressure's off. But when you've got a belt round there, you've got no choice. Three days after that, I actually got speaking to him, and it turned out it was a little bit to do with his case but a lot of it was, he was under the impression...officers were talking at night close to his room and they're just saying he was faking it, so it just turned him the other way so he just...It was a little bit to do with his case but it pushed him that little bit further.

But three days afterwards I was on his constant, he wasn't eating but he was just laying on the floor on a mattress, and I just happened to go in there one day and said 'Look, are you aware that it was me that actually found you with the belt around your neck?' And he just jumped up and hugged me. Just jumped up and hugged me and said 'Thank you very much'. But that was a little bit to do with his case but he was pushed further by actions of other people [staff]. And down here you've probably noticed it takes a certain officer to work down here and sometimes they put the wrong officers. It's a very sensitive mood, it's a very sensitive area they're in. It could go either way. Some of them don't do it unintentionally, put some of them just get pushed over the edge by an officer's reaction or what they hear. So you have to be careful what you...Your actions have gotta be careful when you're dealing with that sort of person, and a lot of them don't understand that. They just assume that they're all doing it just to get out of detention. But yes, there are some of them that do it because they think it will help them to get out, but you do get the serious ones that really do mean it. Yeah I've been in...wrapped up people who've cut themselves up. A lot of it's been superficial. Some of it's been meant, because they are deep, deep, deep cuts. So you know they're meant. And again some of them do it thinking it will get them out quicker but they go too far. They make the mistake of putting too

cigarette? Oh, please. D'you want some dinner now? Oh yeah maybe, well just a little bit. Well come on then, let's get some, bloody get out of bed and walk. Out they come, shuffle shuffle. Then the next day, y'know ... that's basically how it works.

I don't know what the magic is or anything. Sometimes it does, Sometimes it doesn't. If I don't succeed, that's where my line partner comes in, he will probably get a bit more out of him, that's where we work out the game plan. That's where we work the plan out, what we're gonna do with him, how we're gonna work with him. Cos that's all we do is work them.

1.06 [And this being quite a small wing makes all of that possible, right? You can't do that with 120 people.]

We've had some people we've just gone in and told them the truth. Just gone in and (Laughs and says slightly under his breath) You might wanna turn that off, 'What the (fuck) you doing? You think this is a good idea? Y'know. Upstairs don't give a flying (fuck) about you. You're just a number. Prove 'em wrong! Get up! Get up and fight your case. Don't just lay there, y'know, what's your son gonna do, your wife, your kid. You've given up. Oh, right, okay, so what they gonna do? Right, I'll give them a call tell them to give up on you, shall I? Y'know, that's how, just brutally honest with them.

1.06.46 [And can that sort of tough love sometimes work?]

It does work. It has worked. 'Oh, yeah, y'know'...It has worked and some of them y'know they're down here cos they've got family problems or whatever and just go 'I can't stand it cos I'm in detention' or whatever and you go, 'Well have you spoken to them?' Na, she won't speak to me. Try! No, no, no: try! Bit of humble pie never hurt anybody. (I start laughing.) 'Sorry love, you alright?' And the next thing you know, 'Oh thanks for that, better now, I haven't got these thoughts anymore.'

But what the magic is I don't think you can press F1, you're an F10 case, this is what we do. You just can't. It works on some, it works on the other. You've just gotta...It's all teamwork. You can't put one person up to (something?).

1.07.51 [A lot of patience too, it seems?]

All the rest of my colleagues down here say I've got the patience of a saint. They say you've probably got more than all of us put together. But I will just keep chipping, keep chipping, keep chipping and eventually I will get there. And then when I get there, that's when all the others take over. They'll carry on with what I'm doing and what we decide to do with him. I will keep going till I can get them out of this frame of mind. Y'know, I...*I don't want a death on my conscience.* If I can stop it, I will. But I don't deliberately go out, 'Oh God if I don't do something he's gonna die.' It's just, he's there, he needs my care: boom. I've had the RMN say, you would've made a brilliant psychologist, but I've had no training, I only use what I've picked up from them and just talking, so...as you're aware, I'm quite a good talker! I've come straight into this from just being a brickie. I've friends that have lost friends and stuff like that but I've always been there for them and I just see it as duty of care. How would you describe duty of care? That's the badge, y'know, duty of care, doing my bit. That's my definition of duty of care. People seem to think I go above and beyond what you're supposed to do. They say you've got the patience of a saint. One day they could be calling me every name under the sun and the next day I've stopped them from doing something silly and they're my best mate.

[Very fickle.]

I don't know what it is.

1.09.50 [Is there anything I've missed?]

No I think you've covered yourself pretty much right across the board.