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St Giles Trust
Peer Advice Project: An Evaluation



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Peer Advice Project:

An Evaluation

A report by

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SUMMARY

St Giles Trust's *Peer Advice Project* is an innovative project focusing on the resettlement of offenders. It has three key elements. First the project aims to advance the skills and employability of prisoners by offering a recognised qualification (NVQ [National Vocational Qualification] Level 3 Advice and Guidance). Second the Trust provides a housing advice service to a number of prisons in London and the South of England, training and supervising serving prisoners to deliver the housing advice. Third, as well as peer advice in prison, St Giles Trust offers employment experience for offenders on their release from custody via their involvement in mentoring schemes, including 'Through the Gates' project to support the resettlement of their peers.

The Peer Advice Project tests out the concept that prisoners themselves can be an important resource in the rehabilitation and resettlement processes, and thus serves as a counterbalance to the widespread belief that programmes are something that are "done" to offenders by specialists. Consistent with desistance theory, the Project emphasises prisoners' 'agency' – where giving up offending is an active choice made by offenders – as an important ingredient of success. An important feature of the St Giles Trust Project is that there is a 'multiplier effect' whereby benefits that accrue to individuals from their work as Peer Advisors are matched by benefits to the recipients of their advice.

This report presents the results of a 'process evaluation'. That is, it was conducted to help the St Giles Trust develop and fine-tune the prison Peer Advice Project and its community services by describing how the scheme was working in practice. It was not conceived of as an experiment to quantify the service's impact in terms of crime reduction. Nevertheless, many of the findings point to the importance and value of the work of St Giles Trust. The evaluation of the service has included following a cohort of Peer Advisors over time, interviewing clients and volunteers in the community, collating project activity data and highlighting operational issues via observation and interviews with staff, Peer Advisors and key stakeholders.

Benefits of participation

- The Peer Advisors were very positive about their participation in the prison Peer Advice Project. They considered it a more useful and fulfilling job than other prison work; not only did they gain the NVQ, but the Peer Advice work helped them increase their skills and self-confidence, and build a work ethic and a sense of control over their lives. Peer Advisors often said that involvement in the scheme had turned their lives around (a perception shared by staff). They regarded themselves as good role models for other prisoners and they often saw the opportunity to help others as an advantage of the work and a motivation for involvement.
- Offenders who had gained their NVQ qualification with the St Giles Trust were deployed in a range of voluntary positions within prison and in the community; including as advisors for the Citizen's Advice Bureau, prison race relations advisors, Insiders and as workers for the 'Through the Gates' services in the community.

Service delivery in prisons

- Prison and Probation staff and other professionals we interviewed were largely satisfied with the training and supervision of peer advisors, although marketing and advertising of the service is important to ensure that new members of prison staff and all relevant agencies are aware of what help it provides. Stakeholders' key concerns related to the potential for bullying or intimidation and breaches of confidentiality. While neither issue has been a serious problem for the Peer Advice service, this underlines the need for regular and consistent supervision of peer advisors and also the routine monitoring of instances where confidentiality has been breached or a Peer Advisor has succumbed to intimidation from other prisoners to show stakeholders that such instances are relatively rare.
- Delivery of the prison Peer Advice services is influenced by prison environment. The number of offenders from which to recruit for the service is limited by internal security factors. Access to education, training and employment (ETE)

provided by St Giles Trust is mainly available to offenders who already possess some basic skills and/or previous employment experience. However, in order to provide quality housing- and Peer Advice services for all offenders then this kind of selection criteria is important.

Resettlement

- The community projects run by St Giles Trust are an important and integral part of its service. They extend employment support, allowing offenders to develop the skills they gained in prison and to get some 'real-life' work experience. In addition, providing help with job searches and applications is essential when many offenders have little experience of job seeking and the application process. Participation in volunteer work placements also had the practical benefit of keeping offenders occupied and giving them a daily structure after prison. This was often credited as the impetus for changing direction and stopping them from reoffending.
- Our interviewees working as community-based workers were in no doubt as to the importance of peer support for offenders on release from custody. Almost without exception interviewees considered their 'peer' status to be an advantage because they had experienced first-hand many of the problems faced by their 'clients' and could relate to the challenges of life after prison.
- Yet the community service was limited by funding uncertainties: the timing of available grants was an important factor in who got access to employment opportunities. Inevitably this led to disappointment for some who had expectations raised, only to be told there were no volunteer or employment placements available.
- St Giles Trust is a positive work environment for ex-offenders. The ethos of this organisation, particularly their acceptance of ex-offenders and belief in their potential, was hugely appreciated by our interviewees. Yet, it also created some fear about moving on – unsurprisingly, as we know offenders can face

considerable barriers in the wider job market. However, in order to free up space for newly released prisoners and to extend access to community placements, it seems important to plan and focus in more detail on how offenders might gain employment elsewhere.

- Despite acceptance by St Giles Trust, other employers and agency staff, with whom Peer Advisors had come into contact with as part of their mentoring activities, were much more ambivalent about working with ex-offenders. Our interviewees were keenly aware of the stigma of their criminal history.

Service developments

- Over the past year – since our fieldwork ended – St Giles Trust has set clearer goals for the monitoring of their community services in order to illustrate to stakeholders and funders what has been done to get offenders into work and to note all instances of successful resettlement. They have been able to collate information for this report, based on their improved monitoring, to chart the journey of recent volunteers and mentors from prison to St Giles Trust and beyond. This helps to account for their achievements in this area and it will also challenge views about ex-offenders being difficult or unreliable employees.

A stock-taking

St Giles Trust's Peer Advice Project is an innovative scheme illustrating a new paradigm for resettlement services for offenders. Although our study was not designed to quantify benefits in terms of reduced reoffending, the perspectives of both staff and participants strongly suggest to us that mentoring schemes of this sort are very promising. That they bring benefits to the Peer Advisors seems highly likely. Although we have not examined the benefits that accrue to the recipients of their advice in a quantitative way, and this – challenging – research task still needs to be done, our qualitative endeavours suggest that clients of the scheme are very positive about the support they received, and especially appreciative of receiving help from someone who has 'walked in their shoes'.

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BACKGROUND

The statistics on the many issues offenders face when they are released from custody are daunting. The majority have a range of health and social problems including, limited skills, education or employment experience, debt and homelessness and often substance misuse problems¹⁻⁵. Resettlement services have to take a holistic approach to cater for these various needs. In addition to practical help, offenders have to be motivated to sustain positive changes in their lives and services like St Giles Trust have a crucial role in supporting offenders through likely set-backs⁶⁻⁸.

St Giles Trust's Peer Advice Project and community Through the Gates services test out the concept that prisoners themselves can be an important resource in the rehabilitation and resettlement processes, and thus serves as a counterbalance to the widespread belief that programmes are something that are "done" to offenders by specialists. A great deal of effort has been invested over the last fifteen years in developing 'interventions' for offenders. Whilst this is to be welcomed, it has brought with it a tendency to apply a 'one size fits all' approach to resettlement work. Research that actually asks ex-offenders what helped them to stop offending suggests that doing so is a complex, often protracted process, in which prisoners' own sense of agency is a critical factor. Giving up offending is an active choice made by offenders; and many events and processes help them to this choice. The impact of peer pressure – whether to continue offending or to desist – may be very important. An interesting feature of the St Giles Trust Project is that there is a 'multiplier effect' whereby benefits that accrue to individuals from their work as Peer Advisors are matched by benefits to the recipients of their advice.

Mentoring interventions have become popular over the past decade as a way to increase community participation and reduce social exclusion among marginalised and 'at risk' groups⁹⁻¹¹. Schemes targeting offenders have been used as part of safer custody in the form of 'Samaritans' and 'Listeners', in prison education and in preparation for release from custody in Through the Gate services. In 2004 the Forum on Prisoner Education surveyed 139 prisons and found that peer mentoring projects were being used in the majority (116) (House of Commons Select Committee 2004-5)^{12, 13}.

Mentors or peers offer forms of support to the offender that draw on 'common sense' ideas rather than on a body of professional knowledge. Often a basic distinction is made between 'mentors' and 'peers' or 'Peer Advisors', with the latter sharing some key characteristics and life experience, here, experience of offending and life in prison. There is certainly some demand for Peer Advisors with nearly three quarters of 150 offenders surveyed by the Prince's Trust preferring their Advisor to be an ex-offender¹³. In addition, a recent Government review of volunteering across the Criminal Justice System has highlighted the importance of involving 'service users' as volunteers, because of their knowledge and experience¹⁴.

The impact of mentoring on participants and recipients has been hard to measure, particularly in terms of reductions in reoffending^{15,16}; however, so-called 'soft outcomes' have included: better employment prospects through opportunities for vocational training and work experience; increased self-esteem and confidence; and provision of positive role models¹⁷⁻¹⁹.

There has also been a recent emphasis on 'strengths-based resettlement' whereby community needs are met in tandem with developing the talents of offenders and involving them in interesting and useful volunteer and community work. This enables offenders to make a positive contribution to local communities and can be an important prelude to their re-integration into society^{6, 20,21}.

St Giles Trust Peer Advice Project

The St Giles Trust Peer Advice Project comprises three key elements on which our evaluation has focused. First the Project aims to advance the skills and employability of prisoners by offering a recognised qualification (the NVQ [National Vocational Qualification], Level 3 Advice, Information and Guidance). Second the Trust provides a housing advice service to prisons in London and the South of England, training and supervising serving prisoners to deliver the housing advice. Third, as well as Peer Advice in prison, St Giles Trust offers employment experience for offenders on their release from custody via their involvement in mentoring schemes, including Through the Gates project to help newly released prisoners.

Aims and Objectives of the evaluation

The study reported here was a 'process evaluation'. That is, it was conducted to help St Giles Trust develop and fine-tune the Peer Advice Project by describing how the scheme was working in practice. It was not conceived of as an experiment to quantify the scheme's impact in terms of crime reduction. Nevertheless, many of the findings point to the importance and value of St Giles Trust's work.

The aims of the evaluation were to examine:

- The use of Peer Advisors as a method for delivering housing and other resettlement support to fellow prisoners.
- The benefits for offenders, of participation in these types of schemes and their potential for expanding employment opportunities and supporting resettlement on release from custody.

The objectives of the evaluation were to:

- Provide a thorough and detailed description of the operation of St Giles Trust Prisoner Peer Advice services, including the community resettlement project.
- Describe the recruitment, training and supervision of Peer Advisors as well as the extent and nature of resettlement work conducted by this group with offenders.
- Examine the benefits derived by offenders from participation in the prison Peer Advice and community resettlement services and by recipients of these services.
- Identify the key factors that facilitate or impede service delivery.
- Review the extent, nature and quality of service monitoring data and examine how these and other data sources might be used and enhanced for a future outcomes study.

Methods

We were tasked with evaluating the NVQ training and prison Peer Advice Project at four prisons¹ in the south east of England, chosen because they were the most established projects at the time the evaluation started. The study was conducted over a three year period from September 2006 to October 2009. We used a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. In brief, our data collection included:

- 73 semi-structured interviews with 34 Peers Advisors (who formed our cohort of offender Peer Advisors based in prison and in the community).
- 64 semi-structured interviews with St Giles Trust staff; Prison Officers, resettlement, governors; Probation, and CARAT and other advice workers based in prison.
- 25 interviews with clients of the prison Peer Advice service.
- 4 focus groups with volunteers and clients of the community resettlement service, involving a total of 23 participants.
- A focus group with clients of the prison Peer Advice service.
- Observations of NVQ training and the delivery of Peer Advice work in prison.
- Observations of mentoring work in the community.
- Review of operational documents.
- Review of project monitoring.
- Collation of activity monitoring for prison and community projects.

Report structure

This report outlines key findings from the evaluation, highlighting operational and service delivery issues and benefits accrued. Section 1 describes the prison Peer Advice service, focusing on good practice for delivering a prison peer-based initiative such as this. Section 2 looks at how St Giles Trust supports the resettlement of offenders in the community through work placement, mentoring and job brokerage. Section 3 presents a view from offenders about the support they received from St Giles Trust. Our final section notes how these findings may inform service developments.

¹ 3 category B prisons (male), 1 Youth Offending Institution (male).

1. DEVELOPING GOOD PRACTICE FOR 'PEER' BASED INTERVENTIONS IN PRISONS

Here we highlight, via examples from our process evaluation, good practice pointers and the best 'conditions' for delivering peer-based interventions in custody². The prison environment throws up particular challenges for schemes like St Giles Trust's Peer Advice service as there is always the tension between engaging with prisoners and managing risk. We have focused on the ways in which St Giles Trust has worked within these parameters to try to build confidence in their service and ensure benefits for all involved.

Offering a recognisable qualification

There are two key aspects to the prison Peer Advice service:

- The NVQ training and employment of prisoners to enhance skills and prospects for resettlement.
- The provision of an effective housing advice service for prisoners.

The NVQ Level 3³ training in Advice, Information and Guidance (AIG) is provided by St Giles Trust in 18 prisons. This training comprises information about housing and benefits legislation as well as tutoring on effective interviewing, listening and questioning techniques. These skills are developed via role-play, learning about body language, writing essays and completing coursework on government policy and housing legislation. The Trust can promote its housing advice service on the basis that the Peer Advisors receive this type of training in preparation for their role as housing advice worker.

NVQ 'graduates' are also employed in other voluntary positions in prisons, and in the community (see also Section 2). For example, our interviewees have included prisoners who have used their NVQ to become advice workers for the Citizens Advice Bureau

² We have fed back specific process issues to St Giles Trust via internal interim reports over the course of the evaluation.

³ NVQ is Monitored by an external assessment centre, Advice UK and is City & Guilds accredited.

and Job Centre Plus, volunteers for a prisoner literacy project Toe by Toe⁴, Race Relations Peer Advisors⁵ and to help prison staff with the 'induction' of new prisoners.

Yet, the idea of offering this qualification was instigated by the desire to give prisoners something useful that had practical application beyond prison. This is important to ensure that the relationship between Peer Advisor and manager or scheme is reciprocal and that the Advisors' development needs are factored into peer-based initiatives such as this (also discussed in Sections 2 and 3):

I was really sick of disadvantaged people being given "Mickey Mouse" qualifications that mean nothing in the real world. If we were going to use these guys [for Peer Advice service] give them a proper qualification. With the NVQ, at least they might get a chance for a proper job in the voluntary sector (Senior Manager).

Staff commonly noted the way in which participation in the NVQ had helped to change positively offenders' perception of themselves:

It's getting that qualification and holding that bit of paper and the realisation that actually, they can change their life. And that's quite marked... You actually see a change and it's so satisfying to see people who have spent their entire life in and out of prison... (Assessor 1).

Many of them have had limited education experience or bad. And I'm absolutely determined that this is a good experience and it's positive and it always has been. So that's good. It means they're not frightened of more... And some of them have gone on to do diplomas in different subjects and so that's been really good, really positive. Self-esteem? Massive change in them. Absolutely amazing. It's almost visual. I had an SO [Senior Prison Officer] come to say to me the other day that she couldn't believe the difference in her orderly (Assessor 2).

Table I.1 shows the number of prisoners starting and completing the NVQ and working as Peer Advisors in our evaluation sites. General performance data for St Giles Trust, for the financial year April 2008 to March 2009, shows that across all eighteen participating prisons, 145 prisoners gained their NVQ Level 3 in Advice, Information and Guidance.

Prisoners are frequently transferred from one prison establishment to another. This often made it difficult for prisoners to complete their training and was one of the reasons for failure to complete the NVQ (see Table I.1). Prison transfers have been identified more generally as an impediment to skills training in prison²². However, St

⁴ The scheme recruits volunteer literate prisoners to teach other prisoners to read.

⁵ Provides advice on issues such as immigration

Giles Trust assessors, whenever possible, tried to ensure that these individuals completed their training portfolio. Although this was dependent on other factors including where they were transferred to and how far into their training they were at point of transfer. For example, in Prison1 four of the 19 non-completers were as a result of transfers and of those two were helped by St Giles staff to complete their NVQ post transfer. This was also the case for one of eight prisoners transferred from Prison2. Of the remainder, three were transferred too early in the NVQ process to allow for follow-up, contact was lost with three and one prisoner was sacked prior to his transfer.

Table 1.1: NVQ throughput- July 2007 to November 2009*

	Started NVQ	Peer Advisor	Completed NVQ	Ongoing	Non Completion	Drop-out Security Breach	Drop-out Transfer /release
Prison1	44	30	15	10	19	8	11
Prison2	63	12	43	4	16	11	5
Prison3**	50	31	32	11	7	3	4

* Courses run at different times in each prison.

**Data for Prison3 incorporates courses run at two other prisons where the Prison3 team also operate

Gaining the support of prison staff

Support of prison staff is crucial to the operation of the Peer Advice service. This includes all staff not just those in senior positions. Wing officers, for example, were tasked with supervising the movement of Peer Advisors around the prison. Our interviews with the St Giles Trust prison teams suggest initial opposition often ‘softened’ when the Prison Officers could see the benefits of the scheme:

When we first started in [PRISON] it was a whole new concept... So yes, it was difficult, sort of to get going, you know, having inmates going out and doing interviews, freedom of movement around the walkways, you know. We had a few governors who were onside, we had a few POs [prison officers] that were onside. We had a few POs that were dead against it. Some of those POs are still there and now they’ve sort of changed their attitudes towards St Giles, they see that, you know, the benefits of actually having peer advisers going round (Service Manager).

Building good, supportive relationships with individual Prison Officers meant problems could be dealt with quickly, although regular change of prison staff also meant that such relationships could be frequently disrupted:

I found it quite a struggle...we had a different deputy resettlement governor whom I had no contact with. But now that [NEW RESETTLEMENT GOVERNOR] is in place, he seems very keen and helps out wherever he can. I had some issues with the security department... but now that's all sorted out because [RESETTLEMENT GOVERNOR] got involved and the security issues have kind of ironed themselves out (Service Manager).

The Trust has used various methods to engage with Prison Officers, including:

- Regular meetings with resettlement staff
- Prisoner advisors and prison officers doing their NVQ qualification together. This was initially a cost-cutting decision but worked also to raise awareness among the officers about the mentoring scheme and training involved.

Key external stakeholders we interviewed as part of the evaluation⁶ suggested regular promotion of the service could help keep other agencies and prison staff up-to-date with service developments and act as a 'refresher' in terms of knowledge about services provided and appropriate referrals. This could also help new staff become acquainted with the service:

I get muddled about what they do... Anything to do with housing we just refer them [to the Peer Advice team] (Probation Officer).

[Sometimes] I can forget their remit and referral criteria (Housing agency worker).

⁶ External stakeholders included Prison Officers, offender management and resettlement governors and staff from agencies including Job Centre Plus, Probation and CARAT teams.

Managing risk and service quality

Selection procedures

Security regulations are necessary and integral to the organisation of the prisons. Selection procedures for the Peer Advice service contribute towards 'quality control'. There are two levels of selection to become a Peer Advisor; prison security and interview by St Giles Trust. For example, offenders are required to obtain security clearance⁷; submit to a voluntary drugs test; have basic literacy skills; be on hold for anything from 6 to 9 months⁸; and be enthusiastic about the work. These selection criteria are important when aiming to deliver an effective advice service for prisoners and to instil confidence in the service among stakeholders and clients. However it does mean that the pool of offenders who meet these criteria is limited. This can create, at times, a shortage of Peer Advisors which in turn can affect service delivery.

In one site, for example, a member of staff reported that of 50 prisoners who applied to do the NVQ only four were cleared by prison security. St Giles Trust staff also noted how they had adapted working practice around this to avoid wasting time and resources:

On this last course we had well over 30 applicants, but what we did this time is we sent all the people that applied to security [to be security cleared] first, prior to interviewing them, whereas in the past what we've done is interviewed, and then sent them to security, and then they've got lots of sort of knock-backs from security (Service Manager).

Security and selection processes also meant that the service was *mainly* recruiting 'lower risk' offenders who already had some basic skills and often some previous experience of employment. This has also been the case for other peer-based initiatives in prisons²³. The data available on the qualifications and previous employment experience of those registering to do an NVQ are provided in Table 1.2. There were significant missing data here so we have included only those where information on qualifications and previous employment were available. Qualifications included GCSEs/O'levels (10 in each site); A' Levels (5) and degree level (4). However other qualifications included NVQs in other subjects and City & Guilds qualifications, many of which may have been achieved through prison training and education⁹.

⁷ Be cleared by security to work in different areas of the prison.

⁸ Agree to stay in that particular prison for the specified time i.e. forgoing reclassification to another prison.

⁹ It is also likely that the missing data contained prisoners with no qualifications or employment experience.

Table 1.2: Education and employment background of NVQ candidates

	Qualifications	Previous employment experience
Prison1*	17/23	20/21
Prison2**	27/28	16/16
Prison3***	13/15	20/23

Missing data *Qualifications =21 and previous employment =23

**Qualifications =35 and previous employment = 47

***Qualifications =20 and previous employment = 12

Extent and nature of involvement of prisoners in service delivery

Security also had an impact on the extent to which the Peer Advisors could be involved in delivering the housing service. These ‘restrictions’ were not consistent across the prisons. For example, at one site, Advisors were not allowed to use a telephone which meant they could not arrange appointments with hostels or benefit agencies; tasks undertaken by staff. In another site the Advisors were able to make telephone inquiries but a member of staff had to dial the outside number before they could proceed with the call. This slowed things down as Advisors waited for staff to become available. Our interviewees reported feeling frustrated by such arrangements as they were unable to work through each stage of the process.

Appropriate training, support and supervision

Supporting and supervising the day-to-day work of the Advisors and overseeing the quality of advice they provide to offenders is another key aspect of quality control.

The large majority of the Peer Advisors were happy with the level of training, support and supervision they received to fulfil their role as advice workers. After passing their NVQ, they often shadowed more experienced Advisors and continued to be supported by the assessors and the case managers who in turn were supported by a housing manager at the Trust headquarters:

I don't need any more support, I get all I need (Ned).

Anytime I've had a problem or been insecure, I've always felt ok about going into the office to say 'hey I need a bit of help' (Carrel).

Someone who I can go to with a problem or what-not, is probably [assessor A], even though [A] wasn't a caseworker or manager... but was the NVQ assessor, I mean, a lot of time, you know, [A] was somebody we turned to even to do with the housing work (Kev).

Bullying and breaches of security

Our external stakeholders were also largely satisfied that the service provided appropriate training and support to the Peer Advisors. However, they raised two *potential* problems:

- The potential for the peer advisors to be bullied
- Maintaining the confidentiality of the service

The potential for the Peer Advisors to be subject to bullying or pressure to traffic items such as drugs or mobile 'phones through the system was a concern about the *possible* opportunity rather than a worry about the number of such incidents. Bullying and intimidation are issues about which the St Giles Trust staff are well aware, and these are dealt with in recruitment interviews and in training. Peer Advisors have enhanced access to different areas of the prison in order to undertake their advice work and in every evaluation site there were instances of prisoners being sacked as a result of security breaches. For example, these have included positive drugs tests, unauthorised movement around the prison and having possession of a mobile phone. However, these were not frequent, given the numbers working for the service and the length of time the Peer Advice service had been operating (e.g. in one prison since 2000).

Current monitoring procedures capture reasons for 'drop-out'. This should continue to note instances where training or employment was terminated because of a security breach and what that breach entailed. Being able to present stakeholders with the prevalence of such incidents will help allay concerns. In addition, prompt action in response to security breaches helps maintain the credibility of the service (see also Table I.1).

Confidentiality

In prison issues of confidentiality are deemed critical to the work of all staff. The type of information Peer Advisors request from clients such as: home address, national insurance number and offence details is potentially sensitive information. It was important, therefore, to find out how peers advisors were perceived to deal with confidentiality by personnel from other agencies. Training was seen as key to avoiding breaches of confidentiality and all Peer Advisors sign a confidentiality agreement. We have no record of any serious breach of confidentiality having taken place at any of the evaluation sites.

The benefits

Peer Advisors as an important resource

The Peer Advisors *can* work up to eight hours per day. They see offenders at induction where initial housing needs are assessed. They help clients to save or close existing tenancies and all associated activities such as help with form-filling, advice on claiming housing benefit and tenancy restrictions. Advisors can also refer offenders to a range of agencies inside and outside the prison, including Job-Centre Plus and CARAT teams. The amount of contact an Advisor has with each client varies depending on their housing and other needs.

Peer Advisors allow 'professional' time to be deployed elsewhere. One staff member described how prison management began to recognise the value of the scheme when they saw how much work the Advisors actually did:

They [Peer Advisors] were reducing the workload of the officers and they realised that. Suddenly they had a team of peers to refer them to, so you know, that sold it to the prison because it helped them meet their targets (Senior Manager).

And our Peer Advisor interviewees also stressed the cost-effectiveness of their work:

In [Prison I] at least three-quarters of people who had problems with housing wouldn't have been helped because the prison officers ... lack the manpower to be able to do the assessments and act upon the information that we got through the assessment (Cain).

Obviously, they only have to pay us £40 a week between four of us instead of however much it would be [to pay the officers] (Mike).

Benefits for the Peer Advisors

We deal more fully with the benefits of involvement in these schemes in Section 3. However we note four key things here that Peer Advisors said when asked about their participation in the project. First, was the perception of their Advisor role as fulfilling, particularly with its emphasis on helping fellow prisoners and when compared to other jobs available in prison:

I just thought it would be a good thing to do especially in prison because there's some pretty dead end jobs in prison...all the other jobs, cleaning and working in the laundry or in the store, you're not doing anything really. You're just passing the time. But with the peer advising job, I personally felt that I was helping and it was helping other people (Jason).

Just helping people who were in a situation, because I've been in social services care, I've been in hostels, I've been in bed and breakfasts, I've been homeless for a time, I've been a drug addict, I've been an alcoholic, you know, and when I came to jail and I changed all of that round and that I just thought, well if I can help someone like even a little bit by like keeping them their house so they don't go off the rails, or when they get out they've not got [to] sleep in the cold (Mike).

Second, interviewees noted longer-term advantages such as gaining some work experience and qualifications:

What made the decision for me to be a peer adviser and do the NVQ was, number one you do work while in prison, number two you got qualifications, three there were placements you could work once you came out even if initially it was voluntary... I've been to prison a number of times and I don't know any other organisations in prison that offer you that (Cain).

... I was eager to get going...I thought I needed to do this for myself, not for anyone else really, because I wanted a career, and thought, while I'm in prison there's no point me just lazing round doing nothing, and I want to get somewhere in life, so the best way to do it is just to start as fast as I could really (Steve).

Third, their involvement in the project had increased their self-confidence through work activities such as talking on the telephone with housing and other agencies or liaising with staff from prison and probation teams. Learning office 'etiquette' and helping to enhance a work ethic were also reported:

The most challenging thing I ever have done in here was first being on the phone to people and that, God, I was in a mess, I was sweating and that...I'm alright on it now, I can talk to them, and just talk to them for hours and that just chatting (Steve).

I've normally done manual work, [so] working in an office is totally different. It's taught me to be punctual, it's taught me to be concise, and it's taught me a good work ethic (Samuel).

And fourth, almost without exception they considered their 'peer' status to be an advantage because they had experienced first-hand many of the problems faced by their 'clients' and could relate to the various challenges of life after prison:

...being able to say that I have been in that situation myself, I have been behind a prison door and I have fell back into the cycle myself. I think it is a wonderful way of interacting with the client and getting as much information and building up a trusting relationship with them (Nicola).

...You know, the prisoners out there know that we are prisoners as well, so, you know, straightaway I think that we've got a rapport with them, and that, you know, possibly that we can talk to them and they're a bit more at ease with us (Darrel).

It definitely works well because clients trust other prisoners more than they would prison officers or other civilian staff (Jason).

Summary

- Offering mentors a recognisable qualification which would have use beyond prison was an important aspect of the St Giles Trust service.
- The success of the Peer Advice service can be dependent on prison staff at all levels, from the Governor to the wing officer, and regular promotion of the scheme helps ensure that new members of prison staff and other agencies working in the prison are aware of the service.
- The advice service operates under prison security regulations which can create challenges for those delivering and receiving the service. For example, restrictions can be imposed by security departments on who can take part and prisoners can often be transferred from one establishment to another at short notice, resulting in failure to complete their qualification.
- Access to the employment and training provided by St Giles Trust tends to be available to lower risk offenders who already possess some basic skills, although this is important to ensure a good quality of service is provided to offenders.
- Offenders gained many benefits from involvement in the scheme and their participation was often motivated by a desire to provide support to their peers.
- Key stakeholders were, in the main, very satisfied with the training of peers and the quality of the service they provide to offenders. However, they did raise concerns about *potential* for bullying and breaches of confidentiality. While security breaches were a reason for some sackings in each evaluation site, bullying and breaches of confidentiality had not been a serious problem for the service.

2: SUPPORTING OFFENDERS IN THE COMMUNITY

You know, the first time you come to St Giles, you think this is too crowded, it's so tiny. There are people and stuff everywhere and then when you get to know St Giles you realise, it's not so tiny, they are just trying to maximise every little space and to help as many people as they can. I think if the building were twice as big I bet you any money it would be just as crowded (Louis – community worker).

This quote well illustrates the hectic but friendly atmosphere at St Giles Trust head office in Camberwell. Here we examine the resettlement support undertaken by the Trust for ex-offenders. First, we focus on how ex-offenders have fared as volunteers or mentors and second we provide a client and mentor perspective on the services received¹⁰.

The community intervention, to some extent, mirrors the prison project, in that it aims to:

- Extend the training and employment completed by offenders in prison by trying to find them more secure and longer-term paid employment in the community.
- Employ ex-offenders as Peer Advisors in order to meet newly released prisoners 'at the gate' and assist them with practical things such as benefit applications and accommodation searches.

Volunteering opportunities for ex-offenders¹¹ at St Giles Trust are limited to those returning to the London area. These can start with a three month period of voluntary work as a mentor, followed by paid work experience. Table 2.1 details the different community projects managed by the charity and describes the services they provide. These are not distinct projects but overlap to provide community support to ex-offenders as well as providing the work placement and volunteering opportunities for the mentors.

¹⁰ We conducted 24 individual interviews and four focus groups with offenders who were released from custody and went on to work for St Giles Trust. We also undertook observations of the community mentoring.

¹¹ For the purpose of this report we have referred to the ex-offender employees on the various projects as 'mentors', although we are aware that they have a number of titles including 'caseworker'.

Table 2.1: Community Projects

Project	Funding awarded by	Type of Work
Straight to Work	The Oak Foundation, for 3 years	Supports ex-offenders in Greater London - from the day of release. Provides help with housing, training and employment.
Equal Engage	European Social Fund funded for 12 months until Feb 2008.	Supports offenders pre and post release into training and employment in London and the South East.
Brief Intervention	LB Southwark, On-going	Offers daily self-referral drop-in service based in Southwark. Provides support on housing, substance misuse and mental health problems.
Through the Gates	London Probation, On-going	Through the Gates currently works with prisoners returning to 14 London boroughs. Offers practical advice on housing and benefits and helps with finding accommodation.

Currently 35 per cent of the 173 staff employed by the charity are ex-offenders (see Table 2.2) – a good example of ‘putting your money where your mouth is’. Potential ‘mentors’ are referred to the community service via 1) participation in the NVQ and prison peer advice service; 2) as a result of day release work placement whilst still in prison 3) by ‘word of mouth’.

Table 2.2: Staffing at St Giles Trust¹

	Staffing	No. ex-offenders	%
Senior Manager	9	0	0
Management – Operational	10	1	10
Team Leaders	11	5	45
Operational/ Delivery	120	50	42
Sales/Marketing	2	0	0
Administration/Support	21	5	24
Total staff	173	61	35

1. Paid staff

Follow-on support in the community

Consolidation of training and work skills

The opportunity to have a work placement in the community on release from custody was much appreciated by our interviewees. It was perceived as a means of applying the skills developed whilst in prison and gaining some 'real life' work experience to develop their curriculum vitae:

It has given me lots of opportunities..., it's given me something that I would have never thought [about] entering, ..., it's good for my CV, I can write down I've done this, this type of job and it's within your job criteria (Tony).

It's done me a lot, basically because I used to be in the position that a lot of my clients are in, and it makes me just realise that I don't want to be there ... and yes, so apart from that I'm [more] experienced, wiser, you know, with work experience and everything else...I'm doing the sort of work, you know, of a caseworker [this was work completed by St Giles Trust Staff in the prison setting], and even the peer advisor part, having the initial meeting and getting information, but now [I am] you know, making contact with the council ... with clients...you know..., having contact, you know, with all these sort of different organisations and agencies (Kev).

Doing the NVQ and the prison Peer Advice work had helped offenders to develop new skills, which, they felt, could, in theory expand their employment options after release:

If it wasn't for the peer adviser scheme I would have probably gone back to cheffing [being a chef], you know, but doing the peer adviser scheme I found another talent that I had and opened up a new career path and I think there should be more schemes in the prison like that, that can tap in and help develop the prisoners' potentials (Carl).

The work I want to do, you know, I don't want to go back on the building sites, I've done that. The reason I've done the course is so I can get into this line of work, working with ex-offenders, something that I know about, you know, I am an expert, you know, even if I say it myself (Lance).

The organisation had continued to invest in the mentors in that all our interviewees had undertaken some type of additional training, provided and paid for by St Giles Trust, to enhance their knowledge of areas such as housing assessment, mental health or substance misuse issues or to undertake courses in safety at work:

It worked for me, and as soon as I came out, it was daunting the day I started, because I'd never worked in an office, but after a day or two I was fine, you know, everyone was really supportive, and plus continuous training whilst you're working as well, so yes, it really helped me, it definitely helped me (Jarel).

Basically I had the opportunity to train really...every time I had been released from prison before you had the same issues of when you went in and there was no way I could have

afforded to be released from prison and then go to college, it was just financially...couldn't do it...so...also on top of that I've done enough of offending basically (Rami).

Providing a daily structure

A key benefit of their employment was the fact that it gave structure to their day - something they had become accustomed to in prison – and they often credited this as the impetus for keeping them out of trouble in the initial period after their release:

It's assisted me very well because when I was in jail for five years I was used to structure of the day, you got a routine, when I first starting working here, three or four weeks I wasn't working, and I didn't know what to do with myself, didn't know what to do with myself, but it's given me structure it's given me purpose, its given me confidence as well, definitely (Nicola).

That's what you need because when you come out of prison if you haven't got structure then all that's going to happen is that all the good intentions that you thought you had, all that's gone out the window and you revert back to what you know, which is crime (Jack).

Mentoring offenders

The mentors fulfilled a variety of tasks for newly released offenders. This included writing to the prisoner prior to release to find out what support they might require, meeting them on release and accompanying them to Probation, or helping them to sort out immediate accommodation and benefits needs. They could also refer offenders to other services at St Giles Trust such as the Employment and Brief Intervention teams, and act as advocate for their client with other organisations.

For example, output data for one of the community projects running for 12 months between February 2007- 2008 and employing ex-offenders to deliver services, had contact with 211 clients released from prisons in the South East. All received employment advice and guidance, 17 were helped into training courses and 16 received work placements with the charity.

We identified, from our interviews with Peer Advisors and clients, two reasons for why getting advice from someone who had 'walked in their shoes' was useful. First their support was based on personal experience of the problems faced by newly-released prisoners:

It's a lot easier talking to someone who's been there, seen it and done it rather than talking to someone in authority, not everybody coming out of prison is going to be amenable to having people like a probation officer whereas someone like [worker] has experience of coming out of prison and the barriers he faced, they give us more optimism I think (Cameron, client).

They know exactly where you are coming from; you've been in their shoes and you've been on both sides of the wall and from there once you've broken the ice with them you can pass on information, and they're more trusting to take that information on board and they're going to absorb it more than if you go in there and say 'my name's Mr so and so and I'm from this company and this is what I need to do and these are your options', they're not really going to absorb this information, their minds are going to 'what I am going to go and do now', but once you've broken the ice and they know where you are coming from and you're in the same situation, it makes it a lot easier (Neil, mentor).

And second, as described by two clients below, the mentors provided inspiration and hope as they were the proof that it was possible to move on and sort your life out:

It's an understanding because when I was coming out of [PRISON], I was lost, my confidence was lost. I've never been in prison before and St Giles, they way they treated me, like a human. Like when you've been in prison, people look at you, like she's bad... But being here and being around them [mentors] and I've seen the managers and everyone working together to support you and you want to be like them. You want to improve yourself. They've been encouraging me and encouraging me – you can do it – and that is a great thing... I think that mentoring is really, really good... it makes you feel all is not lost (Esme, client).

I've [recently] come under [mentor's] wing and he's really helped me and it was a shock for me that he's been in prison because it seemed like he'd been working for twenty years. I thought it was good for someone else volunteering and helping me so much and he was going that extra mile and made me feel really settled and telling me about benefit forms that I didn't know how to do... Harry kept on pursuing things and getting these links for me and now I've got a house (Richie, client).

Filling a vacuum

In terms of the range of resettlement support available to offenders, St Giles Trust was often described as filling the vacuum left by a *changed* probation service. Probation officers were regularly described by our interviewees as being more interested in offender control and public safety than in aiding their rehabilitation:

With probation when they took the rehabilitation off and replaced it with the word enforcement, it tells you everything. They don't care anymore, the caring, compassion, social work side of probation has gone out of the window. All they're interested in now is public safety and enforcement and therein lies the problem (Harry).

The whole probation service, I don't actually know what they do, it's a lot of people breaching this and breaching that, their patience is really small. They leave you outside sometimes in the probation office for 45 minutes, you come 5 minutes late and you get one breach. The one to one contact you do is really bad...they're just really too quick to

pull out the breaches, there's no patience. There's a big gap between the person coming out of prison and between the probation officers (Ben, client).

Barriers to mentoring

As in the prison environment, there were continuing restrictions to the work Peer Advisors could undertake. They spent a considerable amount of time setting up meetings and liaising with a range of agencies in the community on behalf of their clients. They had encountered reticence from some agencies to the idea of working with ex-offenders. For example, one worker noted a reluctance to share information about a clients' risk assessment with him. This meant he had to meet clients with no prior knowledge of their convictions or mental health issues, as explained by Rami:

Woman that works for [name of agency] she didn't want to give me any information about the assessment etc. It was an issue that she wanted to be in control (Rod).

Some mentors found working relationships changed when the individuals concerned discovered they had recently been released from prison 'The minute they found out, the ball-game completely changed' (Rod). In addition, Probation demonstrated their unwillingness to work with offenders on licence by ensuring these offenders were excluded from working on a 'meet at the gates' service funded through the London Probation Service.

Mentors became frustrated that agencies such as the Probation Service were hostile and guarded with them and were disappointed that Probation staff whose job, they felt, should be to support ex-offenders, chose not to see the benefits of the scheme:

The Probation Service, yes, I think they are, once they found out that we were basically, how do you put it, gamekeeper turned, well poacher turned gamekeeper, then, although they could have seen the good side in it, they didn't, they thought, well, they're just like our other clients (Clint).

Funding

Employment opportunities at St Giles Trust are linked to funding, thus voluntary and paid placements and the services these placements provide to clients last for as long as funding is available. Of note was that timing of release appeared to be an important

factor in who got access to employment opportunities. For example, some offenders were offered paid employment within a matter of weeks of volunteering as a result of a new project starting:

When the relay project started they were very shorthanded, they didn't have enough, ... initially they wanted 20 people straight off and St Giles said, we don't have that number of people spare, so they basically grabbed as many people as they could (Clint).

I was offered, because I did the NVQ, that's Level 3, I was offered a placement on the straight-to-work project basically. And then there was a project starting, the Equal Engage project, at St Giles in Camberwell, so I started on that (Sam).

I did my four months, and then finished and then went on to Equal Engage (Winton).

Yet there were also those who were disadvantaged by timing as there were limited places to fill and this inevitably led to disappointment for some when they were unable to get placements with the charity:

We get a bottleneck, and that's what happened when we first got [project A] last year, we had a lot of people who were in place, so a lot of people were then not being given the opportunity to move through, and consequently we then lost those because we weren't able to give them the opportunities that were being offered beforehand... we're not giving through flow for other people who are as good as the people who are upstairs (Community Service Manager).

St Giles Trust, like many charities, lacks a secure funding base, and funding tends to be short-term, 'pump-priming' limiting the time for projects to become established and effective²⁴. As noted by one of the project managers, there is a constant search for new funds to keep things going and often monies gained extended the life of a project for no more than a few months at a time:

...It is a good thing that we've been able to offer up to 20 [ex-offenders] work, but, you know, I think it's been stressful for them, you know, initially it was just up until the end of December, so then it was like, oh no, we're going to be out of a job, and then literally two weeks before the end of December we realised it was going to be extended for another two months. So then we got another two months reprieve, and you know, it's, so yes, I think for them it's tough, you know, even though it's given them work which they probably wouldn't have had if it hadn't have been St Giles, it's still tough because they're not knowing, and they're still hoping for a permanent contract, or longer term funding, and, you know, it's just not, you know, it's not there (Community Service Manager).

This funding environment also created uncertainty for the mentors, who were keen to have something more permanent in order to make plans and help secure their futures:

You don't know when it's going to end, they're not telling you when the course is gonna end, and also you can't plan for the future financially. Right now, if I knew I had a permanent job... It's like I'm up in the air, I don't know if I'm coming or going, I don't know what to do, I can't make any longer term financial plans (Samuel).

It was also reported by staff and mentors that sometimes a pilot project would be gaining momentum and achieving much good work, at which point the funding would stop:

I've had about four paid jobs here now...my contract at the moment is a four month contract because generally the government are apparently meant to be making three year projects but they've been saying that for years and unfortunately it's not the case and the pilots are only for six months, so the biggest problem that I know is the contracts because your projects are short-term and other organisations in the sector have got more resources than we have, so we tend to do a lot of pilots and we put in the good work and then a bigger organisation will have their own answer and come along and pick it up (Will).

Moving on from St Giles Trust

Our interviewees reported very positive experiences of working for the organisation and were keen to stay with St Giles Trust. This reflected the opportunities available including on-going training of mentors and the culture and ethos of the organisation. For example, interviewees said that they were treated in the same way as other members of staff, perceiving that there was no stigma attached to being an ex-offender:

I mean, they treat us, to be honest, as equally as anyone else, which I was quite surprised about. There's never been an issue about 'them and us' (Winston).

The other thing ...you're labelled a convicted [offender] and that is such a hard stigma to get over. I was very lucky getting voluntary employment here because otherwise I don't know what I would be doing (Harry).

I think the [staff members] of this place are so open to everyone. You can go into their office, there is a real open door policy here (Amir).

This positive view of working relationships was echoed by the staff:

St Giles experience of employing ex-offenders is an extremely positive one. The [mentors] have been consistently motivated, enthusiastic, dedicated and trustworthy, delivering a service which always goes the extra mile (Community Service Manager – extract from project report).

As well as employing ex-offenders themselves, St Giles Trust also has an Employment Team to assist the mentors to find suitable employment with other organisations (see below). For example, they could get assistance with CVs, job application forms and job searches for those who had been released and for those working on projects where the funding was about to end. However, one of the difficulties was the reluctance of mentors to move away from the 'comfort' of St Giles Trust and to look for work elsewhere and there was always a hope expressed that at some point they would get a more permanent paid position within the organisation:

I did have an interview two weeks ago and I came a very close second but I'm content to stay a volunteer here for as long as I can, and there will be opportunities to apply for paid employment and if I get them I get them and if I don't, I'm happy to stay as a volunteer (Harry).

You do get comfortable working, yes you do get comfortable here, and the peer advisor thing and all that, is not designed for that, it's four months paid and then moving you on, but I'm lodging here, I'll squat (Jarel).

We know that offenders can face many obstacles when trying to gain access to the wider job market. This includes the need to organise other aspects of their lives such as stable accommodation. In addition, employers often have negative attitudes towards the employment of staff with criminal convictions²⁵ and ex-offenders are likely to find it difficult to reduce such stigma and prejudice. Our interviewees had concerns about how they might be received by other organisations, and when and what to disclose. However, few reported actual negative experiences of interview and as noted below, a significant proportion went on to successful jobs elsewhere:

I don't know if it's because, you know, these outside organisations their ex-offenders policy might be that you've got to be free of [offending] for three years before you can apply to work with them, whereas some of our guys have only just been released since like last year (Jo).

I went to another interview and they're not even questioning you about what I can do, they were more interested in how come I got so long for what the charge was and I don't think that's right because there's a CRB [Criminal Records Bureau] check, you can read it, you don't need to go through the personal circumstances pertaining to why I committed the offence (Sarah).

...Reintegration into society, you don't know what to expect. What do employers expect? You always have that barrier like, do you mention it? It's that question... They were saying you don't have to mention it [offending history] after seven years. Seven years is a long time, I think that question when you go for a job, because you always want to tell the truth really. Employers use it against you either way, if you say you've been to prison and if you've lied. I want them to see me how I am (Richie).

Progression to employment

So what has happened thus far to the offenders who came to work for St Giles Trust? Performance data for the organisation as a whole, for the financial year 2008/09, shows the Trust helped 129 offenders into some kind of paid employment. Of our interview cohort of 34 offenders, 13 were given work placements for St Giles Trust on their release. Of those, four are still working for the charity in paid positions and five have gone on to other jobs (three in the voluntary sector, one in a local council and one in retail). One of our interviewees reoffended was sent back to prison and began working at the prison Peer Advice service for a second time (see Appendix, Table 1).

In addition, data compiled for the evaluation from records kept by the Trust show that since 2006, 38 graduates of the NVQ in Advice and Guidance were given work placements with the charity (see Appendix, Table 2). Twenty-one are still working for the organisation or continuing with their training at St Giles Trust. Three are now senior workers and one is a team leader. Of the remaining 17, eight have been employed by other organisations, including as support workers for a housing agency, a guidance worker for a further education college and as a worker for an organisation supporting women prisoners. As far as records show, only one of those 38 was returned to prison.

Summary

- Community workers praised St Giles Trust for investing in them by offering them additional training, opportunities to maintain their employment and/or promotion.
- Employment opportunities gave the mentors structure in their lives and occupied them in a useful way. Mentors also praised the ethos of the organisation, not only for employing ex-offenders and seeing their potential, but for fostering a culture whereby they were not stigmatised, but treated as equals.
- Monitoring of the community work has helped to chart what the mentors have achieved in terms of further employment and training and these preliminary results look promising.

- Timing of release and available funding appeared to be an important factor in who got access to these all important employment opportunities and this is likely to continue to impose constraints on the good work that St Giles Trust can do.
- Clients highlighted the importance they placed on receiving advice from mentors who had been through the experience of prison and gained inspiration from the progress their mentors had made.

3: SECOND CHANCE

A common topic in our interviews and focus groups over the course of the evaluation was the importance of being given an opportunity to prove oneself. Theories about why offenders stop committing crime highlight the value of gaining a legitimate stake in society and the positive effect this can have on personal identity or sense-of-self^{6, 26, 27}. Essentially, desistance from crime is described as a process that can be hindered or helped via practical and emotional support from services and significant others. Desistance requires the involvement and cooperation of the offender as well as access to 'opportunities', including training, employment and stable accommodation, in order to sustain progress and prevent further offending.

In this brief section we want to highlight some of the key themes raised in our discussions with interviewees about their experience of working with St Giles Trust.

Overall the organisation was commended for being willing to give them that opportunity and 'second chance':

[St Giles Trust] has an understanding that some people can make a silly mistake. An understanding that people need to be given a second chance and that's what this place does and there aren't enough places like that for ex-offenders. You've paid for your crime and that's when you need to be given a chance and if you're not given a chance then that's when you go back to the way it was (Jack).

This was discussed as a contrast to agencies, like the Probation Service, who were often perceived as being more focused on offenders as *risks* to be managed. The focus group extract below was in response to a question about what they liked best about St Giles Trust:

Grieg: *It's the risk. St Giles are willing to take the risk..., a lot of the organisations want to flutter about and make excuses.*

Neil: *I wouldn't say 'risk' I'd say 'chance'*

Sarah: *Yeah chance because we're not a risk*

Will: *I don't think it is even that, I think it is the opportunity*

Sarah: *Yeah, they have given us the opportunities.*

Grieg: *Here is an organisation that is willing... they've put out their hand and told us 'we'll meet you half way', we've taken it on and proved ourselves and there should be more organisations like that.*

As we have discussed in the sections above, many of our interviewees felt that the NVQ training and peer advice work had tapped into un-known talents and had widened their

potential career horizons. In addition, the work opportunities organised for their release had, they felt, provided a routine that helped prevent further offending. They also commonly made reference to turning their lives around, via involvement in the mentoring and training, and the support they had received from St Giles Trust:

...All the support you get in your work, which is where, I didn't realise that until I went round there, you know, you don't realise it...the support you get here, and it's invaluable really. Yes, so that's what I would say. And just stability, which I've never had, you know, I mean, I was offending for 15 years, so I had a lot of issues, and it was my time, I was ready for the challenge, and as soon as they told me about the NVQ and all that, and they allowed me to access it in prison, do you know what I mean, that sort of, that was a big opening for me (Jarel).

I was in and out of prison, but it's the opportunity to prove myself. I was ready and you ain't going to change yourself until you're ready.... If this opportunity weren't there I can't honestly sit here and say I would never have offended because I would have got out, I would have had nowhere to live, no job and I would have gone straight back in (Will).

One of our interviewees described his contact with the organisation and the opportunities this had provided him in terms of 'saving' him from a life of crime or worse:

That's going really, really well, and I'd have to say that that's the most rewarding job I've ever had, and I'll definitely, definitely, well it if wasn't for St Giles, I'll be quite honest with you, I don't know what I'd be doing. Because I served a ten year sentence, and in May I'd have been out two years, and if it wasn't for St Giles, it literally saved me to be quite honest, and who would have thought it (Samuel).

There was a sense of pride when they talked about being able to do everyday things like getting the bus into work or knowing they could get legitimately-earned money from the ATM with their bank card. These small, often novel things for our interviewees, seemed to be contributing towards them re-establishing their place in 'normal' society:

There is a lot of stigma [about being an ex-offender]. It's hard for the last few years, it would be easier to go back to what I know, which is crime but St Giles Trust is different. I look forward to every day coming in here, you know, getting the bus and getting to work. You wake up in the morning and I know I'm going to work and I don't have to worry about the 'Old Bill' knocking on the door (Jack).

I can put my cash card in and know that something will actually come out of it. I've had a lot of good experience. The work experience I've had has been wonderful (Nicola).

You feel better because of the way you've earned it [money] and because you are helping people, they're like 'Thanks for housing me today, thanks'. And you've got them a nice one bedroom flat. I like doing that, so that's my personal thing (Sarah).

There were also many references made to the re-building of lost self-esteem and confidence as a result of the mentoring and work experience:

I'd say I've gained, it's built back up my confidence actually, to actually be myself again, sort of thing, like I suppose I've put all my life skills back in order, and everything else, and I'm able to understand and be empathic towards my client group, because a lot of their situations I've been in myself. It's given me that employability, it's given me that chance basically from coming out of prison, it's given me a vast number of free training courses, yes, it's been great really (Sharon).

It's helped to boost my self-confidence as well, my self-esteem, definitely, knowing that I can actually, I am capable of working within this environment, with these people, and be able to communicate properly. Yes, definitely, it's been an all round success for me, definitely (Sean).

As noted, the stigma attached to being an ex-offender was often keenly felt, particularly in their efforts to get employment with other organisations. Several interviewees, however, described how their association with St Giles Trust had helped their families to see them in a different light, as someone who was in gainful employment and could provide for them. This kind of approval from others is important for sustaining desistance from crime²⁷:

I mean, with the voluntary work obviously it does pay for your fares and it pays your meals, so it's survival and I have got like family support anyway. And that's the other thing, it's helped my relationship with my family, ...now they've seen me for over a year working, which did not happen before, so that's helped them a lot as well, you know. I support them as much as they support me (Jarel).

I'd never had a job before, well an odd job here and there. So to me, to get released and on the same day to have a job, to help pay for my kids, stuff like that which I've never done (Will).

The 'positive role model' is central to the concept of the Peer Advisor. There was certainly a sense of 'passing on the baton' in the way our interviewees described their optimism after seeing how other ex-offenders, or their predecessors, had fared within the organisation. This highlights the potential multiplier effect of mentoring activities:

[Its] about seeing how other people who have done long term in prison come out and are working here at St Giles and who have really turned a corner, it gives someone like myself who's only been out of prison just under three months a real sense of 'Well this is possible'. If you'd have said to me 12 months ago, I came out of prison on the Friday and started working here on the Monday, if you'd have said to me 12 months ago that that's what I'd be doing and I would really enjoy this job, I would have laughed at you and said don't be silly because until my very last prison I'd never even heard of St Giles, of 23 years in jail it's only the last three years I actually heard about them and started looking at what they could do, what they are doing (Harry).

You are giving them inspiration and when they look at you some of them can think to themselves “Well if this person can do it then I can do it as well... A lot of people say that if it wasn’t for St. Giles and you I would never of got to this place and I never would of got this sorted out and stuff like that so they are really, really grateful. Not only is it rewarding for them, its rewarding for us... It’s not like I’m just working behind somewhere like McDonald’s (Nicola).

Summary

- The employment and training provided by St Giles Trust were described by our interviewees as key opportunity to change direction.
- They allowed our interviewees to see themselves as someone other than offender, providing for their families, earning a legitimate income and making a useful contribution more generally, all vital to prevent further offending.
- Although difficult to demonstrate in any quantitative way, the positive impact of seeing other offenders succeed with the support of St Giles Trust helps highlight the potential multiplier effect of peer-based projects.

4: A STOCK-TAKING

St Giles Trust's Peer Advice Project is an innovative scheme illustrating a new paradigm for resettlement services for offenders.

Although our study was not designed to quantify benefits in terms of reduced reoffending, the perspectives of both staff and participants strongly suggest to us that peer mentoring schemes of this sort are very promising. That they bring benefits to the Peer Advisors seems highly likely. Although we have not examined the benefits that accrue to the recipients of their advice in a quantitative way, and this – challenging – research task still needs to be done, our qualitative work shows that clients find a largely supportive and helpful staff and that the concept of receiving help from someone who has 'walked in their shoes' is welcome and inspiring.

Limitations of short-term funding

One of the innovative aspects of the service, the opportunity for work experience in the community can be limited by the short-term nature of the funding and often the timing of grants received was an important factor in who got access to these employment opportunities. Inevitably this led to disappointment for some who had expectations raised only to be told there were no volunteer or employment placements available at the time of their release. It seems unlikely that the funding environment will change in the short term but the opportunity to seek longer-term funding and to provide this type of follow-on work outside of the London area would be of benefit.

Dependency on the support of St Giles Trust

The ethos of St Giles Trust, particularly their acceptance of ex-offenders and belief in their potential, makes for a very positive working environment. Yet this also created some anxiety about moving on – unsurprisingly, as we know offenders can face considerable barriers in the wider job market. However, in order to free-up space for newly released prisoners and, extend access to community placements and keep this process on-going, it seems important to time-limit placements and continue to focus on how offenders might gain employment elsewhere.

Employment Outcomes

Our interviewees were concerned about how employers would respond to their criminal records and time spent in prison. They also experienced some ambivalence from some agencies during their mentoring activities about working with ex-offenders. However, our data show that a significant proportion of those who started work placements with St Giles Trust have either gained paid work within the organisation or have been successful in getting employment elsewhere, including in the voluntary sector, allowing them to make use of their NVQ qualification and training.

Continued improvements to monitoring

Interim reports for this evaluation have stressed the need for an organisational strategy for monitoring. As well as providing detail about NVQ training activity, it is essential to collate routine information about the peer advisors in order to track their progress over time via, for example, their contact with the community project or after transfer to another prison. While it is hard to prove cause and effect beyond doubt, knowing how they have fared with regards to employment and housing will contribute to future outcome monitoring.

It has also been difficult to account fully for the work of the mentors in the community because of a lack of routine information on the numbers of clients assisted and the extent and nature of the help provided. This is because of the different monitoring requirements of the individual funders of the community projects.

St Giles Trust has started routinely tracking progress of offenders from the NVQ/Peer Advice work to volunteer/employment in the community with St Giles Trust and other organisations. As a minimum the following statistics need to be collated routinely in electronic format:

- Total number referred to community service.
- Total number given placements and voluntary positions.

Then at individual level:

- Route of referral to service.
- Support provided (e.g. help with job searches, CV writing, further skills training).
- Outcome of any job applications (e.g. rejection, interview, employment).
- In addition, the number of offenders seen by each Advisor/volunteer, the number of times seen and the support and services provided.

Final thoughts

It should be clear to readers of this report that we think the scheme that we have evaluated is a valuable one, which achieves a great deal. We have got to know the St Giles Trust well over the course of the study and we have a lot of respect for its work. We are left with a sense that the St Giles Trust offers good value for money, and that the multiplier effect of their delivery model is of particular value. At the same time, we are conscious that we cannot present *clinching* evidence about the effectiveness of the scheme we have examined and we look forward to seeing a formal impact evaluation that can demonstrate a positive effect on reoffending rates.

Funders in both the statutory and charitable sectors often look – understandably – for this sort of clinching evidence in advance of any funding commitment. We should stress that the cost of an evaluation that achieves an apparent level of certainty would be very high indeed. And even then, it might be inconclusive: properly designed evaluations may – with luck – be able to differentiate between the impact of an experimental scheme of this sort and work in comparison sites. It is questionable, however, whether such an experimental evaluation could disentangle the impact of the programme under evaluation from the effects of the values and organisational ethos of the provider and the quality of its leadership.

We think it reasonable to demand that to attract funding, schemes need to demonstrate that they:

- Are underpinned by a coherent theory of change, which has some research support.
- Have credible management systems to support them.
- Can show *prima facie* evidence of effectiveness.
- And can document acceptable throughputs.

It is up to funders, of course, whether they ask for firmer evidence, and demand clinching proof that the scheme in question reduces reoffending more steeply than the alternatives, and is more effective than other approaches in helping resettle offenders. However, whilst we all wait for this evidence to accumulate – and it could be a long wait – the existing pattern of investment will continue into equally unproven, but very probably less effective rehabilitation and resettlement schemes.

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APPENDIX

Table 1: Interview Cohort of Peer Advisors

Table 2: St Giles Trust Peer Advisor Employment Journeys

Table 1: Interview Cohort of Peer Advisors (i)

	Peer 1	Peer 2	Peer 3	Peer 4	Peer 5	Peer 6	Peer 7	Peer 8	Peer 9
NVQ completed	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No
Prison Work Experience	SGT Peer Advisor Listener, advice worker for Citizen Advice Bureau	No	SGT Peer Advisor security clearance revoked after 'incident'	SGT Peer Advisor	Did some initial work with St Giles.	SGT Peer Advisor before transfer	SGT Peer Advisor. security clearance revoked after 'incident'	SGT Peer Advisor	SGT Peer Advisor – Few months
Voluntary work with SGT in Community	Voluntary placement	N/A	N/A	Applied but was unsuccessful in obtaining voluntary work at St Giles	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No
Employment with SGT	Applying for temporary contract with St Giles Trust.	N/A							
Employment outcome at final interview		Foreign National – deported	Still in prison	Lost contact with service	Foreign National - deported	due for release 09 – was past retirement age and had no plans to return to work	due for release 2010	Still working with SGT in prison at final interview date 08	Unknown
No interviews	2 interviews in prison 1 in community	1 interview in prison	2 interviews in prison	2 interviews 1 in prison and 1 in community	1 interview in prison	2 interviews in prison	2 interviews in prison	2 interviews in prison	1 interview in prison

Table I: Interview Cohort of Peer Advisors (ii)

	Peer 10	Peer 11	Peer 12	Peer 13	Peer 14	Peer 15	Peer 16	Peer 17
NVQ completed	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Prison Work Experience	SGT Peer Advisor	SGT Peer Advisor	No	SGT Peer Advisor	SGT Peer Advisor then transfer	SGT Peer Advisor	None	SGT Peer Advisor
Voluntary Work with SGT in the community	Voluntary placement	Voluntary placement	N/A	Voluntary placement	N/A	Voluntary placement	No	Planning to apply to undertake voluntary work on release
Employment With SGT	Paid employment for SGT on a number of projects	Paid employment for SGT on a number of projects	N.A	Paid employment for SGT on a number of projects	Unknown	No	Not Known	N/A
Employment outcome at final interview	Funding came to an end. Found alternative employment in retail	Still working for SGT and has been promoted to high grade.	Foreign National - no further contact	Experience gained enabled peer to obtain, on release, full-time paid work with a London charity working with disadvantaged children	Due for release 08. Lost contact	Employed as key worker with socially excluded children 2008	Lost contact	Transferred to open prison. Release date 2009.
No. Interviews	1 interview in prison and 1 in community	1 interview in prison and 2 in community	1 interview in prison	2 interviews in prison and 1 in community	3 interviews in prison	1 interview in prison; 2 in community	1 interview in prison	2 interviews in prison

Table I: Interview Cohort of Peer Advisors (iii)

	Peer 18	Peer 19	Peer 20	Peer 21	Peer 22	Peer 23	Peer 24	Peer 25	Peer 26
NVQ completed	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Prison Work Experience	SGT Peer Advisor	SGT Peer Advisor	SGT Peer Advisor	SGT Peer Advisor	Other peer support	Other peer support	Other peer support	<i>Toe by Toe</i> helper	Other peer support
Voluntary Work with SGT in the community	No	N/A	No	N/A	Not available due to distance and funds.	No	No	No	No
Employment with SGT	Unknown	N/A	Employed with local council - had contract terminated because of disclosure issues	N/A	Now employed in catering	No	No	No	No
Employment outcome at final interview	Planning to work overseas with Advice and Guidance qualification	Indefinite prison sentence.	Re-offended and sent back to prison. work as a peer advisor again	Working in other voluntary position within prison	Employed in catering but dismissed	Released no further information	Wants voluntary work with SGT on release in 2009	Transfer to adult prison.	Transfer. No peer advice programme.
No. Interviews	2 interviews prison	2 interviews prison	2 interviews prison	2 interviews prison	2 interviews prison and 1 community	1 interview prison	3 interviews prison	3 interviews prison	2 interviews prison

Table 1: Interview Cohort of Peer Advisors (iv)

	Peer 27	Peer 28	Peer 29	Peer 30	Peer 31	Peer 32	Peer 33	Peer 34
Completed NVQ	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Completed NVQ in community	Completed NVQ in community	Completed NVQ in community
Prison Work Experience	SGT Peer Advisor and NVQ assessor	SGT Peer Advisor and NVQ assessor		SGT Peer Advisor	SGT Peer Advisor			
Voluntary Work with SGT in the community	No	Working, on day release from prison, with charity to help employ ex-offenders	Voluntary placement	Voluntary placement	Voluntary placement	Voluntary placement	Voluntary placement	Voluntary placement
Employment With SGT	No information	No	Employment on a number of projects	Employed on number projects	Employed on a number of projects	Employed on a number of projects. Was promoted to team leader	Employed on a number of projects	Employed on a number of projects
Outcome Outcome at final interview	Housing Contract taken over by the prison. No further contact.	Housing Contract taken over by prison. Still advising on housing and employment in prison and the community.	Still working for SGT has been promoted to higher grade.	Still working for SGT and has been promoted to higher grade.	Employment with local council, but resigned after a few weeks to return to SGT (part funded part voluntary). Still working for the organisation	Employed in agency supporting vulnerable women.	Still working for SGT on new project.	Project funding ended and undertook voluntary work for 3 months period. Was let go after the 3 months as no additional funding found.
	1 interview in prison	3 interviews in prison	3 interviews in the community	3 interviews in the community	3 interviews in the community	2 interviews in the community	2 interviews in the community	2 interviews in the community

Table 2: St Giles Trust Peer Advisor Employment Journeys (i)

(This table covers those ex-offenders who completed the NVQ L3 Advice and Guidance with SGT either in prison or in the community and attended for voluntary/work placements. The list is not exhaustive but does cover most NVQ graduates from the evaluation target group).

ID	Referral Route	Contact History SGT	Where now?
Male01	Prison	Training and Employment Team (TET)	Still with SGT. Working towards PTTLs** and Assessor qual.
Female01	Prison	TET	Still with SGT. Working towards PTTLs and Assessor qual.
Female02	Prison	Worked for A4E in 2007/08	Working for SGT (SOS programme)***
Male02	Prison	Volunteer in TET whilst on ROTL* before gaining p/t employment with SGT.	Working for SGT f/t as a Senior Worker. Working towards Assessor qualification
Male03	Prison	Volunteer for SGT whilst on ROTL before gaining p/t work with Southside Partnership.	Working f/t with SGT on SOS project. Gained PTTLs in 2009
Male04	Prison	Volunteer mentor with SGT whilst on ROTL, then employed p/t with TET until July 2009	Employed by London College as a Guidance worker
Male05	Community	Volunteered with SGT between April 08 and July 09	Employed by housing agency since Oct 09
Female03	Community	Worked p/t with SGT until May 09	Employed by housing agency as a support worker
Male06	Unknown	Works for SGT in both paid and voluntary capacity	Still SGT. Working towards PTTLs and Assessor qualification.
Male 07	Unknown	Worked on Straight to Work (S2W)	Employed by housing charity as a hostel worker
Male08	Unknown	Worked on both S2W and Equal Engage projects (EE)	Employed by Social Care recruitment agency
Male09	Prison	Worked on S2W, EE and most recently TTG projects	Still with SGT as a Caseworker.
Female04	Prison	Worked on S2W, EE, PA to Chief Executive, Senior Worker on S2W and recently in TET.	Still with SGT as a Senior Worker.
Male10	Prison	Worked on S2W, EE and most recently the TTG project.	Still with SGT as a Team Leader
Male11	Prison	Worked on S2W, EE, Brief Intervention (BI) team and most recently the TTG project.	Still with SGT as a Senior Worker
Female05		Employed on EE and TTG projects until summer 2009	Employed by Women's charity.
Male12	Prison	Employed on S2W and EE before moving to Aquila Training as a Trainer. Returned to SGT in Sep 09.	Working f/t with SGT as Project Co-ordinator
Male13	Prison	Worked on S2W	Unemployed
Female06	Prison	Worked on S2W and Engage, had a break from employment before returning temporarily with spells in TTG and TET	Not in work.

Table 2: St Giles Trust Peer Advisor Employment Journeys (ii)

ID	Referral Route	Contact History SGT	Where now?
Male14	Unknown		Unknown
Female07	Prison		Unknown
Male15	Prison		Unknown
Male16	Prison		Unknown
Male17	Prison	Employed as volunteer whilst on ROTL then employed as a Trainer/Assessor	Still with SGT as qualified Assessor
Female08	Prison	Employed as administrator in Sep 09	Still with SGT
Male18	Unknown	Employed f/t on EE before moving on into further employment	Employed through a Recruitment Agency
Male19	Prison	Employed f/t on EE July 07 to July 08	Unknown
Male20	Prison	Employed f/t on EE and TTG projects	Still SGT with TTG team
Male21	Prison	Employed f/t on EE and TTG before moving to SOS project.	Still SGT with SOS project.
Female09	Prison	Volunteered as admin support then employed p/t as volunteer co-ordinator whilst on ROTL.	License recall
Male22	Prison	Employed as volunteer whilst on ROTL then f/t as Administrator until made redundant July 09	Unknown
Male23	Prison	Employed on S2W and EE before becoming Senior Worker on S2W	Still with SGT as Senior Worker on S2W.
Male24	Prison	Volunteered with SGT in kitchen (during day centre days) then returned to be employed on EE and TTG projects	Still with SGT in TTG team
Female10	Prison	Employed f/t to work on TTG project	Still with SGT in Housing Team
Male25	originally an SGT client	Volunteered then employed as caseworker on SOS project	Still with SGT in SOS team
Male26	Prison	Employed on TTG project	Still with SGT in TTG team
Male27	Prison	Employed on EE project then within Kent and Sussex team as Employment Worker.	Still with SGT on Peer Mentoring project in Kent.
Male28	Prison	Volunteered with TET whilst on license and offered paid employment with SGT as a Trainer but was deported by Home Office	Returned to Portugal where working for university and UN as interpreter/translator

*ROTL Released on temporary licence **PTTLS Preparing to Teach in Lifelong Learning Sector ***SOS gangs project