

Offender Journeys: Finding the side road



**An insight study
into the experiences of rehabilitation pathways in Norfolk,
amongst people with offending histories.**

Report, Aug 2014

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Background

The motivation for this study came from the outcomes of the N-ARRO (Norfolk Alliance for the Rehabilitation and Resettlement of Offenders) Conference in September 2013. N-ARRO recognises the importance of all the pathways out of offending in targeting need to tackle crime, but also acknowledges the need to work better together.

At a time when everyone is expected to do "more for less", N-ARRO aims to raise awareness of existing provision and facilitate the better integration of local services for offenders and believes that through joined up working practices and clearer pathways between services they can deliver better outcomes for everyone. The 2013 conference highlighted the implications of

the government's 'Transforming Rehabilitation' agenda and demonstrated cross-sector commitment to improve individual outcomes and simplify the offender journey at a local level.

N-ARRO therefore commissioned this piece of independent action-research to gain insight into the service user experience of the 'road to rehabilitation', with a central desire to engage offenders in this process, capturing the authentic voice.



Aim of the Insight Study

The study has been commissioned to gain an insight into experiential perspectives of the rehabilitation process in Norfolk from people who have a history of offending. The study was designed to give a voice to people who have had contact with the criminal justice system.

The scope of the study allowed for a short piece of action-research to provide a snapshot, or insight, into rehabilitation experiences in a reflective manner, exploring issues and concerns, successes and opportunities. These, gathered and analysed, will be beneficial in providing the professional rehabilitation community with improved understanding

and insight into the things that positively and negatively affect the lives of people with offending histories.

It is intended as a 'starting place' that will initiate discussion amongst service commissioners and key stakeholders with a view to influencing change and involving people with offending histories in designing and delivering better services and outcomes for offenders in Norfolk, and for society as a whole.

Executive Summary

When the costs of imprisonment is over £100 per person per day, but the costs of probation are under £12 per person per day it is acceptable to consider community based approaches to rehabilitation favourably. Rising levels of reoffending in Norfolk, and across the country, indicate that there is a growing problem. Understanding existing approaches experientially is central to enhancing knowledge and practice within the professional rehabilitation community, for successful and sustained outcomes.

Participants with offending histories shared their journeys. They highlighted a range of positive and negative occurrences they experienced along the way, and reflected upon their own circumstances in order to contribute

valuable insights into practices and approaches.

Where relationships with support practitioners, like probation workers, were positive, personalised and respectful they often became the catalyst for moving forward and the instigation of pro-social behaviours. This relationship was in turn seen as central to encouraging individuals to engage in personal development. Individuals who were supported to take a look at themselves, understand and value themselves, were then able to identify aims and goals through personal development initiatives.

By looking at the strengths, assets and capabilities people already have, and using this as a bedrock for

positive progression, starting points for identifying motivating factors were uncovered. Whilst having a criminal record impacted many in their rehabilitation pathway by being the last barrier to gaining employment, many people had found that a motivation had been their turning point, or 'side road'.

Motivations were all individual, driven by finding an interest, pride and a sense of achievement. This, coupled with the establishment and growth of social relationships- close bonds, networks and connections- worked to create and provide opportunity for individuals and, for many, proved to be the route to successful rehabilitation.

Participation criteria

2 groups of participants were involved in the study.

- The first group were people with an offending history- that is, time served in prison or time spent undertaking a community order. These participants either took part in a one to one interview, or completed an online survey.
- The second group were people who were nearing completion of their prison sentence. These participants formed the focus group, held inside the prison.

The interviews and focus group session were captured using an audio recorder, to further provide opportunity to hear real voices. For full details of methodology, see page 22.

◀ Listen to the real voices

An accompanying audio documentary has been produced, capturing the voices of participants and providing further context.

If you are interested in gaining a full insight into the lives of those with offending histories, we encourage you to listen to the audio version of 'The side road' by visiting www.the-curious-cat.com/the-side-road

Insights

The following accounts are taken from the interviews, the focus group, and the survey responses, explored further through the use of academic research, government reports, and other documents.

“Opened the gates, closed the gates behind me and there I was on Knox Road.

Free.

What do I do first?

Do I run to the taxi ranks, do I go to the pub get a pint, do I go to the shop and grab a packet of fags, or do I go home and, and do what really?

*They just left me
at the gates.”*

What next? Adjusting back into 'normal life'

"You're sort of battling with yourself to make the right decisions I didn't know what to do next. I didn't know where to go."

"That's all you know. Like when I left the Youth Offending Team you don't know where to go then, you know...I felt that I didn't know what the next move was. What was I meant to do next?"

"After a while you get dependent on your life being run for you. So when you've not got that any more it's a bit of a culture shock."

"It's not always black and white. People like myself, we just want to move on, but we can't move on if we're not 100% sure what the next step is."

"When you're in prison you're in this little bubble where everything... it feels like it's done for you... and now it's just like, hang on, it's just down to me again and you kinda get out of that practice."

"It was just a case of 'out you go, re-adjust'."

"I just found that I had to deal with things myself...sort of stumbling around in the dark, if you see what I mean."

"You get used to being told you need to conform, and then when you come out of jail, the adjustment period, you know, is erm... quite daunting... Coming out to different circumstances. Coming back out into the world, you know. Having to deal with things yourself. I was dreading it."

During 2013, recidivism rates in Norfolk were consistently higher than predicted (Ministry of Justice, 2014), with high levels of reoffending across the UK linked to the need for more effective rehabilitative processes, including the preparation for release from prison (Social Inclusion Unit, 2002).

What's it worth?

The average cost of having one adult offender in prison is **£108.42** per day, the costs of a day on probation averaging between **£6.62 - £11.50**, and the yearly costs comparison is **£39,573** with **£2,415-£4,200** between prison and probation respectively (Ministry of Justice, NOMS data 2011). When the costs of a day in prison are compared with the costs of a day on probation, it is clear that the figures add up in support of prioritising community based support. The challenge lies in understanding how best to do this, and what implementation might look like.

“It’s just soul destroying.

*You just wanna get in
a corner and cry cos*

*it feels like you’re
just dragging a
ball and chain
around with you.”*

Labels and barriers

“People were different with me- the doctors were different with me, the job centre was different with me ... It was almost like they knew, you know, like I was wearing a label or a badge saying you’d just come out of prison. It wasn’t a nice feeling.”

Participants talked at length about the labels they held, and how these impacted on them taking steps towards rehabilitation.

“...Just labelled and just sort of stuck to one side in society... looked down upon, even though you’ve done your time.”

“Once you’ve got a criminal record, you’ve had it, you know.”

“Easier going back than facing the battles ahead”

Participants found that whilst there was a lot of social and governmental pressure to find work, perceptions and experiences of trying to finding work were hindered not only by levels of skill and qualifications held, but also by the label they had. The legal requirement for them to disclose their convictions to prospective employers was a key barrier. Even for those who had worked (sometimes for years) to increase their employability through gaining work experience, training and volunteering, this last step into gaining paid employment was often found to be an impenetrable wall.

“I remember on one occasion I actually went for an interview. It was going great.... she showed me around, she was really keen and, you know, seemed really happy... As soon as I told her I had a criminal background it was just automatic shutdown... I just felt really worthless. I just felt, you know, she wasn’t interested at all. I never heard anything back from her.”

“You know, even if you’ve done your time, ...it doesn’t matter what you do or how nice you are it’s just dragging behind you everywhere, it’s just there. You can’t get rid of it. And I don’t think people can see past that sometimes. They can’t see the person... Everybody’s trying to get a job, so the people who’ve made any mistakes are definitely at the bottom of the pecking order.”

The impact of getting and holding down a job is well documented and has been shown to dramatically reduce re-offending rates, between a third and a half (Social inclusion unit, 2002, Scottish Government, 2011). But the likelihood of those who are ready for work

getting legitimate employment remains limited. With such restricted prospects, the consequential impact on communities and wider society is detrimental.

It’s a challenging situation. On the one hand there have for years been calls to ensure ex-offenders work so that they may positively contribute to society, in turn giving something back. But conversely, employers are understandably reluctant and often resistant to take the risk of employing an ex-offender. Sir Harry Burns, professor of global public health and former Chief Medical Officer for Scotland has researched this area throughout his career, and stated about offenders ‘We should be setting up social enterprises that help them into work. We all want meaning in our life, a sense of purpose, we should be giving them gainful employment.’ (Burns, 2013)

“There does need to be more companies that will give people a second chance, that will accept them....people that are actually driven to try and do something when they get out, they know that they can start bettering themselves straight away, there should be that there.”

“I’m struggling now. And, and this is six years ago and I’m still struggling to get someone to give me a chance.”

“If there’s no opportunities for people who have a criminal background, you’re not gonna get out of it. You’re gonna keep slipping back, because you don’t feel that there is anything out there for you. You’re just getting kicked to the curb every time you try... It’s not gonna work. There needs to be something out there for everybody.”

“Employment is a huge one. Even if you’re not getting paid for it. Just, just something else, something to have, that you’re working for, you’re earning it, and you’re earning people’s trust in the meantime as well. People are giving you a chance. Yeah, a huge one.”

“There needs to be more employers out there who are willing to give people a chance, and you know, allow ...people... to earn their own money and have a life.”

*“It feels like it’s
them against us
sort of thing,*

*when it shouldn’t
probably be like that.*

*It should be them with us,
not them and us.”*

Attitudes and skills of practitioners

Many of the participants' reflections during the study were about relationships with an offender manager, prison officer or a support worker. When relationships were seen as negative, they were described as impersonal, controlling, punishing, hierarchical, and were therefore unsuccessful in their goal to rehabilitate.

Approaches based on 'control and compliance' are the least successful in achieving sustained rehabilitation (Russell, 2010).

"Some of the people I speak to... seem to be under a lot of pressure from probation to conform. It can feel like being on a hamster wheel."

Whilst negative relationships with offender managers had been experienced, this had not deterred participants from working with probation services. Some acknowledged that their own reluctance to engage had contributed to negative relationships although all knew the potential benefits of a positive relationship, and were eager for subsequent experiences to be more positive.

"They should involve themselves while someone's doing a sentence, so they get to know what that person's like so that they know what courses would actually benefit them, rather than.... tick boxes for 'them upstairs'."

"I think, being realistic, that people work in different ways and at different speeds... I'd make sure that everyone gets treated individually. Some people are going to fall.... Some people aren't motivated.... But that doesn't mean that they're being disrespectful to the probation process."

"When I get out they should be, like, not so threatening with you. Like, "if you do this we're gonna send you back to prison". It should be like "if you do this, we will help you"."

"A lot of the people who work in prisons don't know people individually...don't take time to help people individually...that's where they go wrong. They have to do everything by mass. So, a lot of people don't get the help they need, they fall by the way side so when they do come out, there's no network for them."

"It doesn't even seem like a human thing, probation, people just see it as a big obstacle."

"There's...little in mind for the individual."

"Some of the probation officers are... top... but then others don't seem to want to do their jobs."

"For some people its like a one way system. You're just going round the roundabout and back, back again, you know."

Suicidal
Outcast
Stigmatised
Anxious
Hopeless
Unprepared
Daunted
Helpless
Isolated
Low self esteem
Overwhelmed
Labelled
Scared
Lonely
Afraid
Don't fit in
Stuck
In the dark
No confidence
Failure
Worthless
Stressed
Lost

*“She spoke to me like a
proper person...*

*you know, like she
understood...*

*She did treat me like a
human.*

And that’s what it is, I think.”

A sense of connection - personalise, humanise, empathise and have compassion

Where relationships were described as being positive, it was always down to the quality of the interpersonal interaction they experienced. Being treated as a human, as an individual, establishing mutual respect and becoming connected was regularly cited as central to the probation and rehabilitation process.

“That one to one bond is almost like a comfort blanket.... you get that rapport with someone.”

“Treats me like a human and talks to me, not down to me.”

“You should be in that job because you’ve got compassion, and you want to be in that job.... There’s nothing worse than sitting there talking to someone who you feel is not really taking an interest... just going through the motions. You can tell by the way someone’s talking to you if there’s a genuine interest... it just depends on the bond and if you, sort of, connect.”

“Different things work for some people and not for others. You can’t have the same sort of conformity for everybody, cos it’s not gonna work.”

“I feel that the sense of connection with a person is quite vital, to be honest, because if you don’t have that connection with a person...then they’re just gonna be another object.”

Additionally for those who had positive experiences, it was also about the establishment of trust over time, with descriptions of support officers having the skills, and importantly the compassion and empathy, to foster a sense of connection and build nurturing relationships.

“My probation officer had belief in my goals.”

“We had like a common interest.... half the time I was in there we were talking about motorbikes and what have you, and I’d come out of there sort of refreshed, if you know what I mean like. It did work well. I know probation officers aren’t meant to talk about that sort of stuff, but it done me good! I wasn’t a number, I was a person, so I respected him for that.”

“Some of the probation officers are there just for the job...but my probation officer was different, you know. She listened to me, she treated me like a human, I weren’t just a criminal sitting on the other side of the desk....She showed interest. And it think that’s what it was....I was happy to go to probation....it was the way she engaged with me, she didn’t speak down to me....she listened to the things I had to say.”

“Being known,

knowing yourself,

and having the support of

***someone to help you
find out what motivates
you and what your
strengths are.”***

The need for personal development

"Honestly, you're going to laugh, but counselling."

"Seriously, counselling."

"I think it's a good idea. Prison's stressful. Getting out is stressful... It's a good idea."

"Yeah."

"Probably have more positive impact than 90% of the things... the conditions they give you on licence anyway. Something that's going to be beneficial to help you address, do you know what I mean, your offending behaviour."

This dialogue occurred between the people who were inmates at the prison. Once the theme of personal development and psycho-social support was raised, the discussion became more earnest. The group went on to share thoughts on the genuine benefits they felt that this sort of support would have on them as individuals. They went on to explore what this could look like:

"Self esteem and valuing yourself, and understanding that just because you're not good at something doesn't mean you can't achieve it... I do feel ...that I can get to where I want to be...."

"I'm lucky I work for myself, I do something I love. But if I didn't do that I honestly don't know what I would do. I really don't. I think there's something inside each individual that needs to be looked at."

"Changed, tuned slightly. Tweaked."

"In here you've got time to structure people... you could work for this company, you could do that....something to work towards....you'll have your eye on some sort of a prize, rather than getting out and suddenly going from not being able to do anything to 'I could do anything I want'...kind of overwhelmed with it all."

"I think probation should set up a little umbrella company...that makes you take a look at yourself...If you take a look at yourself first and realise what you're all about , why you're doing it, what is actually making me this person, what do I want from life... If you can unwind that little knot which may be somewhere in your psyche and pull that apart, then maybe you'd be happy doing that."

Their opinions were echoed by those in the wider community.

"Some time to sit there and talk, you know."

"You're aware of the challenges, but you're not aware of how demanding the challenges are."

"Just a bit of support. Just a bit of help, you know, in getting back to my regular life...because it can be very daunting. Just a bit of guidance and pointing in the right direction. No matter how stubborn the person can be."

"I just did the GOALS training and it's really good...personal development...has helped me a lot. It's a different way of thinking, I've found, rather than being negative all the time. If you've got a goal you can get it, as and when. It's basically about self-esteem and valuing yourself...It's nice that you get the opportunity to actually make your own path. So I do feel that there's, yeah, excitement for the future that I can get to where I want to be."

*“Sometimes you’ve
got to find that
side road*

where you can turn off,

*...it’s just finding that side road,
you know.”*

Finding the side road - motivation for turning the corner

For those who had reached their turning point, or as one participant stated, had found “the side road”, participants shared that they had found a common sense of having a purpose. Their ‘purposes’ were all individual. This is to be expected, as desistance is widely understood as an ‘inherently individualised and subjective process’ (Weaver and McNeill, 2010), reinforcing the need for people to be treated as individuals and services to be tailored accordingly. Whilst interests and motivations themselves were individual, the commonality was that successes were all driven by motivation, a passion, a sense of purpose, and pride.

“When you’re doing it for yourself, cos you want to do it, the rewarding sense of pride you get from that you can’t...I can’t describe how that makes me feel...that feeling you get...you can’t put a price on that...there’s nothing like it.”

“Working in the food bank has stopped me taking drugs for the last 14 weeks... helped with my confidence, my self esteem... showed me that I have got something to offer, to contribute. I’m not just someone who’s going nowhere, an ex-crook y’know. Someone with drug issues y’know...There’s more to me as a person.... It sort of helped me rediscover that to be honest, and other people are noticing it too.”

Whatever it was; a role in running the food bank, becoming a gardener, a passion for working with young people, the desire to become a role model for their children, it was something that interested them enough to help them turn the corner. Research from Green and O’Brien (2007) reinforces this, demonstrating that finding out what someone cares about, and importantly that thing they care enough about to do something about, is a central driver to a successful and sustained rehabilitation.

“I’ve found something that works for me obviously.”

“I’ve got young children that I want to do my best for...”

A considerable challenge, however, is how to do this. How do rehabilitation services find out what it is that motivates someone to this level?

“Just don’t get the... the right sort of help.

*It’s always help
strangers think
you need*

...so people end up re-offending.”

Employing an asset based approach to rehabilitation?

First and foremost, it is critical that the person, the offender, is open to change. Theoretically, (Giordano et al, 2002) this is described as going through a 'cognitive transformation' within which the sense of openness to change is developed. The establishment of this openness provides a space to then explore the motivations of the person, and also their strengths.

"I want to progress in my life. I don't want to stay the person who was in prison...I now want to carry on and live the rest of my life."

A 'strengths based' approach, focussing on the positive attributes people have –skills, gifts, and talents- is the starting point for identifying motivating factors. It is, of course, critical for successful rehabilitation to address problems such as health issues, debt, addictions, and the offending behaviour itself. This is what we tend to do, the default starting point, undertaking interventions to address the professionally identified problems.

However, if problems are the main focus, solely or with extreme disproportion, it will leave little or no space to identify the person's own strengths and resources. Focussing on a person's issues and problems, and the support perceived to be 'right' in the normalised professional view, leaves little space or opportunity to find out what they are good at, what it is they care about, what resources they have, what it is that motivates them. And to really know what a person needs, you first have to find out what they already have (Russell, 2010).

**"Not everyone's going to want the same thing.
Everyone's interests are different.
Everyone's support needs are different.**

You can't tell what people want without investigating and finding out what they want."

"Sitting down and talking really. Working to people's strengths- better understanding.... more free access to the help when it's needed, sooner rather than once it's already too late and people are sort of at their lowest low."

A support worker needs to be able to connect with the person, to build a relationship to help them to both address issues and identify and nurture strengths. A highly skilled support worker should be able to connect well enough to co-productively address issues through identifying strengths, and nurturing next steps to desistance through developing these capacities and capabilities, or 'human capital' (Maruna and LeBel 2003). Once harnessed, both parties can work to find out how best these can contribute positively to society.

"My life has completely kind of changed round...I've found a new vocation in life, like... with the garden, and what have you...and that is what I do now. I think you need an interest, whatever it may be. I'd say it's paramount."

“My family.

I lost them for years

*...now I want them
back in my life.”*

Peers, friends, family and community

Professional intervention is important and, in certain circumstances, is the only option. Largely, evidence suggests that most things can be co-produced, that is, progress towards rehabilitation can be achieved by the professional practitioner and the person with the offending history working together to identify, plan and act. And, some things people can do for themselves, particularly after identifying what their capabilities are, their strengths, their 'human capital', and their motivations. Therefore the role of the professional is important, but the approach cannot achieve successful rehabilitation on its own, particularly in respect of re-offending, re-integration and engendering pro-social behaviours (Watson 2002). There has to be genuine engagement from the service user, and increasingly there is a need to build a wider societal bridge.

Offender management services have a key leadership role in helping to create these bridges, or 'bridging capital', incorporating other support services (such as housing, financial and employability services), including voluntary and community sector organisations, into the offender rehabilitation journey. But underpinning this is the need to ensure that, where appropriate, people are effectively connected back into families, communities, and community life, reducing social exclusion.

People live in communities, and ex-offenders will ultimately be living in a community. In fact, research proves that offenders need communities (Raynor and Robinson, 2009), as indeed do all people. Communitarian approaches to rehabilitation realise that these bonds and links need either to be created, continued, or repaired if whole reintegration is to be achieved (ibid.).

Therefore, desistance can only be really understood and achieved within the context of real life social relationships, and in particular those relationships that matter most to the person with the offending history (McNeill, 2006). Communities themselves have to some extent then be involved in the dialogue through developing, valuing and encouraging understanding of rehabilitative processes and how best to make reintegration a success for everybody.

In general, those in the study with strong social bonds, such as children, families, or close positive friendships manage rehabilitation better than those without, citing key people as the strongest influences to getting their lives on track.

A recognition of what life is, or might be, like without these social bonds was also voiced.

“There are people out there who... don't have anybody they can fall on... I'm lucky that when I do feel completely soul destroyed I've got my family to pick me up.”

“They go through prison lost, and come out just the same if not more lost.”

“I think that affects a lot of people to be honest. When I got out...loneliness and isolation, and all that. Couldn't handle it. And truth of the matter? I was suicidal and I wanted to go back to jail. Or be dead. One of the two. And...it's that cut and dry. That's how I felt and the position I was in.”

'Linking capital' was additionally identified as a key element: the development of wider relationships built on familiarity, circumstance, interest or place, providing networks that create and provide opportunity (Mc Neill, 2012). For the study's participants, this included linking with peers, seeing this as a potentially key relationship in moving forward in the rehabilitative journey.

“Meet with offenders who have turned life around.”

“It's from your peers. It's not from authority. A lot of people have problems with authority figures. People in the same situations. They can take people kind of under their wing, and give them a little bit of a helping hand, right, but not being a figure of authority...You're all on equal bases, there's no boss, you're all the same, just a bit of encouragement, from someone for your own status.”

The future for rehabilitation?

Most people stop offending at some point, with or sometimes without any particular intervention (McNeill 2006). The main focus, therefore, needs to be on how to ensure this happens quickly, so that rehabilitation is effective and that reintegration is successful and sustained.

Because individuals are part of a wider society, practitioners from professional services have to maintain this viewpoint, becoming the mediator for multiple elements of society. They subsequently need to ensure that focus is spent on securing community based relationships- creating, nurturing, and strengthening, as without this, there would be nothing to re-integrate into (Mc Neill, 2012).

All participants were asked what advice they would give to services responsible for rehabilitating offenders.

“Work on people skills- try to make people feel a bit more at ease, rather than under pressure. More of a connection...more connection and rapport.”

“Make sure that probation workers are trained in interpersonal relationships- just because you have personality clash, doesn’t mean you can’t have a productive relationship with someone.”

“Make sure that everyone gets treated as an individual. So, treating people individually...Helping someone grow personally.”

“It’s paramount to have something. An interest. You don’t know what you like until you try it. People should have the scope to try different things.”

“A bit of encouragement from someone of your own status.”

“Work is important but, you’ve got to also have a decent support network there as well.”

“Sometimes you should look at it from our side. Try and walk a mile in our shoes. It’s hard work every day. It’s always a struggle.”

Summary:

The impact of labels and barriers

The huge societal and governmental pressures upon unemployed people to find employment are growing, yet the label of a criminal record creates a barrier that few employers are willing to break down. Despite well documented evidence on the positive impact of getting and retaining employment on re-offending rates, the employment chances of many people with criminal histories remains low.

The need for personal development

Supporting individuals to take a look at themselves, understand their behaviours, develop self esteem and develop positive behaviours is for many a critical step for sustained rehabilitation. For many leaving prison, they are entering into a changing world, and so guidance for being able to cope, manage and thrive is essential. For some of the participants this was achieved through sessions inside prison, and for those who had completed their prison or community sentence it was achieved through locally delivered courses like 'GOALS'.

Personalise support and connect with individuals

Positive relationships with offender managers, and subsequently finding intrinsic motivations, were identified as the key points to turning the corner. Central to the success of the relationships was the establishment of a 'connection', embedding mutual respect, humanising the process, empathising, and having compassion. Any reluctance to engage with the probation process was dramatically heightened when attitudes of practitioners were negative, impersonal, coercive and hierarchical.

Participatory approaches should be prioritised

Approaches to designing and implementing probation and rehabilitation should be more participatory, and less coercive, both for successful individual rehabilitation and for reintegration. A co-productive approach will best allow for the appropriate professional support, and provide better links and bridges into communities and wider society for successful reintegration.

Identify motivations to finding 'the side road'

Skilled support that is tailored to an individual will better allow for the identification of a person's interest in something and establish a sense of purpose. As a result, through finding out what someone really cares about, there becomes the opportunity to identify and nurture motivations and pro-social behaviours.

Identify strengths and assets

Employing an 'asset based' lens to approaching rehabilitation allows for the recognition of the strengths and assets people already have (human capital), in addition to focussing on deficits, such as the things people need or lack. This can be difficult as many people with offending histories may be extremely disconnected from an internal understanding of what they are good at (for one person in this study, it had taken him 50 years to identify his strengths). It is therefore unlikely to be a quick process, rather requiring a long term approach. However, when a person is able to identify their own human capital, it results in the increased and sustained demonstration of pro-social behaviours.

Offenders exist within communities

People all ultimately live in communities and so people must be linked into communities, positively, to ensure a sustained reintegration process. There will always be a need for professional support, but the role of social networks should not be ignored or underestimated. The central role of close bonds and community links play an integral rehabilitative role, and therefore should feature centrally within the process.



Methodology

Participating organisations

All interviewed participants were associated with one of the following organisations based in Norfolk, UK; Access Community Trust, Norfolk Youth Offending Team, LEAP, The Purfleet Trust, The Baseline Centre, HM Prison Norwich.

Other interview participants were recruited from the 4women centre in Norwich, and from YMCA Norfolk in Great Yarmouth, but were ultimately unable to take part.

The online survey was circulated within the N-ARRO network of organisations, and it is therefore assumed that survey participants were linked to one of these organisations in Norfolk.

Deliverables

- Written report of findings from interviews, focus group and online survey.
- An audio 'case study' of the interviews and focus group.
- A summarised 'trailer length' audio piece, presenting key themes and findings.
- Verbal presentation to the stakeholder group of agencies.

Participation criteria

The research brief outlined 2 groups of participants. The first should have had an offending history- that is, time served in prison or time spent undertaking a community order. These participants took part in the one to one interview.

The second group were people who were nearing completion of their prison sentence. These participants formed the focus group, held inside the prison.

Participant recruitment

Participants were identified using a snowball sampling method. This approach relies on participants being nominated via a small group of informants who have already expressed a willingness to support the study, including both service partners and the people with offending histories. This approach is particularly useful in identifying participants who would otherwise be difficult to identify or locate. The approach does however limit control over the sample and impacts on representativeness, with sole reliance on the 'nominators' for participants. As the research was commissioned as an insight study however, it was agreed that this approach would be appropriate and suitable for the intended scope.

Participants

47 people contributed to the study in total. 18 people took part in the interviews and focus group (including the scoping workshop). 15 were men and three were women. They ranged in age from early 20s to late 60s and were all living in Norfolk. 29 people contributed anonymously to the online survey, via a range support organisations in the N-ARRO network in Norfolk.

Question scoping workshop with stakeholders

An empowerment based approach to research design was taken. This ensured that whilst guided by N-ARRO, the research was informed and shaped by people meeting participant criteria. An interactive scoping workshop session was held with 5 such participants. During the workshop, themes and research questions for the study were explored, critiqued and verified by the participants. This helped in making sure the pitch, tone, and angle of the subsequent questions used for the study were appropriate.

Interviews

Information was gathered using semi-structured interviews, which were informal in nature. This provided the framework within which to broaden out conversations about a range of issues impacting on the lives of offenders. All of the nine interviewees had completed their prison/ community sentence.

Focus group

A small group of participants were 'interviewed' together in a Focus Group. The social setting, and subsequent interaction, is useful as a method to draw out common experiences, attitudes and beliefs that may not be presented in a one to one setting. The Focus Group was held with seven people who were inmates at HM Prison Norwich. All were preparing for release within 1-4 months.

Survey

An online survey (Survey Monkey) was utilised to extend the reach of the insight study. This was distributed amongst partnership networks across Norfolk. During the month that the survey was live 29 responses were gathered.

Audio recording

Audio recordings were conducted as an additional research tool. Using this approach the team were able to capture the authenticity of the participant voice, adding further context and enhancing strength and depth to the impact of findings.

Questions

The study aimed to find out about personal experiences. Interviews and focus group discussions were therefore framed in the form of a 'journey', and participants were asked to share their stories. The following questions provided the guiding basis for a) the one to one interviews and b) the in-prison focus group. Not all questions were asked as their usage depended on the natural direction of the interview conversation.

One to one interviews

1. Tell us in your own words your story, or your journey, since you completed your prison/community sentence?
2. How well prepared were you when you came out of prison/finished your community sentence?
3. What has most surprised you about your experiences since you finished your sentence?
4. What did you least expect about your journey?
5. Can you tell us about things that have changed for you positively?
6. Can you tell us about things that have changed for you negatively?
7. Thinking about your own experiences, or those of people you know, what are the causes for people to reoffend?
8. What makes it easier to not re-offend? What could prevent re-offending?
9. Would a different level of support have helped you along your ideal route?
10. In prison/during your community sentence, what would have helped that wasn't there? What helped you the most?
11. One your sentence had finished, what would have helped, that wasn't there? What helped you the most?
12. If you were able to design the support and assistance available to offenders completing sentences, what would it look like? 3 key things.

In-prison focus group

1. What are you currently doing to prepare for leaving prison?
2. What things do the prison do/provide to help you prepare?
3. If you were able to get more/different help to prepare, what would it be?
4. When the time comes to be released, what do you think you will be most looking forward to?
5. When the time comes to be released, what do you think you will be most concerned about?
6. Other than help in getting adequate accommodation and finances when you get released, what other help/support would you find useful to have access to?
7. If you were able to design the support and assistance

available before leaving prison and after being released, what would it look like? 3 key things.

Survey

1. In your experience what are the 3 biggest challenges in going straight?
2. What made you decide to change or would stop you from re-offending?
3. What things, people or services have had a positive effect on your journey away from crime and why?
4. If it was your job to help people turn away from crime, what 3 things would you do?
5. If you could turn back the clock, what advice would you give yourself?

Analysis

All of the audio content from the interviews and the focus group session was transcribed. A simple coding method was then utilised to identify and label concepts and themes, attitudes and emotions, terms and keywords, throughout all of the audio recordings. Once identified these sections of the transcription were grouped, and further explored in parallel with complementary sections of transcription. The findings presented feature the key themes, via the use of a small selection of information gathered in the study.

Acknowledgements

The study would like to extend sincere thanks to all of the participants and support staff from John Room House, Norfolk Youth Offending Team, LEAP, the Purfleet Trust, Baseline Centre, and HMP Norwich for their time and sincerity.

Additional thanks to the NARRO commissioners of the study, Chrissy Chalmers and Claire Leborgne, for your support and guidance.

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CoSocial is a team of specialist practitioners working in the field of social and community development. We believe that a community development approach to addressing the needs of people across the globe is vital in shaping healthier, prosperous, more sustainable and resilient communities for the 21st century. CoSocial offers high quality support in all areas of social and community development, including; service design and delivery, project scoping and development, bespoke training, participatory research and evaluation.

With it's origins in the urban centre of Great Yarmouth in Norfolk, CoSocial is committed to making sure development initiatives thrive in the borough. Many of the communities in Great Yarmouth continue to face some of the most challenging social, economic and environmental circumstances in the UK. Income generated from CoSocial is rooted directly back into supporting grass-roots initiatives across the borough.

Research team

Research for the insight study was conducted by CoSocial.



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