



Evaluation summary: Working one to one with young offenders

Overview

This paper provides a summary of the key findings from the independent evaluation of 'Working one to one with young offenders.' This paper is by The Prince's Trust and ICPR, based on the external evaluation report by Gillian Hunter and Amy Kirby of The Institute for Criminal Policy Research, School of Law, Birkbeck College, which reported in August 2011.

"It gives me a sense of purpose and I can call myself a productive member of society"

"When ex-offenders go into prison and start talking in the manner that we have done, [young people] can't help but sit up and take notice. It's the voice of experience".

[Mentor]

Summary messages

In 2007 The Prince's Trust launched a pilot project to enable ex-prisoners to mentor young people (16-30 yrs) through their transition from prison to community. The evaluation found:

- The central tenet of the project model is ex-offenders as mentors and inspiration to young people leaving custody. This works well and should not be changed.
- Overall ex-offender mentors can effectively engage with young offenders and offer forms of support that are not always available or appropriate via more conventional services.
 - *This includes pre-release support, meeting at the gate, practical help, being available at short notice, being a role model, providing inspiration and acting as a sounding board.*
- Ex-offender mentors personal insight into prison life makes it easier for the young people to bond with the volunteers and provides the all important initial hook with which to engage them in the project.
- Mentors enjoyed the training, supervision and the role. They reported gaining a range of benefits from taking part, such as increased confidence, skills and work experience, and providing a way to atone for past offending. To some extent it has also helped mentors remain crime / drug free by providing routine and interesting activities.
- There would be no doubt that there is value in developing this model further.
- Many lessons have been learnt through the pilot, particularly around ways of working with prisons and the nature and levels of support required by mentors and young people, and issues have been identified to address in taking this initiative forward.

The evaluation has made a series of recommendations and The Trust has a number of actions underway to continue to develop and improve the project.

Acknowledgements

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Methodology

This evaluation was conducted to help The Prince's Trust develop the One to One project and to draw out lessons for wider roll-out by describing how the scheme was working in practice and to assess the impact of the project on beneficiaries and mentors. Methods have included depth interviews and focus groups with mentors and interviews with young people supported by the project, staff from The Prince's Trust, the prisons and other agencies in contact with the project. Routine monitoring of project activities have included collecting socio-demographic and details of offending history of the young people and tracking their progress over time in the resettlement 'pathways' and volunteer monitoring. Learning days with key project staff were held at the interim and final evaluation stages to reflect on findings and inform recommendations.

"When I came out of custody, there was nothing like this [project]."

"If I had had someone like that I think things might have turned round earlier for me."

[Mentor]

2011 Project Summary

3 areas (South West, South East, Northern Ireland)

7 prisons (Guys Marsh, Eastwood Park, Dorchester, Lewes, Winchester, Ford, Hydebank Wood)

Trained 143 ex-prisoners as mentors

Supported 344 young people

"They [the mentors] talk to you on an equal level. At first it was just something to get out of the cell ...but it grabs your attention. You are so used to the inmate - prison guard thing. It is hard to engage as an equal as a prisoner but they do."

[Young person]

The project

The rationale for developing the pilot was based on:

- demand for mentors with first-hand experience of prison was highlighted in a Prince's Trust consultation with young offenders
- re-offending rates for young adults are high and the cost of keeping someone in custody is £45,000ⁱ
- offenders face multiple health and social problems, such as, family breakdown, mental health problems, substance misuse and low levels of literacy /numeracy.
- post-release arrangements can vary significantly across institutions especially for those serving short sentences.
- the idea that offenders or ex-offenders themselves can be an important resource in the rehabilitation and resettlement processes has been highlightedⁱⁱ.
- mentoring interventions are popular to help offenders and to reduce social exclusion among marginalised groups.

On the project, the mentors visit the prison on a fortnightly basis to deliver an inspirational talk to a group of young people. Young people are then matched one-to-one with a mentor who will support them for six months before /after release including meeting them at the gate. The primary role of the mentor is to inspire the young person to turn away from crime. The secondary role is to signpost young people to appropriate support services. Mentors are recruited on the basis that they are (a) two years from prison release /offending behaviour (b) two years from substance misuse (c) have the skills /qualities of a mentor. Young people are recruited on the basis that they are (a) within six months of release (b) returning to an area where the project is active (c) committed to the mentoring support.

Mentors attend four days of training which includes: boundaries, confidentiality, the impact of prison, the cycle of offending, emotional well-being and how to deliver an inspirational talk. Following the training mentors attend a monthly mentor meeting and a one-to-one supervision meeting with the Programme Executive.

Key findings

"You've got to remember that I've taken for ages. I'm giving something back to society now."

[Mentor]

"[We] understand where they're coming from, someone who hasn't been through that situation; they don't know how it feels. You can read all the textbooks about it but living it is completely different, when you're locked up and your liberty is taken away, it's a different sort of feeling."

[Mentor]

Case-study:

Faleen (18) has 9 convictions and met his 121 mentor during his only time in prison. Since release he has been living with his family, volunteering and about to complete a construction course.

"I think it's good because they have been in your shoes so they have a rough idea of where you are.

They instil confidence in you, the visits, you've got to get to know that person and build that bond and it gives more time to get stuff sorted out for your release.

[Mentor] is always there and he's just someone, I feel if there were any problems I could just phone him."

Mentors

The findings show recruitment, training and supervision of ex-offenders as mentors has been largely successful from the mentors' perspective. The mentors consulted were unanimous in their view of The Prince's Trust Programme Executives as committed and wholly supportive of the volunteers.

Motivation for and benefits of participation included:

- wanting to give back to society
- provide a service that wasn't available when they were in prison
- enhance their career prospects
- increased self-confidence
- employability skills
- building on their successful rehabilitation from substance misuse
- giving mentors a sense of purpose

Mentors felt their ability to bond with young people in prison resulted from their first-hand experience of life 'inside'. This sentiment was echoed by the young people interviewed who granted greater credibility to the mentors because they were ex-offenders. The volunteers are potentially a considerable resource for working with young offenders.

Both mentors and young people perceived the benefit of having ex-prisoner mentors is that they have credibility with young offenders because of shared experiences and an understanding of prison culture. They also provide inspiration for the young people that they too can turn their lives around.

Mentees

The mentors delivered inspirational talks in the prison and were then matched to a young person. It is clear from the young people that the use of ex-offender volunteers is what impresses most and is often cited as the reason for returning to the sessions. The key forms of support that may be considered the 'speciality' of the Mentor are:

- Pre-release support
- Meeting at the gate
- Practical help
- Being available at short notice
- Being a role model and providing inspiration
- Acting as a sounding board

Of the 344 young people that the project engaged with in custody, 190 were matched with a mentor. There were a range of reasons for the difference including young people not meeting the criteria for support (e.g. live out of area), prison transfers and lack of motivation /commitment. Of the 190 young people who were matched around two thirds continued contact with their mentor post release. Reasons for losing contact include prison transfers and lack of, or late, communication from the prisons about where the young person has gone. Contact can also be lost because of starting jobs or employment courses or moving away from the area.

Whilst project outcomes were limited at the time of the evaluation due to monitoring data issues, qualitative findings of young people's views and experiences illustrate some potential outcomes for mentoring:

- Meeting at the gates to provide **support at a vulnerable point** - : this can reduce the risk of immediate relapse and return to destructive behaviour before being slotted into support services in the community
- There is the **longer-term potential stabilising effect** of having

someone on hand to help sort out benefit claims or deal with frustrations with other services and to talk through problems and concerns in a measured way

- The mentor as **role model** can help the young people feel more positive about their future and act as motivation to their keep life on track and prevent a return to offending behaviour.
- The **practical support** provided by the mentor could contribute to tangible changes in young people's outcomes in relation to their life circumstances such as college places, housing, employment

Project development and implementation

'I spend a lot of my time supporting the mentors to support the young people'
[Programme Executive]

Volunteer recruitment and supervision

Regular recruitment of mentors can be time-consuming especially because of the prison security clearance process. In addition, because many of the mentors are new to volunteering and to the work environment and because of their own needs in re-building their lives, supporting the mentors can be time consuming and difficult for the Programme Executives. There was a general consensus among the Programme Executives that creating a core team of motivated and possibly paid mentors would be preferable to these regular recruitment drives for volunteers.

Working with prisons

Latterly the working relationships with the prisons have generally been good. However, this has not always been the case. In one region staff estimated that it took the first 12 to 18 months of the pilot to get access to the prisons, go through security clearance, launch the project and get prison staff to recognise which young people were suitable for the project.

Presence in the prisons is key to gaining acceptance from prison staff. In one prison the Programme Executive had gained access to the landings, was given a desk in the offender management unit, had officers making referrals to him directly and was visiting the prison on average three times per week. In contrast, in another region (in one of several prisons targeted) the staff member visited less than weekly and was very much kept at arms-length.

Governor clearance for the project is clearly essential for initial access to an institution but gaining support from prison officers was crucial for its week-to-week operation. Staff reported some very productive relationships with prison officers. However, this can be disrupted when staff leave or change roles.

Part-way through the pilot, a Prison Manager secondment was arranged by The Prince's Trust to expand the project in one prison. This was beneficial because they had greater access to prisoner information and support agencies that work in the prison.

A time-demanding administrative issue with prison work was the need to get Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and Access NIⁱⁱⁱ clearance for all Mentors and the more recent changes to protocol that require Mentors to go through a separate CRB clearance for every prison they visit. Security checks can take between three to 12 months and this means trained Mentors often have long waits to become 'active'. However, sometimes interim measures were put in place until this paperwork was complete (e.g. using visiting orders to have contact with young person).

Support in the community

The One to One model ideally involves a period of regular contact between young person and Mentor prior to their release from custody to allow time to get to know one another and prepare for return to the community. A logistical issue, particularly in the South West, was the large geographic area covered by the project. It was a challenge to ensure mentors could continue to meet their mentees regularly (face to face) in the community due to distance. In some places this work was heavily supported by the Programme Executives and Volunteer Progression Mentors. The Prince's Trust Progression Mentors are volunteers who support young people for 3 – 6 months into education, training, volunteering or employment.

Recommendations

Overall the evaluation findings show that ex-offender mentors can effectively engage with young offenders and offer forms of support that are not always available or appropriate via more conventional services and there would be no doubt that there is value in developing this model further.

In taking forward the pilot and rolling out to new areas, the following recommendations have been made:

- The central tenet of the One to One model - the ex-offender as both mentor and inspiration to young people leaving custody – works well and should not be changed
- When planning the ratios of staff to young people, The Prince's Trust should set lower ratios than those currently required for other less intensive programmes, in recognition of the level of support required by volunteers and young people
- Revisit how both the volunteers and Programme Executives are supported to fulfil their role in the project, such as increasing frequency of supervision sessions with mentors (currently monthly) and involve some specialist input from counsellors or referral agencies to deal with more complex personal issues
- Re-think how best to balance the number of paid and voluntary staff delivering the project, given the great and expanding workload of Programme Executives
- Employ a small group of Mentors in each site instead of regular recruitment drives for volunteers.
- Focus on one prison at a time to build a good working relationship and to establish the credibility of the project.
- Build on a number of best practice lessons identified in the pilot sites for working in custodial settings e.g. having access to the prison wings and corridors to make direct contact with prisoners.
- Ensure clear and regular lines of communication between the project and the prison and build on good practice examples to encourage all prisons to share data to allow for better targeting of young people (e.g. details of transfers, date and location of their release),
- Develop the particular strengths of the ex-offender volunteers: effective engagement with young people, meeting at the gate, accompanying young people to appointments, being available at short-notice, being an advocate and acting as inspiration that change is possible.
- Ensure compliance with routine monitoring processes to collect employment, education and training outcomes and incorporate a wider range of outcomes in tracking young people's progress
- Recognise the length of time (up to one year) and effort involved for each of the pilot sites to set up and establish their project

Success at HMP Lewes

HMP Lewes provides a good practice example of how the pilot can help young people.

Since October 2011, the project at HMP Lewes has trained 26 volunteers as mentors and supported 65 young people in the community and the prison. Of these, 14 young people have gone into positive outcomes such as education, training, employment or volunteering. The total reconviction rate for all those we have supported in the community is only 23% (checked via the PNOMIS database at HMP Lewes).

Next steps

The Prince's Trust is going to continue to pilot the project for and incorporate improvements.

Our new mission - to support young adults in prison (aged 18 – 30) to not return to prison by helping them into volunteering, education, training or employment. Our aim is that the young people have increased:

- confidence, self-esteem
- awareness of healthy relationships
- links to pathways to reduce offending
- coping strategies to prevent re-offending
- employability skills
- positive outcomes into education, training, employment and volunteering (a target of 60% for this particular programme)

Paid staff – The Programme Executive will continue to manage the project and, in some cases, provide mentoring. The leaving prison mentors role will be simplified, and they will continue to deliver inspirational talks in prison and to support young people to live crime free. A new role called 'Peer Support Assistant' will support a caseload of 25 young people through regular mentoring sessions and gate pick-up.

Pre-release programme – we will deliver a new pre-release course for young people approaching release, involving five sessions: Inspirational talk; Turning away from crime; Preparing for release; The first 72 hours after release and Living crime-free.

Links to employers on release – the project will have a stronger focus on linking to employers /employment opportunities on release. We are in discussion with various employers to take this idea forward.

Measuring soft outcomes

The Trust will continue to collect profile forms /mentor logs on every young person and enter the data onto our in-house database. In addition we will introduce the My Journey soft outcome measurement tool. Young people will continue to receive the text message survey at 3 and 6 months after our support has ended.

Campaign work

The Prince's Trust is also a founding member of the GateMate Alliance - a network of mentoring providers who support people leaving prison /on probation with a vision that everyone leaving prison, especially young adults, has the offer of a mentor to support them through the gate.

Final quotes

Alex, 24

64 convictions, 11th time in prison

"One of the mentors did an inspirational talk about their lives and those talks inspired me to be truthful and honest about my experiences. I was institutionalised at a very young age. Prison was a life for me; it was just a hazard of the job. I've got kids and I thought I might as well give it a go, try and do it properly and the Prince's Trust has helped me do that." Alex's mentor met him at the gate on release and helped him to get information about college courses, attend probation meetings and gain support from a drug agency. Since release Alex has worked as a cleaner and as a labourer. He has remained drug-free and is about to start a part-time plastering course funded by The Prince's Trust.

Melissa, 26

40 convictions, 5th time in prison

Melissa told us that all her offending is committed when she is drunk. Melissa's parents are dead. She has two children but neither is currently in her care. She had heard of the Prince's Trust before attending the meeting in prison and she enjoyed the inspirational talk – "Just the thought of hearing their stories and hearing the backgrounds they come from and believing that if there's hope for these people and they could stop taking the drugs and get to where they are today then I could do it." Melissa was met at the gate: "I just used to get on the train and get pissed up." Her Mentor took her to The Prince's Trust office and helped her get "all my immediate things sorted out, my gas, my electric, got forms sent over to them so I can get my gas and electric meter cleared. Then I got my benefits sorted out." Melissa re-offended on release she contacted the 121 project again. She was supported through the gate a second time and is now doing well in the community. "I want to pass my [driving] test, get a car, start taking holidays abroad and go and see my daughter and get all my family back in my life."

Danny, 21

1 conviction, 1st time in prison

In his first meeting he met three of the Mentors and liked the fact that they too had an offending background. He told us he was worried about being judged for his offence and felt this wasn't an issue with the Mentors: "It's their understanding of your crimes. You are not being judged and they are giving up their time to help you. They know, they've done it the hard way and tried to build their lives up again" His mentor helped by giving him advice on how to deal with his criminal history when applying for jobs and how to present himself in interviews. His mentor visited him first thing on the Monday to see how he was doing and to help him fill out his benefit forms. He also acted as an advocate for Danny when he was late for a probation appointment because of transport difficulties.

Susanne, 32

2 convictions, 1st time in prison

She told us that she links her offending with being a victim of domestic violence. She attended several meetings and was matched with a mentor: "I just clicked with her." Her mentor acted as an advocate for Susanne in support of her application to relocate to the North West. Susanne was given supported accommodation through Nacro and also volunteered for them. She has applied to do a course in health and social care. "When you're changing your life, it's the scariest thing. It's a whole new world out there and having someone there, reminding you that getting out of bed, there's an achievement, you're not staying in bed all day like you used to." When asked what improvements could be made to One to One Project, she recommended that it should be available in every prison.

Mentor: Johnny, 40

First convicted at 16, first prison sentence at 22, last in prison 2001

Johnny was unemployed although had previous experience working on building sites. He decided to get involved because [he] "didn't feel like I was doing anything positive and with the Prince's Trust because of the training and the support they offer I didn't think I had anything to lose". Since being a volunteer Johnny is doing an NVQ in Understanding Substance Misuse and volunteering at a local hostel. Describing to us the benefits of his participation in the One to One scheme, he told us: "It's made me more organised, I've got to get to places on time. I've got my weekly planner now. This has been a good network to hand myself back into everyday life, because I didn't have much structure before".

Mentor: Patsy, 37

First conviction at 18, first prison sentence at 21, last in prison in 2004

Patsy was unemployed with past experience of bar work. "I come from a very dysfunctional family... For my mum to survive with 5 kids on a council estate she had to sell stolen goods so criminality was drummed into me from a very young age. I used to sell stolen goods for my mum. I didn't like school, I found it hard to fit in... I started shoplifting at 12, bunking off school, got into drugs and I've been going in and out of prison for 20 years. I've turned my life around and what I have in my life today I wouldn't change it for the world. It's nice to go along the street without thinking I'm either going to end up dead from what I owe people for my drugs or that I'm going to get arrested and go back into prison."

More Information

To find out more about more about the 'Working one to one with young offenders' pilot please contact Clara Clint, Innovation Manager at clara.clint@princes-trust.org.uk

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ⁱ Hansard HC, 3 March 2010, c1251W

ⁱⁱ Boyce, I; Hunter, G. and Hough, M. (2009) The St Giles Trust Peer Advice Programme: An evaluation. London: St Giles Trust.

ⁱⁱⁱ Northern Ireland Equivalent to Criminal Records Bureau Check