

New
Philanthropy
Capital

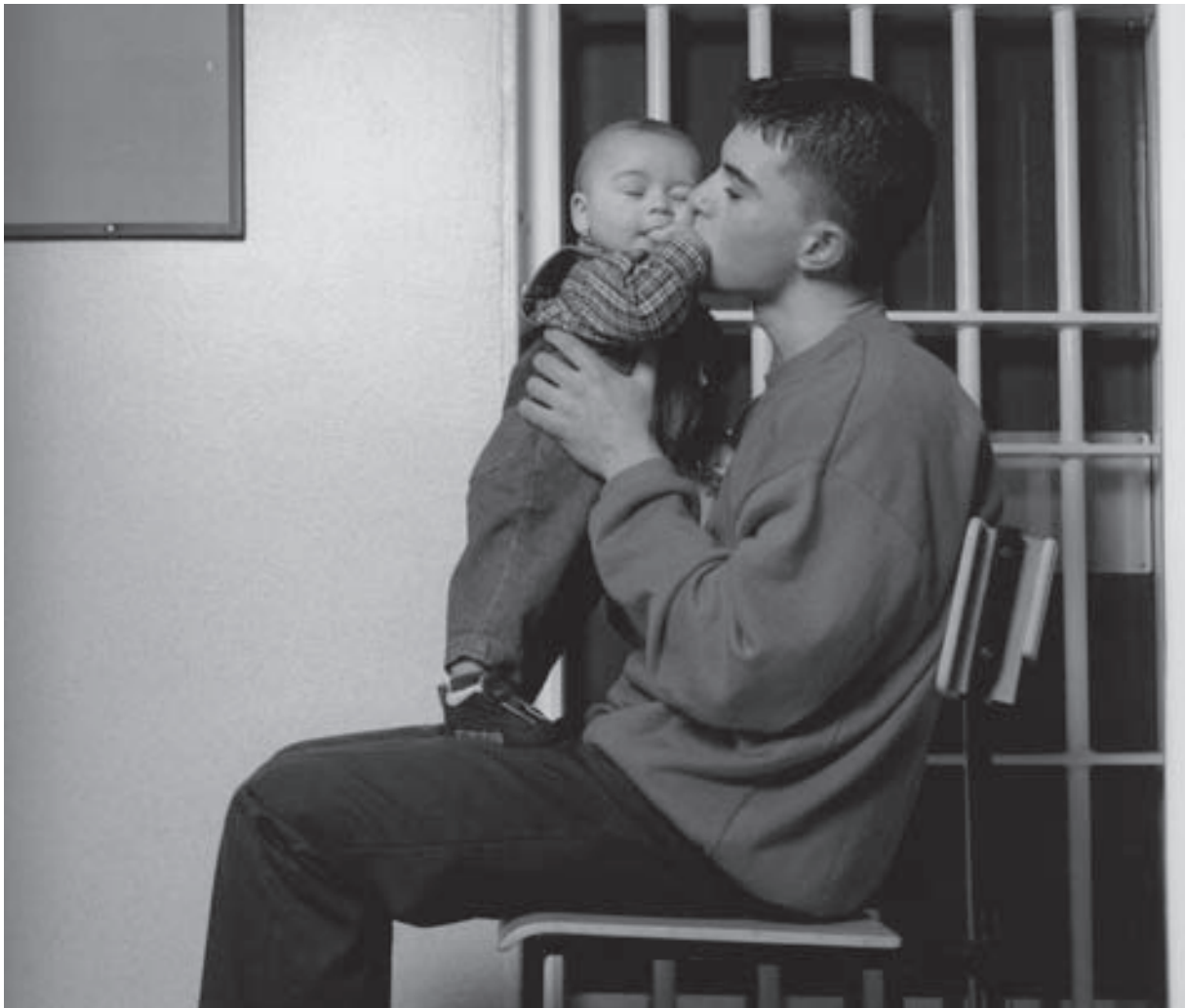
Breaking the cycle

February 2009

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Charities working with people in prison and on release

An update for donors, funders and charities



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Summary

This report is an update to NPC's previous work, *Inside and out: People in prison and life after release*, which was published in 2005. Since this time, the prison population has continued to rise and re-offending rates remain unacceptably high. This report considers the implications of recent changes in the criminal justice system on the work of charities and investigates opportunities for private philanthropy.

The need

The rehabilitation of prisoners should matter to us all—whether we are concerned about the safety of our communities, reducing the burden on taxpayers, or the welfare of one of the most disadvantaged groups in the UK.

Two thirds of prisoners re-offend within two years of leaving prison, committing at least one million crimes and costing the taxpayer a total of £13bn a year.^{19,6} Improving this situation does not just require the punishment of offenders—it requires effective services that tackle people's problems and turn them away from crime.

Over 70% of prisoners experience mental health problems and half have no qualifications.^{16,6} During their sentences, prisoners may lose their jobs, their homes and contact with their families. Problems such as these directly increase the likelihood that a prisoner will re-offend on release.

The prison population has grown rapidly over the past five years as sentences get tougher and longer. In 2007, nearly 136,000 people were sentenced to prison, putting significant strain on prison and probation services and at great expense to a shrinking government budget.²⁰ Little is left over for support services to address the problems prisoners face, such as mental health care, drug treatment, or help finding a job or housing.

Attempts to improve the system are hampered by the lack of a comprehensive evidence base on what works to reduce re-offending, and poor coordination between the Prison and Probation Services. The government's proposed solution—building 'Titan prisons' housing up to 2,500 prisoners—flies in the face of most available evidence.

There is a clear need for charitable activity and private philanthropy. Despite the complexity of the issues, donors have the opportunity not only to help individual prisoners but also to improve the entire criminal justice system.

The role of charities

Within this challenging environment, charities have a vital role to play. Their independence from government, and their ability to be responsive and innovative, are crucial qualities when working with prisoners to reduce re-offending. But charities working within this field face a number of challenges: in capturing their results, sustaining services and operating within a politically sensitive field.

The vast majority of charities working with offenders are small organisations, yet it is the larger regional and national organisations that often receive the majority of available funding. Activities range from providing core services, such as drug treatment programmes, to campaigning and lobbying for improvements to the criminal justice system. Increasingly, charities from other sectors, such as drug and alcohol and employment, also work with ex-offenders.

The government is a major funder of charities' work. However, funding cuts and changes to the way it funds services have all affected the sector. Charities have tried to adapt, but in some cases lack the expertise, capacity and resources to do so.

Grant-making trusts and foundations have long supported work with offenders and have played an important role in strengthening the sector. However, they are becoming increasingly frustrated with the government's lack of strategic engagement with the voluntary sector and the lack of investment in innovative services funded by charitable trusts.

Charities require funding to prove the impact of their services in order to attract government funding and inform commissioning. At a higher level charities also have an important role to play in influencing public attitudes towards offenders.

The role of donors

The case for donors to support people in prison and on release is morally, socially and financially compelling. People in prison are one of the most disadvantaged groups in the UK, and their rehabilitation has repercussions for everyone. Helping them not only improves their own lives and the lives of their families, but decreases the risk of re-offending, reducing crime and its huge costs to society.

For example, investing £1 in a charity such as **Elmore Community Services**, which supports vulnerable prisoners on release, saves the taxpayer £14 by reducing re-offending and its associated costs to the criminal justice system, offenders and their families, and the wider community (see Box 14 for our full analysis).

The potential is enormous, but where can private money have the greatest impact? Beneath the political rhetoric, the situation is confused and constantly changing. This makes it harder for both charities and funders to plan for the future.

However, the most urgent priorities are clear. These include direct services, such as employment programmes, housing advice projects and 'through the gate' support on release; and campaigning, lobbying for policy change and challenging public opinion. Within these areas donors have the opportunity to achieve lasting change—not only in an individual's life, but in the sector itself.

Supporting charities in this sector does involve risks. Funding new interventions to help prisoners will not guarantee their adoption by an over-stretched Prison Service. Campaigning and lobbying work may not alter the policy of a government that needs to look tough on law and order.

But despite these challenges, private donors continue to make a vital contribution. By funding charities that are developing innovative approaches, providing an independent perspective of the criminal justice system, and supporting thousands of prisoners and their families, donors can help to break the cycle of re-offending.



Photograph courtesy of Clean Break

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Photograph supplied by Prison Reform Trust - Michael Grievé

Introduction

The purpose of this report

This report is an update to NPC's previous work, *Inside and out: People in prison and life after release*, which was published in 2005.

The aim of this report is to consider the implications of recent changes in the criminal justice system on the work of charities and on the role and impact of private funding. These include changes to government infrastructure, a new approach to tackling re-offending and the reorganisation of government funding. In the last decade, the prison population has been rapidly growing, despite falling crime rates, which has had significant repercussions for the sector.

The need for philanthropy for people in prison and on release remains morally, socially and financially compelling. People in prison are one of the most disadvantaged groups in the UK, and the current system is failing to rehabilitate prisoners and to reduce re-offending. By helping prisoners deal with their problems, donors can reduce re-offending, thus reducing the huge personal and social costs of crime.

Nevertheless, donors should be informed and realistic about their role and their potential impact. This complex sector requires nuanced advice about what can be achieved and where private philanthropy can have the most impact.

Methodology

The process underpinning the research is different in this update to NPC's usual sector reports. The emphasis is on a higher level of analysis, reviewing government policy and the voluntary sector as a whole, rather than detailing the work of a large number of charities. See NPC's previous report, *Inside and out*, for a detailed illustration of the range of work going on in the sector.

The research process involved talking to funders, policy makers and academics. When it came to individual charities, the focus was on organisations recommended in the previous report. Where there were gaps in the portfolio of recommendations, new charities were analysed. This followed NPC's updated charity analysis framework, which will be published in Spring 2009.

Scope and content

This report focuses on charities working with adults in prison and those who have been released. It includes a discussion of the wider criminal justice system, including sentencing trends, use of community orders and alternatives to custody, particularly with regard to their impact on the Prison and Probation Services.

The report does not address the question of how to prevent offending in the first place. This is strongly linked to wider social issues, such as poverty, social exclusion, access to health care and education. NPC publications on these sectors are outlined at the back of this report.

The research does not cover the issue of youth offending, which will be the subject of a forthcoming NPC report. It also largely focuses on developments in England and Wales, although insights from the Scottish system provide some useful contrasts.

Structure

This report has three chapters:

The basics: This chapter reviews the issues that people face in prison and on release; the current challenges and deficiencies in the resettlement and rehabilitation process; and the structural constraints that limit improvements. Recent changes to government policy and their implications for the voluntary sector are discussed. It also attempts to pull together evidence of what works to reduce re-offending.

The voluntary sector: This chapter focuses on the nature of the voluntary sector within the criminal justice system—what it looks like, what it does, and how charities have been affected by changes in government policy and funding. It also spells out some of the challenges that the voluntary sector faces, which influence the environment for donors.

A donor's role: The final chapter pulls together the relevant issues to highlight lessons and priorities for donors who are interested in funding voluntary sector work with prisoners.

‘Too often a prison sentence does not cure the causes of crime, but aggravates them. It leaves prisoners virtually destitute, on the road back to prison even as they leave it.’

Social Exclusion Unit⁶



Photograph supplied by Prison Reform Trust

The basics

The rehabilitation of prisoners should matter to us all—whether we are concerned about having a safer community, reducing the burden on the taxpayer, or the welfare of one of the most disadvantaged groups in the UK.

Two thirds of prisoners re-offend within two years of leaving prison, committing at least one million crimes and costing the taxpayer £13bn a year.^{19,6} Improving this situation does not just require the punishment of offenders. It also requires effective services that tackle people’s problems and turn them away from crime.

The prison population has grown rapidly over the last five years, as sentences have been getting tougher and longer. In 2007, nearly 136,000 people were sentenced to custody.²⁰ This puts significant strain on prison and probation services and soaks up a shrinking government budget. Little is left over for support services such as mental health care, drug treatment, or help finding employment or housing.

Attempts to improve the effectiveness of the system are hampered by the lack of a comprehensive evidence base on what works to reduce re-offending, and poor coordination between the Prison and Probation Services. The government’s proposed solution— building ‘Titan prisons’ housing up to 2,500 prisoners— flies in the face of most available evidence.

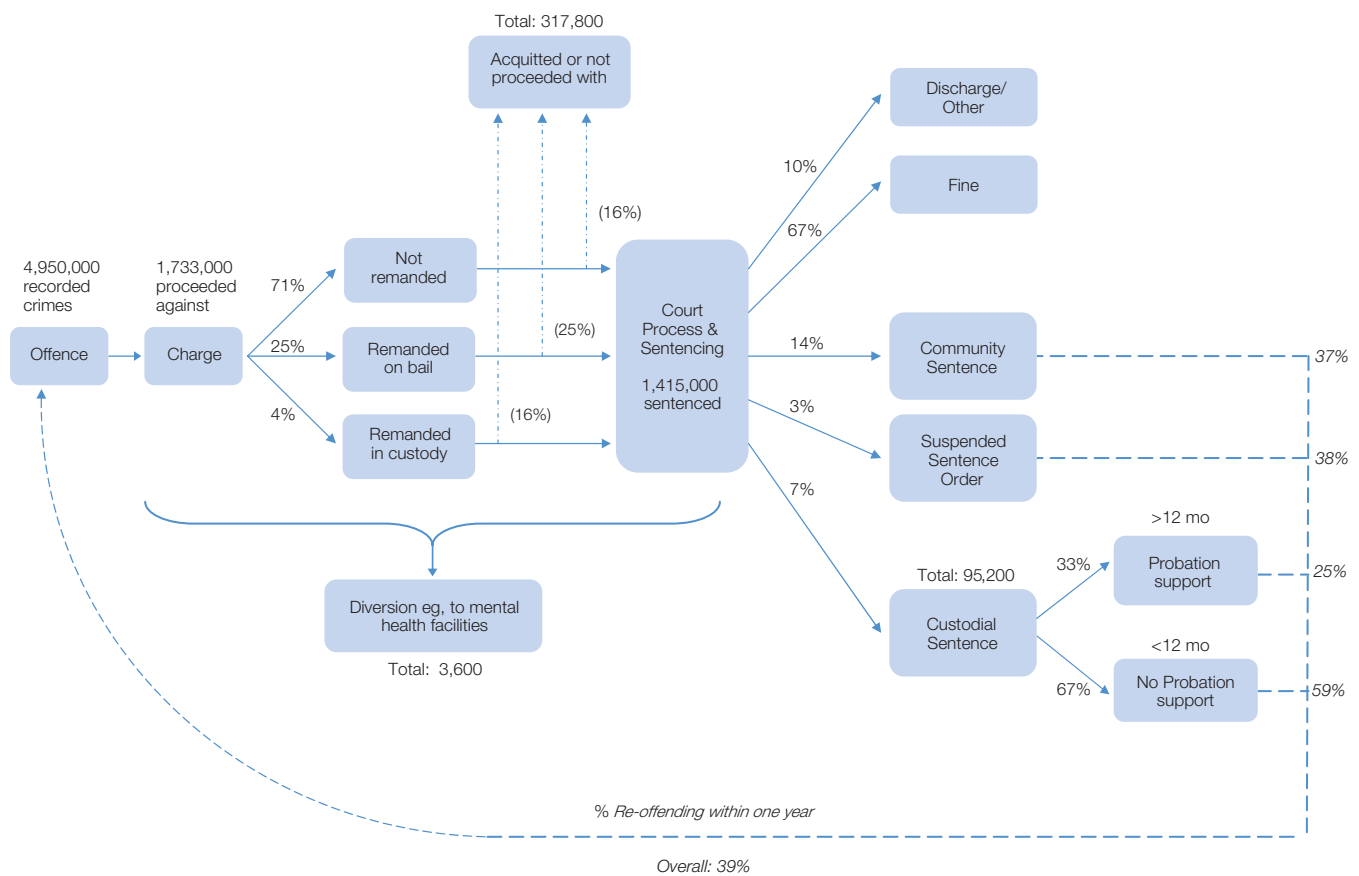
Due to the high level of need, and the failure of current provision, there is a clear role for charitable activity and private philanthropy. Despite the complexity of the issues, donors have the opportunity not only to benefit individual prisoners, but also to improve the entire criminal justice system.

A prisoner’s journey

In an ideal case an offender is charged, sentenced to an appropriate punishment and supported to reintegrate into society on release from prison. However, in reality the situation is rarely as straightforward as this. Many offenders go on to re-offend and their journey becomes a vicious cycle that is very difficult to break (see Figure 1).

In 2006, untried people were remanded into custody for an average length of 58 days.

Figure 1: The journey through the criminal justice system†



† All figures taken from ‘Sentencing statistics 2007’ and ‘Re-offending of adults: results from the 2006 cohort’.^{20,34} Percentages are rounded.

Box 1: A typical prisoner's story**Mark**

Mark was always in trouble at school. His teachers could not control him, and his mum struggled to cope at home with his younger brothers and sisters. He hardly knew his dad, who had been in prison since he was three, and he did not get on with his mum's new boyfriend.

After getting excluded from school for fighting, Mark fell in with a bad crowd of older lads and ran away from home. Finding himself homeless and jobless, with no qualifications and few aspirations, he started taking drugs. By his eighteenth birthday, he was burgling houses to pay for his fix.

One night, Mark got caught breaking in by the police. He got sent to a local prison and was sentenced to nine months behind bars. While he was there, Mark hoped he could get some form of help with his drug habit, or pick up some qualifications. But halfway through his sentence and still on the waiting list for a literacy scheme and drug treatment, Mark got moved to a different prison two hours away. There, the process started all over again. *'I really thought I was on the way to getting off drugs,' he says, 'but then I found myself right back at square one. It was really depressing.'*

At the end of his sentence, Mark was released with a carrier bag of possessions and his £46.75 discharge fee, which had to last for two weeks until his benefit claim came through. With no one to meet him at the gate, and no help finding a place to stay, he ended up heading back to the same area he grew up in and meeting up with his old friends. Within a month, he was back in prison for breaking and entering.

Carly

Carly first started taking drugs with her boyfriend when she was fifteen. Two years later, after leaving school with no qualifications, her boyfriend left her with two children and a drug habit. She struggled to cope as a single mum but managed to find part-time work in a local shop, while a friend looked after the children. But the strain of caring for two children and working got on top of Carly and, after visiting her doctor, she was diagnosed with depression and given Prozac and sleeping tablets.

One day, two men came to Carly's house with stolen credit cards and cheque books and asked if she wanted to buy things for her children. With Christmas around the corner and a drugs habit to feed, the temptation was too much. *'I was well out of control,'* she says *'I went with them to the shops and within no time the kids had all they wanted.'*

Eventually, Carly got caught by the police and ended up being sent to a women's prison, three hours away from where she lived. With no family to support her and no one to look after her children, they were taken into care. *'I felt the social services were playing with my kids like a pack of cards.'*

The children's foster parents were sympathetic and took them to visit Carly, but because of the distance they could only manage the journey every three months. Carly also struggled to get her medication in prison, as staff believed she would try to sell it, and her depression got worse. *'At lock in I grabbed a bag and sat behind the wardrobe and tried to suffocate myself. Unfortunately the officers came in and got me.'*

After eight months Carly was released with no home to go to and no job. With her children in care, she was not a priority case to receive housing and ended up staying in a hostel. She fought to regain custody of her children, but with no house was not allowed to have her children back. *'I know I made a mistake,'* she says, *'but even though I did my time it still feels like I'm being punished now.'*

160,000 children have a parent in prison. In 2006, more children were affected by this than by divorce.

As a person moves through the criminal justice system, there are numerous points where charities may intervene. Understanding this journey, and the nature and extent of the problems that people face at different stages, can help donors identify key points where they can make a difference. Box 1 outlines a typical experience of a male and female prisoner.

The following describes each stage of a prisoner's journey through the criminal justice system.

Pre-sentence

From the outset, people going through the criminal justice system tend to have significant problems (see Table 1). They are 13 times more likely than the general population to be unemployed; 14 times more likely to have two or more mental disorders; 32 times more likely to be homeless; and nearly four times more likely to have no qualifications.⁶

In theory, people with acute problems—such as severe mental illness and drug abuse—should be identified by a pre-sentence assessment and, if appropriate, diverted into psychiatric or medical care. Yet in practice, problems are often missed and opportunities for diversion are limited. There is a lack of serious investment in diversion and liaison schemes, and a lack of suitable alternative provision, such as secure psychiatric accommodation.²¹

While people wait to be sentenced, they are either released on bail or, if they are assessed to be a danger to the public or likely to abscond, imprisoned on remand. Prisoners on remand now make up 17% of the prison population at any one time.²² In 2006, 55,800 untried people were remanded into custody for an average length of 58 days.²³ On some calculations, using 2007 data, this figure is higher (see Figure 1). While in prison, there is limited opportunity for remand prisoners to benefit from available services, such as work or education classes,

and they are not helped with resettlement on release.

In 2005, one fifth of remand prisoners went on to be acquitted and only half received a custodial sentence. Better initial assessment and a wider range of bail options in the community could reduce the burden on the prison system and avoid major inconvenience to the individual.

Sentencing

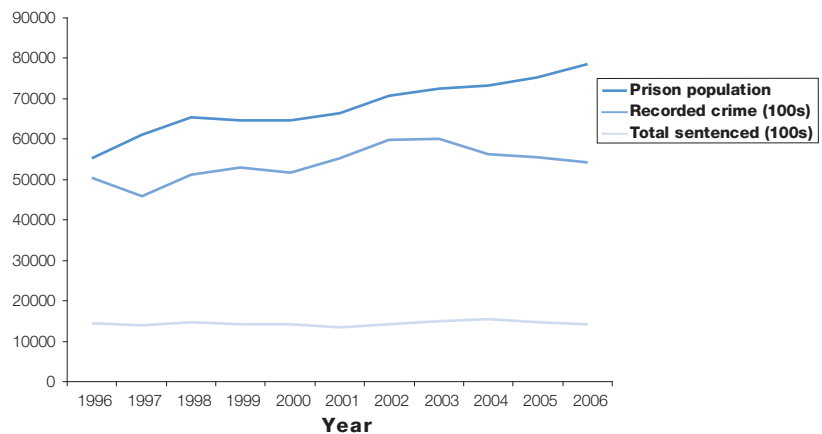
While the number of people convicted each year has stayed roughly constant over the last decade, the prison population has grown rapidly as sentences have become tougher.²⁴ (See Figure 2.)

Offences that would have previously warranted a fine or community sentence now often receive a custodial sentence (a process called ‘up-tariffing’).²⁵ In 2007, there were nearly 136,000 people sentenced to custody (immediate and suspended), the highest in a decade. This was an increase of 5% from 2006 and 40% from 1997.²⁰

Meanwhile, sentence length has also increased as a rising number of people are receiving indefinite sentences including life and Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP).[†]

IPP sentences were introduced in 2005 with the aim of protecting the public from dangerous offenders. However, the scope of these sentences has been wide, including

Figure 2: Trends in the prison population: number sentenced and recorded crime 1996–2006



being used for short-term tariffs and offenders committing minor crimes. The high number of prisoners now serving these sentences (over 4,200 in October 2008) has put great strain on an already over-loaded and under-resourced prison system.²⁶

A joint report from the Prison and Probation Inspectorates criticised these sentences as a lesson in ‘how not to’ tackle offending, and warned that the implementation and impact of such sentences would damage the penal system ‘for years to come’.²⁷ As a result of this and similar objections, use of these sentences has now been restricted to the most serious offenders to ease pressure on the overcrowding crisis.

Table 1: Examples of prisoners’ needs at different stages

	Accommodation	Education, employment and training	Health	Drugs and alcohol	Finance, benefits and debt	Children and families	Attitudes and behaviour
Before prison	One in three prisoners are not in permanent accommodation prior to imprisonment. ¹¹	Half of prisoners have no qualifications at all. ¹⁴	Over 70% of prisoners have two or more mental health problems. ¹⁶	Nearly 75% of prisoners have taken illegal drugs in the year prior to entering prison. ⁷	Three quarters of prisoners are on benefits prior to imprisonment. ¹²	160,000 children in the UK are affected by a parent going to prison. ¹⁰	Nearly 50% of male and 33% of female prisoners were excluded from school. ⁶
During custody	As many as a third of prisoners lose their housing on imprisonment. ¹²	Two thirds of prisoners who do have a job lose it when they enter prison. ¹²	Over 20,000 incidents of self-harm and 90 suicides were recorded in 2007. ^{3,18}	40% of prisoners report using some form of drug during custody. ¹⁵	A third of prisoners experience an increase in debt problems during custody. ⁸	Prisoners are held an average of 50 miles away from home. ²	Prisoners only spend an average of 20 hours a week on purposeful activity. ⁵
On release	A third of prisoners have nowhere to stay on release. ¹	Three quarters of prisoners do not have paid employment to go to on release. ¹³	96% of mentally disordered patients are released without supported accommodation. ¹⁷	The risk of drug-related deaths in men is 40 times higher on release than in the general population. ⁹	The discharge grant on release of £46.75 has not increased since 1997. ⁸	Nearly half of prisoners lose contact with their family during custody. ⁴	Many prisoners exhibit ‘learned helplessness’ and are unable to manage entry back into the community. ⁶

[†]An IPP is given to someone who is convicted of a serious specified violent or sexual offence for which the maximum sentence is ten years or more and who, in the court’s view, poses a significant risk of serious harm to the public. Offenders given the IPP are told they must serve a minimum term—the tariff—after which the Parole Board will decide if they can be released. If they are not freed, they remain in jail indefinitely with regular two-year reviews of their case by the board.

“An offender is much less likely to re-offend if he feels part of a family and community, from which he receives support as well as owes obligations.”

Charles Clarke

Prison

Prison should present a clear opportunity for rehabilitation. However, far from addressing needs, prison often exacerbates existing problems or adds to them. The initial period of imprisonment can be particularly traumatic. In 2007, a third of self-harm incidents happened within the first month of arrival and a fifth of suicides occurred within the first week.²⁸

On arrival in prison, each person should receive a proper assessment—for example for mental health problems or drug use. Yet the quality and length of this process differs arbitrarily from prison to prison. Each prisoner should also be accompanied by their pre-sentence assessment, but these records are often delayed.

Once prisoners have been assessed, they should be assigned the appropriate support or treatment. But access to services, such as mental health counselling, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, and even medication, is often governed by very strict eligibility criteria.

Prisoners may also face barriers in accessing broader opportunities. Only a third of prisoners take part in education and training courses and these do not necessarily provide the most effective support.²⁹ For example, it is not clear whether teaching basic skills is enough to help people get a job or reduce re-offending.³⁰

Contact outside of prison

Families of prisoners are also affected by the imprisonment. Around 160,000 children have a parent in prison; in 2006, more children were affected in this way than through divorce in

the family.^{10,31} Compared to their peers, the children of prisoners are three times more likely to be mentally ill or to take part in anti-social behaviour, and two thirds of boys with a convicted parent go on to offend.⁶ Maintaining family ties while in prison can help mitigate this negative impact on the family.

Family visits can also lead to better outcomes for prisoners. They are associated with successful employment and accommodation outcomes on release, and they reduce the chance of re-offending on release from 70% to 52%.³² Yet many prisoners are held far from home and receive few visits during their sentence. When he was Home Secretary, Charles Clarke observed, ‘An offender is much less likely to re-offend if he feels part of a family and community, from which he receives support as well as owes obligations.’

Leaving prison

Leaving prison can be as traumatic as entering it—recently released male offenders are eight times more likely to commit suicide than other men, and female offenders are 36 times more likely than other women.³³ Individuals often need help to manage their transition back into the community. Yet there is little coordination or continuity between services in prison and on release. Key needs can be overlooked—only one in five prisoners who needs help with accommodation receives support or advice.¹¹

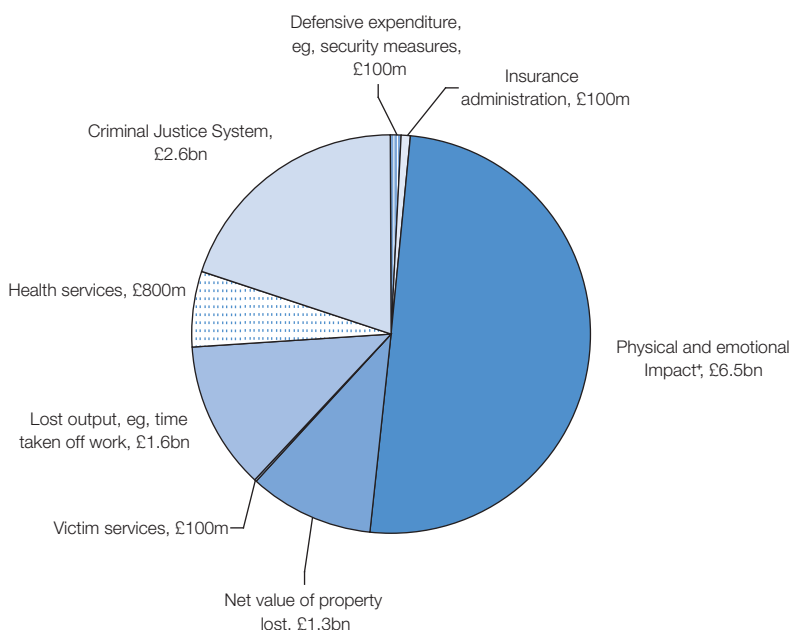
Those with a sentence of more than a year are usually released under the supervision of the Probation Service, and in theory should be visited by their probation officer while still in prison to help prepare for their release. This rarely happens. Those with a sentence of under a year do not receive any probation support at all.

The period after release is when people’s needs are most urgent. They usually need to find somewhere to live, sign on for benefits, register at a GP and begin to rebuild their lives. On leaving prison, the fortunate ones are met at the gate, either by a designated probation officer, a family member, or a volunteer.

Without this immediate support, people who have left prison can easily turn back to alcohol and drugs. The risk of death for men released from prison is 40 times higher in the first week of release than for the general population, largely due to drug-related deaths.⁹

People leaving prison often need financial support as well as emotional support. The discharge grant of £46.75 that every released prisoner receives has not increased since 1997, and is unlikely to last the 11 to 18 days it takes to process a benefits claim.⁸

Figure 3: Breakdown of estimated total costs of re-offending to individuals and households^{57*}



* Takes account of the expected prevalence and duration of the physical and psychological outcomes of offences, and is a monetary estimate of the effect on a victim’s quality of life.

* The breakdown of costs for re-offending are presumed to be proportionate to the breakdown of costs for total crime

Released prisoners continue to face problems such as poverty, unemployment, lack of sustained accommodation, ill-health and discrimination. All of these compound the likelihood that they will re-offend.

Re-offending

In 2006, 48% of people sent to prison and 37% of those on community sentences went on to re-offend within a year—most in the first three months.³⁴ Within two years of release, 64% of those sent to prison and 50% of those on community sentences are likely to re-offend.¹⁹ Released prisoners are responsible for at least a million crimes a year—a fifth of all recorded crime.¹⁹ By adding together the cost incurred in anticipation of crime (eg, insurance), costs as a consequence of crime (eg, health services, repairing damage) and costs to the criminal justice system, the total cost of re-offending to society is estimated at £13bn (see Figure 3).³⁵

Vulnerable groups

Certain groups are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of the prison system, including those with specific needs, such as older people, foreign nationals, women and people with mental health problems or learning disabilities. Staff are not usually adequately trained to deal with these groups, and facilities and programmes are rarely designed with them in mind.

Within the wider prison population, three overlapping groups are particularly disadvantaged.

Prisoners on short sentences

In 2006, 65,000 out of the total 96,000 sentences handed out in England and Wales were for 12 months or less.³⁶ At any one time, 11% of the total prison population is serving a sentence of 12 months or less (see Figure 4).²³

These sentences are too short for prisoners to be able to engage in prison services or beneficial programmes, but are potentially long enough to lose a job, a home and contact with family. On release, these prisoners do not receive any support from the Probation Service. Although the government was planning to widen the support for people on sentences of six months (Custody Plus), this has been put on hold due to lack of funding.²⁵

It is perhaps not surprising that reconviction rates are highest for those who have served short custodial sentences. In Scotland, a third of prisoners sentenced to short-term sentences in 2006/2007 had been in prison between three and ten times before, and 15% had received more than ten previous custodial sentences.³⁷

Figure 4: Prison population by sentence type (October 2008)

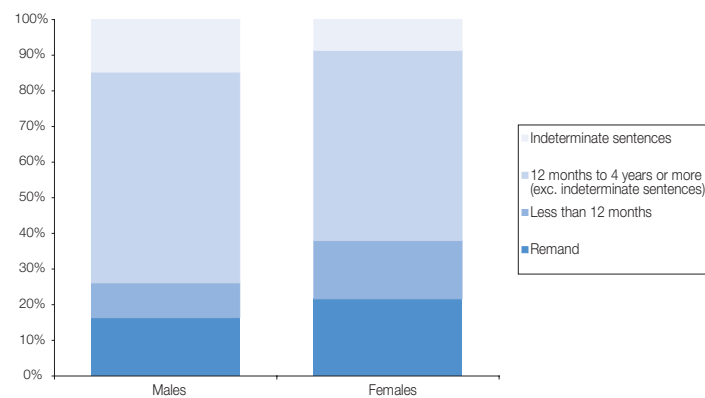
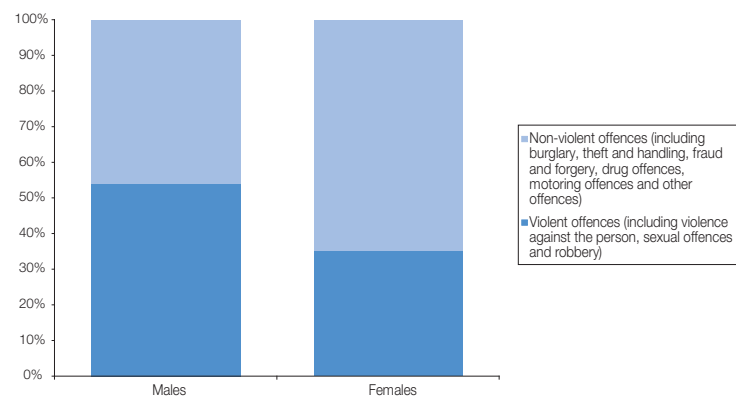


Figure 5: Sentenced population by offence type (October 2008)



Women

The female prison population of 4,325 only makes up 5% of the total prison population.²⁶ Of these, the vast majority are in jail on short-term sentences for non-violent crime, and one fifth are on remand (see Figure 4).²²

A woman is more likely to be imprisoned than a man who has committed a similar crime.³⁸ This is despite the fact that there are more likely to be mitigating factors. Women are more likely to be victims of domestic violence or sexual abuse, and are more likely to have been coerced into crimes.³⁸

The prison system is based on the needs of men. Women do not necessarily require the same level of security and are more likely to have mental health issues. They also face specific problems with accommodation: while male prisoners may return to their family home on release, this is less likely for women.

Two thirds of women in prison have dependant children under 18, and at least a third are lone mothers before imprisonment.⁶ Only fourteen women's prisons exist across the whole of England and Wales and 60% of female prisoners are held in prisons outside their home region, making it even harder to maintain family ties.³⁹

Within two years of release, 64% of prisoners will re-offend—committing at least one million crimes per year.

Box 2: The Corston Report ³⁸

In March 2007, Baroness Corston published her report into vulnerable women in the criminal justice system, which had been commissioned by the Home Office after a series of suicides within female prisons.

The report made 43 recommendations for improvement, and called for a gender-specific approach to women in the criminal justice system and those at risk of offending. This included recommendations to take account of the effects of domestic violence, sexual abuse and prostitution, and for replacing existing women's prisons with geographically dispersed, multi-functional custodial centres. In addition it advocated the use of women's centres, such as those run by charities, both as part of community sentencing and for delivery of probation and other services.

The government response accepted 40 out of the 43 recommendations. However, concerns have been raised about the government commitment to this work and sufficient resources and funding have not been made available to deliver the recommendations. Instead, attention has been diverted to expanding the prison estate.²⁵

In response to these concerns, the Home Office commissioned a report by Baroness Corston on women in the criminal justice system (see Box 2). This advocated a gender-specific approach to female offenders and the greater use of community provision. The government has responded positively but with limited allocations of funding.²⁵ Efforts to provide effective community support tailored to the needs of women offenders remain patchy.

Black and minority ethnic groups

Black and minority ethnic (BME) groups are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system. Compared to their white counterparts, BME groups are more likely to be stopped and searched, to be charged with more serious offences for similar behaviour, and to be imprisoned for longer for equivalent offences.⁴⁰ In 2006, BME groups made up 26% of the prison population, despite only comprising 8% of the population of England and Wales.^{23,41}

In addition to this over-representation, there have been well-documented reports of racism within the prison system. Former and current Director Generals of Prisons have acknowledged the 'institutional racism' within the system, while external investigations, such as that by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), have highlighted the mistreatment of BME prisoners and staff.⁴²

In response to this situation, the government, together with the CRE, outlined a five-year action plan to address the culture of racism.⁴³ The results of this work, published in December 2008, revealed that there has been significant progress in putting the systems and processes in place to effectively manage race equality in prisons. However, it also acknowledges that the experience of BME prisoners and staff has not been transformed.⁴⁴ Combating racial discrimination within the prison system therefore remains a key challenge.

External constraints

Efforts to improve the prison system are heavily influenced by an unwieldy criminal justice system that has three significant problems:

- strain due to overcrowding;
- decreasing government funding; and
- lack of evidence-based decision making.

These constraints shape the charitable sector and its ability to get funding to design and deliver high-quality services, which has significant repercussions for private philanthropy.

Growing strain on the current system

Increasingly punitive sentences have contributed to the significant rise of people in prison from 65,298 in 1998 to 83,703 in September 2008.^{45,22} Unsurprisingly, both the Prison and Probation Services have struggled to deal with this rapid increase.

There is a fundamental lack of space. Just over half of prisons in England and Wales are overcrowded; more than 19,000 prisoners were doubled in cells intended for one person and prison inspectors have found people housed in toilets.⁴⁶ The quality of the prison estate is also poor: a third of the accommodation was built in the 19th century or earlier.⁴⁷

This overcrowding churns prisoners through the system. As new prisoners enter, people have to be moved to make room, often with little warning or coordination. A study by Citizens Advice found that on average, prisoners moved four times during their sentence.⁸ The Prison Service itself finds it hard to track people, or ensure that their records and files are forwarded as they move on.

Rising numbers not only have an impact on basic decency and living standards, but also on services within prison. From the beginning of 2008, the Prison Service is cutting the so-called 'core day', which effectively means that prisoners are kept in the cell for longer periods of time to save on staff costs. This affects the number of courses that prisoners can take. If they can get on a specialist course, there is a high risk that they may be moved before completing it, and there is no guarantee that the course will be offered at their new prison.

In the face of overcrowding, cutting costs and government targets, both the Prison and Probation Services are falling back on their core roles of punishment and public protection and becoming increasingly risk averse. This has led to more rigorous rules concerning movement around prison, access to prisoners, and activities on probation.

The rising prison population soaks up resources like a sponge and takes away resources from the other things ... you would need to have in place in order not to use prison so much; so it becomes a kind of vicious cycle.

Chief Inspector of Prisons

To reduce overcrowding, some prisoners are now released before the end of their sentence. Between June 2007 (when this practice was introduced) and December 2008, 45,000 non-violent prisoners were released in this way.⁴⁸ This increase has obviously impacted on the Probation Service, which had a total caseload of just over 235,000 in 2006.²³ This included 146,530 supervised under a court order—a 47% increase since 1996—and 90,740 offenders under pre- or post-custody supervision—an 82% increase over the same period.²³

Since 2002, a probation officer's average caseload has increased from 31 to 40 cases.⁴⁹ Probation officers no longer have to be trained social workers, and instead have a case-management function, referring clients to other services and ensuring compliance with the requirements of the licence or order. Ex-offenders potentially miss out on the benefits of a personal relationship, attention and care. And there are indications that probation officers are less likely to give their clients any lee-way before sending them back to prison. This shift can be summed up in the change of the Probation Service's motto from *'Advise, Assist, Befriend'* to *'Enforcement, Rehabilitation and Public Protection'*.

Decreasing government funding

Despite an anticipated rise in the prison population to 86,400 in 2010, government funding for the Prison and Probation Services is subject to budgetary constraints.⁵⁰ The Ministry of Justice is expected to make efficiency savings of 3% each year for the next three years, and this is likely to be reflected by similar cuts in the prison and probation budgets.

Funding is being diverted to cope with the growing prison population. Each new person in jail costs the Prison Service £33,000 a year, and it costs £125,000 to build a new prison place.⁵¹ Total costs were £28m last year.⁵²

This comes after a period of five years during which the budget had roughly kept pace with the rise in numbers. Funding for the Probation Service had increased by 40% in real terms.⁴⁹ Even with these increases, the Prison and Probation Services were reporting insufficient funding, blaming an increased administrative burden due to changes to sentencing, in addition to the increase in caseload described above.

Both the Prison and Probation Services are preparing for either 'efficiency savings' or cuts in funding for services.⁵³ In a 2008 survey of 42 probation areas, 9 had significant deficits in their budgets, with another 11 having to make substantial savings.⁴⁹

To help defray some of the immediate costs of expanding prison places and to contribute to greater efficiency, the government has involved

Box 3: Private prisons

There are 11 private prisons in the UK, catering for 10% of the prison population. They are run by a collection of private companies (such as Serco and GS4), which tender for contracts at the national level and are then responsible for providing all services in their prisons, including health care and education.

In 2003, the National Audit Office produced a report on private prisons, noting improvements in efficiency, relations with prisoners, and purposeful activities. But it also highlighted problems with security and levels of prisoner aggression. A recent report into HMP Ryes Hill noted the *'unsafe and unstable environment'*. Critics point to the low ratio of staff to prisoners, and the low levels of pay and high staff turnover.

It is hard to make blanket comparisons across all the prisons, as private and public prisons are judged by different standards. But at the moment, 10 out of the 11 private prisons are rated in the bottom quartile of the prison performance table.⁸³

private companies in building and running prisons. This trend started in the 1990s, and private companies now run 11 prisons in the UK. Despite uncertain evidence in favour of its effectiveness (see Box 3), privatisation is at the heart of the government's strategy to expand the prison estate.

Lack of evidence-based decision-making

In the face of a growing prison population and insufficient funding, the government is trying to increase efficiency and effectiveness through evidence-based commissioning. However, this strategy is limited.⁵⁴ There is no comprehensive evidence base either in knowing what works, or in knowing why programmes work and how best to implement them. Evaluation of interventions is often constrained for financial, bureaucratic or political reasons.

Although the evidence base for reducing re-offending is improving, it is still inconsistent and incomplete.⁵⁵ This situation is due in part to the insufficient funding in this area, but also to the inherent difficulties in conducting robust research with the offending population (see Box 4). It is difficult to attribute the ability to reduce re-offending to a particular project or programme, and especially difficult to assess its ability to be scaled up and replicated to similar effect.⁵⁶

However, it is possible to draw out general conclusions on the best way to work with offenders using the existing evidence base (see Table 2). It is widely recognised that no intervention alone will impact on offending, and that a coordinated programme of intervention is required.⁵⁶ Programmes should take into account the overlapping and complex nature of offenders' needs and determine the best way to sequence support. Successful programmes should also tie together existing services and provide personalised, intensive and long-term support.

Box 4: The difficulties in conducting research with offenders

Difficulties in knowing what works

It is often not feasible or ethical to implement strict research methodology when working with prisoners. So unfortunately, few studies are of a high enough quality to draw significant conclusions.⁵⁵ The structural constraints of the system mean that it is difficult to recruit sufficient participants for studies and many will have to drop out due to churn within the system.⁵⁶ Longitudinal studies assessing the long-term impact of interventions on re-offending are also scarce, due to the difficulties in following up. As a result of these factors, much research has to be inferred or extrapolated from abroad. However, there are limits to how much these lessons can be applied in the UK context.⁵⁵

Difficulties in knowing how and why programmes work

Although some programmes work for some offenders, little is known about the underlying mechanisms by which an intervention achieves change.⁵⁶ This is the key to understanding how interventions can be implemented effectively. Most studies assess and are compared on reconviction rates, as this is the only acceptable hard data that can be measured. However, this measure only tells us what works, not 'what works for whom and why'. This is a limited 'all or nothing' measure that can underestimate levels of re-offending and is affected by changes in policy and prosecution practice.

Reconviction rates also make it difficult to attribute success to a single cause. Few studies look at other measures, such as frequency and severity of re-offending, or at non-reconviction benefits such as sustained employment or housing, reduction in drug or alcohol use, or improved self-confidence.⁵⁶

Difficulties in implementing and sequencing support

Where good evidence does exist on effective interventions, there are difficulties in rolling out and implementing these programmes.⁵⁹ This is due to limitations in both the knowledge on the best way to sequence support, and in the capacity of the Prison and Probation Services. It is widely accepted that properly integrated multi-disciplinary support for offenders is likely to be the most effective way of reducing re-offending.^{56,59} However, few such approaches exist and historically interventions have focused on only a single issue. There is therefore limited knowledge on how best to coordinate and sequence support in order to address multiple needs. The limited capacity of the Probation Service also creates difficulties in building on the rehabilitative work of prisons and in effectively managing coordinated programmes.⁵⁹

In addition, many experts we consulted believe that the model to reduce re-offending has concentrated too much on packages of accredited programmes and not enough on what motivates offenders to change and to desist from offending. Looking at such studies into preventing offending, it is clear that for many prisoners, changing personal circumstances, such as having a child or starting a new relationship, will be the crucial factor to stopping re-offending, over and above the support of an intervention. The role of personal support, family ties and the timings of interventions should therefore also be considered in turning offenders away from crime, and maintaining that change.

Without a conclusive evidence base, the government can be unwilling to take risks on new programmes. Money is therefore often allocated in favour of services that are institutionally convenient or of low unit cost. As a result, much of the development and implementation of new interventions falls to charities.

Government efforts to improve the system

The government recognises that the current system is not working, and over the past five years it has introduced and explored four main reforms:

- the introduction of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS);
- the establishment of reducing re-offending partnerships;
- a reassessment of the use of custodial sentences; and
- ideas for the future of the prison system.

These innovations have not been easy. They have involved: the reorganisation of civil service infrastructure; changes in legislation; and the diversion of funding flows. Implementation has proceeded in an uncertain, precarious and confusing manner, seemingly unconnected to the reality on the ground. This has left charities, donors, and even people in the Prison and Probation Services unsure about the current situation, or indeed future developments.

NOMS

The most significant—and controversial—development in government policy in the last five years has been the formation of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). Intended to improve coordination and commissioning across the sector, its impact appears to have been almost the exact opposite.

NOMS was designed to sit above the Prison and Probation Services and take the lead on the twin goals of public protection and reducing re-offending. To do this, it planned to implement an 'end-to-end' offender management system and improve the commissioning and coordination of services.

Yet by the end of 2007, there were rumours that the whole NOMS system would be abolished.⁶⁴ Instead, in February 2008, a new Agency Framework was published, merging the Prison Service into NOMS.⁶⁵

Table 2: Evidence of what works and lessons to be learned

Area	Quality of evidence	Lessons for effective interventions
Employment and education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited evidence to support the role of basic skills training and prison-based employment interventions in reducing re-offending.⁶⁰ Evidence favours the impact of employment interventions over basic education skills. Little evidence of systematic targeting of employment/education programmes according to need.⁶¹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find innovative ways of delivering education to engage offenders in programmes (eg, peer mentors). Provide a range of options that are vocational and specific in nature (eg, plumbing, fork-lift truck driving) in addition to general improvement of numeracy and literacy. New skills must be transferable and interventions tailored to the local job market. Transition can be improved by advice before release and setting up post-release appointments before release.
Drugs and alcohol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good evidence that drug programmes (eg, Rehabilitation of Addicted Prisoners trust programmes) can reduce drug taking on release and re-offending.^{7, 62} Effective interventions include: substitute prescribing (eg, methadone), therapeutic communities, psycho-social approaches, drug courts and parole and probation supervision.⁶³ There is debate surrounding the effectiveness of drug testing on its own.¹⁵ Little is known about interventions for alcohol dependency, mainly due to the government emphasis on drug use instead. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion rates are a major factor in success rates, therefore long-term support is needed to minimise drop out. Changing fundamental attitudes is a major factor in success rates, therefore long-term intensive programmes are associated with better outcomes. Similarly, there should be greater attention on post-treatment arrangements to continue after-care and support. More research is needed into treatment of co-existing drug and mental health problems. Method of delivery and client-therapist relationship is often as important as what is actually delivered. Housing and other forms of social support are often needed as part of the package.
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very little evidence on the impact of different forms of help in finding accommodation on re-offending.⁶¹ The relationship is complex and difficult to establish cause and effect. There is an association between stable housing and improved family ties, and sustained employment.⁶ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing and employment issues should be addressed together. Should also bring in financial capability skills, to give confidence and skills to manage money, bills, rent, and income successfully to maintain a stable living situation. Support should not be time-limited; consider changing housing needs throughout the offender's lifetime.
Mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although associated with offending, evidence on the effectiveness of mental health treatment in reducing re-offending is weak and not clear cut. In prison, advocacy and listening support can be effective in helping low-level mental health problems that fall through the gap of NHS services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There should be co-ordinated care plans on release to address mental health issues. As above, co-existing mental health and substance use problems should be considered. Improved court diversion schemes are needed to divert offenders with severe mental health problems away from prison. Improve intensity and quality of interventions received.
Offender attitudes and behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is considerable evidence from abroad that offender behaviour programmes reduce re-offending.⁶¹ Evidence from the UK remains mixed, partly due to poor research and programme design.⁶ Specific programmes, eg, sex offender treatment programmes, have shown limited success in reducing re-offending.⁶¹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is great potential to motivate change through these programmes—look at mechanisms by which programmes work. However, they are most successful when offender is ready for change. Need to develop longer term programmes that are suitable for all (eg, take account of literacy levels and ability to be introspective). Good to implement alongside other programmes to enhance engagement in other services.
Finance, debt and benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good evidence that financial education teaches good money management and increases financial capability. However no long-term evidence on whether this information is implemented or how it impacts on resettlement. Often dealt with through the employment or housing pathways. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective work focuses on empowering clients to make real changes in personal finance behaviour as opposed to just increasing financial knowledge. Use of interactive approaches. Programmes must also be targeted effectively and take account of varying levels of literacy and numeracy. Should be a central part of a holistic prison strategy. Through the gate and long-term support mean that offenders can better manage finances post-release.
Family ties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emerging evidence that family-based interventions—including parenting skills, multi-systemic therapy, day care provision and home visiting—are effective in reducing re-offending.⁶¹ These appear to promote family cohesion which in turn impacts offending behaviour. Receiving visits has been shown to increase the chances of gaining employment and accommodation on release, and to reduce re-offending.³² 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A stable home environment and good family relationships can provide the platform and motivation for addressing the other pathways. Support should be directed not only at prisoners, but at the families left behind too, and improving relationships between them. Support can improve facilities for prison visits, improve the experience of prison visits and facilitate correspondence in other ways, eg, through tape recordings or letters etc.

Box 5: C-NOMIS

The prison system has previously had no comprehensive computer system to manage offenders. The C-NOMIS computer system was intended to track offenders through the prison system centrally, from courts to prisons to probation services. The system would store offenders’ details, such as nationality, ethnicity, education and employment.

But in August 2007, the project was suspended due to rapidly increasing costs. A strategic review was commissioned, and in January 2008, it was announced that the system will now only be introduced in prisons, not extended to the Probation Service as originally planned.

Mike Manisty, C-NOMIS project head, said ‘we can’t even get the basics right,’ adding that ‘the whole thing is actually very badly thought through.’

This wider strategic uncertainty has been underpinned by basic failures in infrastructure and implementation. The implosion of the flagship IT project, C-NOMIS (designed to integrate Prison and Probation Service data) has severely affected the ability to deliver end-to-end offender management (see Box 5). Meanwhile, the introduction of a common assessment procedure across both the Prison and Probation Services—OASys—has faced significant challenges and put a significant extra burden on the Probation Service.⁴⁹

Increasingly, it appears that NOMS is not solving the problems it was set up to address. Whether this is a product of its design or its implementation is difficult to say. What is clear is that its current benefits do not justify the uncertainty, the stress, and the £1.5bn that has been spent on it over the past three years.⁸⁴

Reducing re-offending through partnership

In 2004, the Home Office produced a National Re-offending Action Plan to coordinate the government’s efforts.⁶⁶ This was based on the lessons of the Social Exclusion Unit’s report, *Reducing Re-offending by Ex-Prisoners* (2002). It compressed the nine issues highlighted by that report into seven main pathways for action:

- accommodation/housing;
- education, training and employment;
- health;
- drugs and alcohol;
- finance and debt;
- children and families; and
- attitudes and behaviour.

The newly-formed NOMS was responsible for coordinating these pathways, but specific responsibility (and funding) was split among different government agencies (see Table 3). It is estimated that only half of total government spending on prisoners goes through the Ministry of Justice, with the rest channelled through other government departments.⁶⁷

This division of responsibility has led to significant benefits, bringing in expertise on healthcare, education and increasing integration between services in prison and the community. However, potential pitfalls do exist: other departments might overlook the specific needs of prisoners, lumping them into cheaper mainstream services, or not catering for them at all.

NOMS was meant to be a champion for offenders’ needs, calling other government agencies to account and coordinating any problems. A complex series of local, regional and national groups was established for each pathway involving different statutory and voluntary parties. These would establish needs, scope out different actors’ responsibilities and identify gaps in provision. NOMS would then fill these gaps through its own funding, and by drawing on the resources of the corporate, civic and voluntary sectors.

Yet it is unclear what actually came out of all this activity. Each pathway is funded differently and only three—drugs and alcohol, health, and education and employment—receive ringfenced central funding streams (both from NOMS and other government departments):

- **Drug and alcohol:** In 2006/2007, the Ministry of Justice spent £77.3m on custodial drug treatments.⁶⁸ The Department of Health spent a further £22.5m on clinical treatment in prisons.
- **Health:** In 2006/2007, £200m was spent on prison health care.³⁹
- **Education and training:** The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills spent £156m in 2007/2008. This was joined by a further £30m from the European Social Fund (ESF) in 2006–2008 and £13.9m from Equal (an ESF initiative) in 2006–2009.⁶⁹

These three pathways also benefit from an embedded infrastructure in each prison and specific prison targets. Each prison has an education team, a drug treatment team, prison health clinics and a health team. They will also be measured on the numbers of people taking part in drug treatments and education placements. Yet even these pathways are struggling to find adequate funding.

‘The budget available to the LSC for the provision of learning and skills to offenders in custody and in the community cannot meet the full demand from a sector of the population with poor levels of achievement.’

OLASS Prospectus, draft⁸²

Table 3: Government responsibilities and funding streams across the different re-offending pathways

	Housing	Education and employment	Attitudes and behaviour	Family and children	Finance and debt	Health	Drugs and alcohol
NOMS	Basic housing advice in prison—on arrival and on release	Employment in prison—eg, working in canteen	Accredited courses, such as: sex offender treatment and anger management	Space for family visits within the prison, and some kind of visitor centre outside the prison	N/A	Some kind of mental health screening on arrival in prison	CARAT (Counselling, Assessment, Referral, Advice and Throughcare) services in prison Intensive psycho-social drug treatment programmes
Central government departments	Housing Benefit on release (Department for Work and Pensions) Investment in hostel places (Department of Communities and Local Government)	Adult education and training classes in prison and on release (Legal Services Commission) Job Centre Plus advice and New Deal programmes (DWP)	Arts programmes tackling social exclusion (Arts Council)	Support to vulnerable children within the community (Department for Children, Schools and Families)	Financial literacy classes (Learning and Skills Council) Debt advice (LSC—very limited) Income support on release (DWP)	Mental health and primary care provision in prison and in the community (Department of Health)	Clinical drug services in prison and on release in the community, eg, Methadone
Local government	Housing-related support for vulnerable ex-offenders Advice on housing in the community	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Social services contribution to residential drug and alcohol treatment

The other pathways, such as housing, children and families, and finance and debt have a much more opaque funding system. Without the benefit of clear funding streams and government prioritisation, the situation is likely to get even worse, as charities and funders have reported to NPC. In the words of the Chief Inspector of Prisons: *'The difficulty we have at the moment is that the rising prison population soaks up resources like a sponge and takes away resources from the other things ... you would need to have in place in order not to use prison so much; so it becomes a kind of vicious cycle.'*²⁵

Use of prison

The Criminal Justice Act 2003 was introduced in order to bring a strategic overview to sentencing and to manage the prison population. The Act outlined aims to reserve custodial punishment for serious and dangerous offenders and advocated the use of community sentences as an effective alternative for the majority of non-violent offenders. In addition, the government identified certain vulnerable groups, including those with mental health problems, women and young people, who—where appropriate—could be better catered for in the community.

However, the Act has not achieved the intended overhaul in sentencing. The number of people going to prison on remand, for short-sentences for non-violent offences, or with particular vulnerabilities continues to soar. **The Prison Reform Trust** claims that the Act has *'failed entirely'* in its attempt to create a coherent sentencing strategy, and instead produced a *'raft of disparate measures'*.²⁵

Community sentences

The main alternative to custody is community sentencing, implemented and enforced by the Probation Service. In 2003, the Criminal Justice Act reformed these sentences in order to make them more appropriate for a range of offenders and provide a robust alternative to custody. It was hoped that the introduction of two types of sentence would bring about a reduction in expensive short-term sentences. However, they have not had the impact that the government had hoped for (see Box 6).

As part of this reform, the old set of community sentences was replaced by a single Community Order with a range of 12 requirements (eg, unpaid work or drug rehabilitation), and the

Box 6: Effectiveness of community sentences

If the prison population is to be reduced, it is essential that there are effective non-custodial options that are seen to protect the public, provide suitable punishment and reduce re-offending. However, although community sentences appear to be a promising alternative, effective operation and delivery of these sentences is limited by public confidence and the capacity of the Probation Service.²⁵

Data from 2004 shows that the rate of re-offending for community sentences was 50%, compared to 64% for those on custodial sentences.¹⁹ Although these rates cannot be directly compared due to the differing profile of people starting each type of sentence, there is confidence within the government and Probation that community sentences, when robustly implemented, can achieve lower recidivism rates. For example, community sentences can provide more opportunities for rehabilitation, retain proximity to families and local communities and be skills oriented.

However what is clear is that there is currently an absence of rigorous assessment into probation programmes and the effectiveness of community sentences overall.²⁵ Without this research, confidence in these sentences by the public and sentencers remains limited and sentencing policy becomes more a matter of guess-work and optimism.

In order to effectively implement rigorous community programmes the government will have to improve the capacity of Probation so that it can deliver thorough and consistent provision for each requirement of the Community Order and work to improve public confidence in non-custodial sentences.

“A large part of the difficulty in passing community sentences rather than short-term prison sentences [is down to] how the sentence appears to the public as opposed to whether it is in fact the right sentence.”

Criminal Bar Association²⁵

Suspended Sentence Order (SSO). This allows sentencers to choose an appropriate combination of requirements to address both the punishment and rehabilitation of the offender. The most common order during 2006 was a single requirement of unpaid work, accounting for 36% of all orders.

Unfortunately, these orders have been under-used, or not used appropriately. Fundamentally, sentencers and the public still do not see community sentences as a convincing alternative to prison.²⁵ As a result, they are often used in place of lesser punishments, such as fines, rather than as an alternative to custody. In fact, the strict requirements of the SSOs have actually contributed to the increasing prison population, as a high number of people breach the terms of their order and are then sent to prison. Moreover, community sentences are not being used to full effect, with requirements such as mental health treatment (1% of orders in 2006), and drug treatment (6%) hardly used at all.

Diversion

In addition to community sentences, the Act was intended to divert vulnerable people, such as those with mental health and drug problems, away from custody.

Diversion and liaison schemes are supposed to identify people early, channelling them away from the criminal justice system into NHS mental health facilities. Yet widespread variation exists in the funding, organisation and geographical distribution of such schemes. As a result, there is often a lack of NHS secure beds or suitable community provision, and sentencers have no choice but to give a custodial sentence.²⁵

A government review on improving diversion schemes for people with severe mental health problems and learning disabilities is already underway. The government has also promised to consider the impact of several initiatives already piloted, including mental health courts, and new ideas such as specialist ‘hybrid’ prisons.

In the case of offenders with severe drug dependencies, there is a similar lack of community provision. As a result, such offenders are often sentenced to prison in order to access drug treatment there, rather than because their crime warrants that level of punishment.⁷⁰

Deciding the future of the prison estate

Underpinning much of the current debate is the future of the prison estate. This has recently coalesced around two major government reviews—the Corston Review on women in prison (see Box 2), and the Carter Report (see Box 7). Each presented very different visions of the future. As the Chief Inspector of Prisons said, *‘they might have emanated from two different universes.’*²⁸

Lord Carter’s answer was the construction of a small number of large ‘Titan prisons’, which would each house 2,500 people, far bigger than the current largest prison, Wandsworth, which has 1,500 inmates. He believed these would be more efficient and would effectively meet the needs of different prisoners.⁷²

Box 7: The Carter report

In June 2007, Lord Carter was commissioned by the government to carry out a review on *'improving the balance between the supply of prison places and demand for them'*.⁷² Six months later, his report published the following recommendations:

- significant expansion of the current prison building programme should begin immediately;
- larger, state-of-the-art prisons should be planned and developed;
- a structured sentencing framework and permanent Sentencing Commission should be developed; and
- operations and headquarters' overheads should be structured and managed in a more efficient manner.

The report was heavily criticised for being focused on efficiency rather than effectiveness when talking about reducing re-offending, as well as for its short development time and limited consultation.

Baroness Corston's report took a diametrically opposed position, advocating a number of smaller community-based prisons across the UK. The government has signed up to the majority of her recommendations. However, it has followed Lord Carter's recommendations for more prison places, despite opposition from charities, academics and the prison officers' union.⁷¹ The **Prison Reform Trust** commented on Titan prisons: *'The government is on the verge of making a massive, costly and hugely damaging mistake that will destabilise the criminal justice system for years to come.'*

Conclusion

It is clear that the current system is neither rehabilitating prisoners successfully, nor reducing re-offending rates significantly. This is not because it is impossible to do so. Rather, at several points throughout their journey, people are missing out on the support that they need.

Numerous factors—historical, political, structural and financial—underpin this failure. Current government initiatives seem unable and insufficient to remedy the situation. Instead, the government's main plan to build Titan prisons appears to be contradicting all available evidence for the sake of short-term expediency.

Within this confused environment, the voluntary sector has an important role to play. It can deliver services to meet the immediate needs of prisoners, as well as taking a broader view on the structural issues plaguing the sector. The independence of the voluntary sector, and its focus on addressing the needs of prisoners, can provide a vital voice in the debate surrounding prisons, as the next chapter explores.

‘The government is on the verge of making a massive, costly and hugely damaging mistake that will destabilise the criminal justice system for years to come.’

Prison
Reform Trust



Photograph supplied by Prison Reform Trust

The voluntary sector

Charities have a vital role to play in the criminal justice sector. Their independence from government, and ability to be responsive and innovative, are crucial qualities when working with prisoners to reduce re-offending. But charities working within the sector face a number of challenges: in capturing their results; sustaining services; and operating within a politically-sensitive field.

The vast majority of the sector is made up of small organisations, yet it is the larger regional and national organisations that often receive a large proportion of the sector's income. Activities range from providing core services, such as drug treatment programmes, to campaigning and lobbying for improvements in the criminal justice system. Increasingly, charities from other sectors, such as drug and alcohol addictions and employment, also work with ex-offenders.

Government is a major funder of this work. However, funding cuts, changes to commissioning structures and to policy have all affected the sector. Charities have sought to adapt to an increasingly challenging situation, but in some cases lack the expertise, capacity and resources to do so.

While grant-making trusts and foundations have played an important role in strengthening the criminal justice sector, they are becoming increasingly frustrated about the government's lack of strategic engagement with the voluntary sector and the lack of investment in innovative services.

There is a clear role for private philanthropy to help the voluntary sector to overcome the challenges it faces, strengthen services, and impact on the wider criminal justice debate. Charities should be supported to prove the impact of their services in order to attract government funding and inform commissioning. At a higher level, charities also have an important role to play in influencing public attitudes towards offenders.

Why charities?

Within the wider context of the criminal justice system, the voluntary sector has an important role to play. Charities are able to draw on a number of strengths, including:

Independence from the Prison and Probation Services: Prisoners view charities as more approachable, and less associated with punishment and discipline.

Specialist skills: Charities can provide skills and expertise that the Prison Service and related services lack—such as diversity training, legal skills and language skills.

Funding and delivering services outside statutory responsibility: Charities can bring in funding and volunteers to cover issues and areas that are, strictly speaking, not the government's responsibility.

Innovative ethos: As the voluntary sector is generally less bureaucratic than the public sector, and more responsive to the needs of service users, it is well-placed to develop innovative approaches.

Community links: As charities are often based in the local area, they can provide a bridge between life in prison and life in the community.

Independent voice: Charities are not subject to the same political and public pressures as the government. They are therefore well-placed to carry out independent research and policy work, and to be more prisoner-focused in their approach.

These strengths are particularly pertinent when looking at what works to reduce re-offending as discussed in the previous chapter. Factors for success include: a personal focus, working holistically and providing a strong link into local communities.

The nature of the sector

The voluntary sector has a strong tradition of working with prisoners. From the beginning of the 19th century, concerned individuals, often inspired by religious beliefs, visited local prisons and worked to improve conditions. Faith-based work continues to comprise a significant proportion of the charitable work in this sector.

The bulk of the sector is made up of **small organisations**. Of the estimated 1,500 charities working in the criminal justice sector, the vast majority work in only one or two local prisons, or with a small number of prisoners on release. They typically rely on volunteers and have an income below £100,000.

“I do not believe that the public at large realises just how much it owes to the voluntary sector for what it does in prison.”

Lord Ramsbotham
Former HM Inspectorate
of Prisons

In addition to these smaller organisations is a thin layer of **regional organisations** and **national charities that focus on a particular issue**. These include: **UNLOCK** (primarily financial inclusion); **The Prison Advice & Care Trust** (PACT—families); **The Rehabilitation of Addicted Prisoners trust** (RAPt—drugs and alcohol); **St Giles Trust** (housing and employment); and **Hibiscus** (foreign national women). These organisations have incomes of between £250,000 and £5m, of which around half is provided by the government.

At the top of the sector are a number of **large national organisations**, which generally span the whole of the criminal justice sector. These organisations, such as **NACRO** (National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders) and **SOVA** (Supporting Others through Volunteer Action), operate nationally and across a number of different areas. Statutory funding typically makes up the bulk of their income: in 2006/2007, NACRO received 97% of its £60m income from government; for SOVA, 95% of its £11m income came from the government.

In addition, there are a number of more specific **second-tier organisations**. These include those that lobby and campaign for reform, such as the **Prison Reform Trust** (PRT) and the **Howard League for Penal Reform**. There are also organisations that focus on improving the infrastructure of the voluntary sector, like **Clinks**, and **Action for Prisoners' Families** (APF).

Elsewhere, there is a much wider group of **charities from other sectors**, who also work with ex-offenders. These include charities such as **Turning Point** or **MIND**, or employment organisations like **Tomorrow's People**.

What charities do

Charities provide activities at various points in the criminal justice process. Direct support can be given before, during and after custody in the form of core services. This includes advice, advocacy and engagement, as well as piloting new projects and ideas (see Table 4).

In addition, charities play a key role in influencing the policies and conditions of the criminal justice system through indirect services such as research, lobbying, campaigning, capacity-building and improving public awareness.

This chapter can only give a small number of examples of these services and what they can achieve. NPC's previous report, *Inside and out*, provides a more comprehensive guide to charities working in the sector.

Direct services

Core services

Most core services are delivered by statutory agencies, such as prison health or education teams. However, charities are involved in providing services across the different pathways, such as accommodation, education, employment and finance and debt. They offer the advantage of specialist knowledge and expertise, although due to the capacity and resources needed to run such programmes, usually only large organisations are involved in this work.

RAPt provides CARAT (Counselling, Advice, Referral, Assessment and Throughcare) teams to 17 prisons in England and Wales, for approximately 10,000 prisoners per year with drug addiction problems. It delivers specific drug treatment programmes to a further 850 prisoners across nine prisons. Importantly, RAPt has the expertise to develop and deliver intensive programmes that are currently lacking in statutory provision. This is particularly evident in treatment for alcohol addiction, which has traditionally been overlooked by government in favour of a focus on drug treatment. RAPt developed the first specialised programme exclusively for drug and alcohol misusers.

In addition to its in-prison services, RAPt also operates a residential rehabilitation centre in Hull to address the many different problems prisoners face when released, and maintain the support received in prison. The 26-bed centre provides intensive support encompassing holistic care, personal development work and relapse prevention. This recognises the intensive support that prisoners often need during this vulnerable time, and supports their successful reintegration into everyday life.

One of the many services that **NACRO** provides is accommodation for people after prison. NACRO's housing association houses over 1,300 ex-offenders in self-contained flats, shared houses and hostels around the UK. The charity combines this direct provision with its Resettlement Support Programme, which helps clients to develop the skills to find and keep a home of their own. This can include support in practical living skills like budgeting, shopping and cooking, and access to training and education programmes.

Blue Sky is a new charity tackling the issue of employment. It supports prisoners in the most direct way possible—by employing ex-offenders directly to carry out grounds maintenance work. Blue Sky offers a six-month contract alongside training, support and encouragement to help participants adjust to employment and then move on to long-term jobs. Unlike in-prison employment programmes that often focus on

prisoners with high levels of qualifications or skills, Blue Sky is able to offer employment to anyone who wants to work, regardless of existing qualifications. This includes a high proportion of the most persistent offenders released into the local area.

This approach has proved successful in getting almost 45% of participants into full-time work—more than double the 20% expected through similar statutory employment schemes—and Blue Sky has ambitions to expand the service throughout the country. Box 8 compares the investment in a charity such as Blue Sky to the investment in the proposed 'Titan prison' scheme.

Other charities provide direct services for debt and finance support and to maintain family ties. For example, **PACT** runs family centres providing support to families and children visiting their relatives in prison. **Kids VIP** works with prisons to enhance relationships between children and their imprisoned parent through customised training and support to prison and play staff. Since 1988, Kids VIP has set up play areas in 104 prisons in the UK and feedback shows that parents and children are happier, visits are a more positive experience, and the interaction promotes bonding.

Both **Citizens Advice** and **UNLOCK** offer debt advice, training on financial literacy, and money management. Citizens Advice Bureaux provide advice in around 40 prisons, in addition to working with the Probation Service to help offenders deal with their money problems on release.

Advice, advocacy and engagement

Charities can offer advice to offenders and advocate for their rights, entitlements and treatment. This is important in the context of overcrowded prisons and overburdened Prison and Probation Services. Independent advocacy can provide prisoners with a voice against unacceptable or unfair treatment by the system.

Charities such as the **Prisoner Advice Service (PAS)** provide free and confidential advice to all adult prisoners in England and Wales. PAS employs lawyers to deliver legal advice to prisoners, particularly regarding the application of prison rules and conditions of imprisonment. PAS can advise and resolve individual queries and take legal action where appropriate. In addition, it promotes prisoners' rights through

Box 8: Titan prisons are criminal

The government is touting vast Titan prisons as the answer to prison overcrowding, caused by the rise in the prison population in the last decade. But if the government invested £350m⁸⁵—the cost of setting up just one Titan prison—into a charity helping ex-offenders into employment, it could eliminate the need for this Titan prison altogether.

A major reason for overcrowding is the high re-offending rate—64% of prisoners are reconvicted within two years of release, and over half of these will be sent back to prison.

Blue Sky is a charity trying to prevent re-offending by giving ex-offenders a second chance. It does this by directly employing ex-offenders to carry out grounds maintenance work for a six-month period. After this, the charity supports them to move on into full-time employment.

And Blue Sky's approach really works. In 2007 it helped 50 ex-offenders at a cost of £271,000, with 21 of its graduates gaining full-time employment. As a result, re-offending rates were below 20%—even lower than the 32% expected.

Without a job, it would be expected that 13 of these 21 graduates would have gone on to re-offend. Yet, only four did. This suggests that Blue Sky's intervention prevented nine of these graduates from being reconvicted and five from returning to prison.

Using these figures, NPC calculates that with an investment of £350m, Blue Sky could scale up its approach and get over 25,000 ex-prisoners into full-time employment. This could prevent nearly 12,000 reconvictions and over 6,000 people being sent to prison. As Titan prisons are intended to hold 2,500 inmates, this could eliminate the need for a Titan prison altogether.

Of course, the cost of re-offending is greater than the cost of a prison place. Re-offending costs society £13bn a year, including costs to the criminal justice system, the local community, future victims, and offenders and their families. Charities that help ex-offenders into work offer a real opportunity to break the cycle of re-offending and, as a result, save millions for society.

training and bulletins for prisoners, professionals and other voluntary organisations.

As well as general advocacy services, charities also provide support for particular issues or groups, and specialist expertise. **Bristol Mind** uses its expertise in mental health to advocate on behalf of prisoners experiencing mental or emotional distress. This can include getting access to appropriate provision or treatment, or advocating on issues that exacerbate mental health problems, such as poor or inappropriate living conditions, lack of contact with family members, and limited access to training and education programmes. Bristol Mind can also involve appropriate professionals to ensure that prisoners receive the required support and treatment. This support is continued on release through a drop-in service and helpline.

Table 4: Different types of charity activities across the seven pathways

	Housing	Education and employment	Attitudes and behaviour	Family and children	Finance and debt	Health	Drugs and alcohol
Core services	Running hostels and supported housing for ex-offenders eg, NACRO	Running education and training classes in prison and in the community eg, Asha Women's Centre	Providing accredited programmes for prisoners on attitudes towards crime	Running family centres in prison eg, PACT	Providing financial literacy classes eg, UNLOCK	Charities do not provide core health services in prisons.	Drug and alcohol treatment eg, RAPt
Advice, advocacy and engagement	Providing housing advice in prison and on release eg, Eimore Community Services	Running schemes to encourage and engage people in learning eg, Shannon Trust	Running activities to promote soft skills and motivation, eg, theatre classes eg, Koestler Trust	Providing advice to families of prisoners eg, Adfam	Providing advice on benefits and budgeting to prisoners eg, Citizens Advice Bureaux	Advocacy services for people with mental health problems eg, Bristol Mind	Referral to drug treatment in the community eg, Sheriffs' and Recorder's Fund
Pilots and evaluation	Developing new models of providing housing advice eg, through peer advisors eg, St Giles Trust	Developing new ways to connect ex-offenders with local employers eg, Blue Sky	Evaluating arts-based programmes, to demonstrate their impact eg, Clean Break	Developing new ways to maintain family ties for people in prison eg, Kids VIP	Testing new ways of delivering financial advice, eg, through a telephone helpline eg, Citizens Advice Bureaux	Applying cognitive behavioural therapy to the specific needs of ex-offenders	Developing improved drug and alcohol treatments eg, RAPt

Hibiscus advocates for women in the criminal justice system, including foreign national prisoners who are over-represented amongst the female prison population. Support centres around childcare, family problems, housing, deportation and immigration. The language expertise of Hibiscus' staff enables it to help women of many nationalities. It also carries out work abroad to warn of the severe punishments handed out to women who smuggle drugs into the UK (see Box 9).

Charities also work to engage people in existing services and build self-confidence and self-esteem. Prisoners are often not attracted to formal programmes (such as education and training) due to previous negative experiences. As a result, they can miss out on vital opportunities to improve their skills and well-being. This often provides the first step towards engaging prisoners in much-needed interventions.

Shannon Trust uses a peer mentor model to teach prisoners to read. In this scheme, prisoners who can read give one-to-one lessons to fellow prisoners who have limited literacy skills. This engages prisoners wary of formal education, while providing benefits to both the learner and the mentor. The programme now operates in 131 prisons in the UK and is successful in improving literacy levels and encouraging students to move on to further education and employment opportunities.

The **Koestler Trust** encourages prisoners to take part in arts activities as another route to learning and productive activity. The trust presents awards and distributes and sells prisoners' work, providing motivation and increased self-esteem and confidence. The advantage of artistic work is that it does not require pre-existing skills, it is open to prisoners of all abilities, and it provides a different type of activity. The charity ensures the benefits of this work are continued on release by training professional artists to mentor ex-prisoners, and support them to maintain and develop their arts activities in the community.

In many cases, charities provide engagement, advice and advocacy in one package. This is apparent in the use of link-workers and mentors. Given the Probation Service's move away from this work, these particular services are needed more than ever—providing extra support to address the complex needs that ex-prisoners face on release (see Box 10). This is particularly pertinent for prisoners on short-term sentences who do not receive any probation support on release.

For example, **Asha Women's Centre** provides a range of support for disadvantaged women. It helps ex-offenders to find a route out of offending, poverty and deprivation. Asha employs a prison in-reach and resettlement worker to support women released into the Worcestershire region. In addition, the centre aims to tackle the root cause of offending by offering information, advice, education and training, and encouraging women to access services such as legal advice, debt management and careers guidance.

As part of the Corston Report, Baroness Corston praised the activities of the Asha Centre and recommended it as an alternative for women facing criminal proceedings.

The Sheriffs' and Recorder's Fund has recently started a mentoring project in association with London Probation to offer practical help and guidance to offenders on release. Mentors aim to help prisoners to reintegrate with their families, friends and local communities, and become active citizens, therefore reducing the risk of re-offending.

Help can include: motivating offenders to attend appointments; signposting to appropriate services; supporting offenders to access childcare, benefits, a GP, and education and training; and providing friendly independent and non-judgemental support. This can often provide the key to engaging offenders in the numerous services they will need to access to reintegrate successfully into everyday life.

Piloting and developing new approaches

Charities also pilot and assess new approaches, adding to the currently limited evidence base on what works. In doing this, charities have the advantage of being independent from government restraints, and can often be more innovative than statutory services.

Box 9: Hibiscus

In 2002, there were more Jamaican women imprisoned in UK jails than there were in jails in Jamaica. A large number of these women were imprisoned for smuggling drugs, a crime they were often coerced into with little idea that their actions could result in sentences of up to 20 years.

To tackle this, Hibiscus, a UK charity, launched a campaign to educate women overseas about the consequences of bringing drugs into the UK. The charity developed a comic strip, along with T-shirts and posters, which it distributed across Jamaica and Trinidad. As a result, airport arrests dropped from 20 a day before the campaign to only one arrest a month.

Following this success, Hibiscus launched similar campaigns in Ghana, where arrests entirely stopped for around six months afterwards, and in Nigeria. The results of the charity's work are impressive. In 2002 there were 700 Jamaican women imprisoned in the UK; today there are only 97.⁸¹

Box 10: Mentoring

In recent years there has been significant interest in mentoring programmes to support people at risk of offending. Mentoring support can take the form of practical help—claiming benefits, completing forms and resolving accommodation issues—and more general help, such as encouragement, emotional and moral support, and befriending.

These models use volunteer mentors from the community (who may be ex-offenders themselves) to deliver support to vulnerable individuals who would not receive this support from their family or friends. In some ways, this can replace the old-style ‘social-work’ approach of probation. Many charities carry out this work: for example, SOVA impact programme, St Giles Trust peer advice housing support, and Sheriffs’ and Recorder’s Fund mentoring project with the Probation Service.

Due to the practical support and motivation such schemes offer, the hope is that they can help to improve people’s lives and ultimately reduce offending. Evidence on the effectiveness of such programmes is mixed and there is a need for studies of higher methodological quality (eg, randomised controlled trials). However, a recent review of mentoring programmes showed that there is potential for programmes to achieve an impact in reducing re-offending if they are delivered as part of a coordinated series of intervention programmes, recruit high quality mentors, and persist with support over an extended period.⁶²

For example, **Elmore Community Services** is developing a project to support people in and out of Bullingdon prison who are primarily serving short-term sentences and therefore do not receive probation support on release. This is based on a six-month research project, which assessed the needs of prisoners released with ‘no fixed abode’. From this research, it was evident that there were considerable barriers to getting housing on release, and demand from short-term prisoners was particularly high. As a result, the Elmore Team gained funding to employ a support worker to specially target these needs, working with prisoners before, on and after release to improve resettlement.

Of 21 prisoners involved in this project, 16 were due to be released to no fixed abode. The support worker was able to help ten get housing immediately on release, and a further four housed within one week. Re-offending benefits were significant, with 81% of participants not re-offending during the period of support.

St Giles Trust began as a homelessness charity based in Camberwell in south London. It extended its work into prisons in 1994, after seeing how many of its clients were ex-offenders. In 2002, it developed a peer advice scheme, training prisoners in jail to give housing advice to their peers. It now operates in 20 prisons and trains over 100 prisoners to NVQ3 level (equivalent to two A-levels) in ‘Advice and Guidance’. These ‘peer advisors’ then help other prisoners with housing problems. St Giles employs a proportion of these peer advisors when they leave prison to support other ex-

offenders by helping them reintegrate into the community.

In 2006, St Giles commissioned the Institute for Criminal Policy Research (ICPR) at King’s College to carry out a three year evaluation of the peer advice service. The first year’s interim evaluation reports positive feedback from clients of the service. One peer advisor said: *‘You know, the prisoners out there know that we are prisoners as well, so straight away I think that we’ve got a rapport with them, and that, possibly we can talk to them and they’re a bit more at ease with us.’*

The project also provides immediate benefits to peer advisors themselves, including: structure to their day; increased social interaction; better motivation; and a positive and worthwhile activity.

Indirect services

Improving capacity

Charities improve the capacity of the sector by strengthening and developing better links between voluntary organisations and the Prison and Probation Services. They can deliver training to build and disseminate knowledge, and share experiences and good practice to build up the sector.

Clinks is the umbrella organisation for charities that work with offenders and their families. It works to influence national policy as well as local and regional partnerships. Clinks facilitates training, promotes and coordinates communication within the criminal justice voluntary sector, and speaks up on behalf of charities.

It is a member of the National Offender Management Board and is currently working on a project to improve engagement between NOMS and the voluntary sector. This has fed into documents, such as the recently published *Third Sector Action Plan*, which aims to set out how government and the charity sector will work together over the next three years.⁷³

Charities like **The Anne Peaker Centre** are working to develop a better evidence base for the sector. The centre carries out research, training and advocacy into arts work in prison. One of its projects is establishing and collating the different evidence in favour of the arts. Using funding from the government, it is planning an online library where different organisations can upload their results, so that commissioners can see the benefits of using arts activities in prison.

Research, lobbying and campaigning

Some charities undertake research to improve policy, and to recommend best practice and interventions. There is also work at a second tier level to lobby and campaign on issues in the criminal justice system.

The Prison Reform Trust (PRT) was set up in 1981 to improve the prison system. It seeks to ensure that only those that deserve to be in prison are there, that prisoners are provided with constructive regimes in decent conditions, and that they and their families are treated with respect. It does this by carrying out research, lobbying government, and providing advice and information to prisoners and their families.

PRT has successfully influenced both policy and practice, for example, in its recent research into prisoners with learning disabilities. As a result of this work, 80% of prison officers say they are doing more to help such prisoners, and Scottish and Northern Irish prisons are implementing the recommendations of the report. PRT's work into older prisoners led to improvements in Department of Health policy and it is expected that work into BME prisoners will inform national standards.

In addition, PRT maintains a high public profile, commenting on all press stories relating to prisoners and campaigning on specific issues such as the high cost of phone calls in prison, (see Box 11), and, together with **UNLOCK**, the right of prisoners to vote.

UNLOCK has managed to persuade several brokers to provide affordable insurance for ex-offenders. Before **UNLOCK**'s work, it was almost impossible for former offenders to get any type of insurance. Many prisoners also struggle to open bank accounts, so **UNLOCK** has produced bespoke forms, approved by prison governors, to help them open accounts on release.

Public awareness

Lack of public understanding and sympathy towards prisoners directly influences government policy. In order to give the public confidence in the criminal justice system (including both prison and alternatives to custody), charities need

Box 11: A life or death call

The start of a prison sentence is the toughest time for prisoners and a time when they are most vulnerable to suicide. A supportive phone call from a family member or a friend in the first few days can be the difference between life and death for some prisoners. The Prison Reform Trust (PRT) is one charity helping to make sure these vital calls can be made, by campaigning to reduce the cost of prison phone calls.

At present, a 15 minute call for a prisoner costs £1.50, compared to only 30p from a phone box. Prison wages are about £8 a week, meaning a seven-minute phone call eats up nearly 10% of an inmate's earnings. As a result, over half of all phone calls made by inmates last less than three minutes.

To address this, the National Consumer Council, backed by PRT, has lodged a formal complaint against BT and hopes to ensure this vital lifeline can become affordable for all prisoners.

In the words of David Howarth, the Liberal Democrat justice spokesman: *'If prisoners lose contact with their families while inside, the cost to society could be far greater than the price of a premium-rate phone call.'*

to improve public awareness of issues facing offenders and their families. By campaigning, doing research, and targeting the media, they seek to influence public opinion.

Clean Break runs education and arts activities for women in prison and in its dedicated centre in north London. The charity also puts on an annual professional drama production, which tours theatres across the UK and prisons in England and Wales. The production seeks to highlight the effects of crime and prison on women, and influence public opinion. Reviews from the media, audiences and theatres are highly favourable.

SmartJustice is a programme set up by PRT to widen the debate on crime and punishment with the general public and the media. This includes questioning the effectiveness of prison for non-violent offenders; campaigning for more investment in initiatives that tackle the causes of crime; and looking at alternatives to custody.

SmartJustice is aimed at tabloids, daytime TV and grass-roots campaigning. Past campaigns have included women and prison, young people and crime, and the links between drugs, drink, mental health and crime. This work is now continuing with the **Make Justice Work** campaign.



Photograph taken from 'This Wide Night', Clean Break's 2008 production. Courtesy of Sarah Ainslie

Who funds and supports this work?

Government

The government is the major funder of the criminal justice system and of charities' work in this sector. In 2007/2008, the budget for NOMS was £4.65bn.⁵³ Of this, £2bn went to the Prison Service, £0.9bn to the Probation Service, £0.4bn to the Youth Justice Board; and £1.4bn to central NOMS costs (these include private prisons, improving prison costs, and the cost of headquarters). It is estimated that on top of this, other government departments provided another £4bn for services to offenders.⁶⁷

In November 2007 the Ministry of Justice published its Third Sector Action Plan, which raised a series of questions on how NOMS could work more effectively with the third sector. The response was published in October 2008 and highlighted the need for clearer communication from government on policy, funding, commissioning and strategy.⁷³

As these findings suggest, it is difficult to unpick exactly what is happening with government funding. Transparency is poor and specific figures are often unavailable. Yet various trends

and pressures seem to have emerged from the recent changes in government policy outlined in the previous section. This includes:

- the narrow focus of government funding;
- changes in the mechanism of government funding; and
- the continuing role of prison governors in providing funding and access.

The narrow focus of government funding

The Prison and Probation Services are expected to make efficiency savings of 3% each year for the next three years.⁷⁴ When focusing on the government's explicit spending on reducing re-offending, choices have to be made on which services will be funded and which will be cut.

National guidelines have highlighted three main priorities in tackling re-offending: offender health; education, training and employment; and drugs and alcohol. Yet even in these priority areas, funding is not adequate to meet all needs, and tends to be directed towards larger organisations. Charities that work in the other pathways, such as families, benefit and debt or housing, often struggle to find adequate funding.

Beyond the influence of these broad national priorities, there is meant to be a '*regional centre of gravity of NOMS commissioning*'.⁶⁷ This was brought in to be in line with other government bodies and was also believed to be more effective and efficient. The regional manager can take a broader and more inclusive view, integrate the different needs of prison and probation, and make informed decisions on where to allocate resources. In reality, regional commissioning only started in 2008, and the agenda continues to be dominated by the national guidelines.

Decisions concerning charitable funding can still be *ad hoc* and local. Prison governors and probation area directors can use parts of their budgets to pay for things that they feel are necessary. This can lead to considerable diversity of provision. In 2005, only half of prisons provided some form of housing advice and support service.⁷⁵ The quality of family visitor centres varies massively between prisons. So when looking at where private philanthropy is needed, it becomes difficult to make hard and fast rules about what is, and what is not, statutory responsibility.

Changes in how the government funds services

When it comes to the voluntary sector, it is not just a question of what the government funds,

but also how it funds. Instead of giving charities grants towards their projects, the government increasingly commissions the services it wants by tendering. Voluntary or private sector organisations then have to compete for each contract.

This competition is not necessarily a bad thing—it has the potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the services. Yet several dangers exist in its implementation. Firstly, commissioners may lack the expertise to commission the right services, in terms of both designing the contract and handling the tendering process.

Secondly, it can be unclear on what basis the decision to award the contract should be made. Ideally, decisions should be based on the effectiveness of the programme, but when limited evidence exists and budget pressures are so intense, commissioners often fall back on unsatisfactory proxy measures. These can include unit costs, arbitrary governance requirements and slickness of presentation.

Smaller charities are particularly vulnerable in this move towards commissioning. They often lack the skills to write professional-looking bids, lack a mainstream brand, and are unable to reduce costs. Small charities may establish a successful project, but when this service is put out to tender, a rival large organisation may swoop in and provide a lower quality service for a lower price.

Regional commissioning may also result in regional contracts—instead of having a number of local contracts for each prison or probation area, it is easier to establish one large regional contract. A small charity working in one or two prisons is unlikely to be able to offer a service across the whole region. And while the ideal may be a partnership among a number of different organisations—both voluntary and private—this may be hard to arrange.

Regional contracts do already exist in the Prison and Probation Services. The Learning and Skills Council commissions education teams in each prison through regional contracts, and European funding schemes for training and employment programmes are also largely delivered regionally. However, within NOMS, with notable exceptions in London and a couple of other regions, regional contracts are poorly developed.

Many of these changes to commissioning are still being decided and this uncertainty is considerable and damaging. Charities may not know until the last minute whether they will continue to receive a grant for their services, whether it will be cut, or whether they will now have to tender for it. If they do have to tender, they do not know whether it will be for an individual prison or probation area, or across the

region. This makes it harder to plan strategically and for the long term, as time is spent chasing contracts. Finally, there is an inbuilt preference of budget holders within NOMS to invest in services managed in-house. This undermines the very idea of ‘best value’ or a ‘level playing field’.

If projects close, staff and participants are easily lost, and hard to get back if and when new funding streams are accessed. The alternative is to cut the quality of work and make cost savings in order to have viable services. The lack of sustainable funding risks dispersing teams and services, and losing key staff and expert knowledge.

Beyond funding

The government does not just have a role in funding the voluntary sector; it also facilitates its access to and contact with prisoners.

Ultimately, it is the governor who has the final say on whether charities can work in their prison, and which prisoners they can work with. Having an office and a physical presence in a prison can improve the ability of a charity to deliver its services and to have greater representation and voice within the prison.

However, a change in governor can have a huge impact on the success of individual charities. Since the average length of time a governor spends in a prison is 21 months, it can be a major and recurring issue.⁷⁶ The new governor may have different ideas, priorities or worries about risk. A recent change of governor in a London prison led to the closure of 20 out of 24 charitable programmes.⁷⁷

The role of trusts and private funding

Trusts and foundations have been traditional supporters of this sector, bringing in an estimated £26m each year. This is a major part of the total amount of private funding; public giving in this field is so small as to be negligible.

Private funders and trusts have three main roles within the voluntary sector:

- to fund services;
- to develop capacity; and
- to research and campaign.

Funding services

Funding from trusts and foundations has traditionally been in two main areas:

- developing pilot projects; and
- paying for activities that fall outside the government's responsibility.

Increasingly, grant-making trusts are frustrated by government policy. It can be difficult for successful programmes to be adopted and scaled up. There is also a risk that some programmes may be stopped by new governors. All of this has meant that *'foundations have had to question whether expenditure on work in prison can be justified as charitable'*.⁷⁷ The government is open to the accusation that it is using grant-making trust funding purely as a means of keeping budgets down, rather than seeing the potential this funding has towards innovation and change.

Developing capacity and cooperation of the voluntary sector

In response to the huge changes going on in the policy environment, trusts have stepped up their support for developing the capacity and cooperation of the voluntary sector.

In the South West region, the Tudor Trust and LankellyChase Foundation have a funding partnership to help strengthen the size of small and medium-sized agencies to enable them to work with NOMS. This is not just financially, but also in terms of information and networking opportunities. At a broader level, foundations have funded initiatives to help charities measure their results better and provide a more coherent economic argument for their services (see Box 12).

Box 12: The Matrix Report: the economic case⁸⁰

In 2007, three grant-making trusts (the Bromley Trust, the Monument Trust and the LankellyChase Foundation) commissioned The Matrix Knowledge Group to produce a report addressing the question, *'Are prison sentences a cost-beneficial way of reducing re-offending in those populations at risk of further offending?'*

Using the internationally available evidence base, the report compared the effectiveness of prison sentences to non-prison approaches in reducing re-offending. This cost-benefit analysis highlighted how costly prison sentences are compared to suitable and appropriate alternatives. For example, it concluded that offenders that receive residential drug treatment are 43% less likely to re-offend after release than comparable offenders receiving prison sentences, saving an estimated £88,500 per offender.

The report has taken the first steps in combining qualitative outcomes with thorough quantitative approaches and framing the prison debate in economic terms. It has also served to highlight the gaps in what we know about reducing re-offending and where more research is needed. This work is continuing and an updated report with significant further UK research is due to be released in early 2009. Above all, further work is needed to build on the valuable findings of the Matrix Report, and to extend and inform the economic argument in favour of rehabilitative programmes.

Research and campaigning

Grant-making trusts regularly fund charities to carry out research and campaigning work. For example, the Bromley Trust funds one of the cornerstones of information in the sector, The Bromley Briefings, produced by the Prison Reform Trust.

In 2001, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation went a step beyond funding individual projects, and developed a £4m programme: *Rethinking Crime and Punishment*. This work aimed to raise the level of debate on this issue in order to allow a more rational criminal and penal policy. The project culminated in a set of recommendations that highlighted the importance of: public involvement in criminal justice; the development of programmes to treat the health problems of prisoners; and using prison as a genuine last resort. It also recently produced a manifesto pointing out where the money for Titan prisons can be better spent.⁷⁸

Trusts and foundations have begun to take a more visible and vocal role, carrying out their own lobbying and campaigning work, particularly through the Penal Affairs Funders Forum. Recently, this has coalesced around the findings of the Corston Report. In June 2008, a coalition of funders wrote a public letter to Jack Straw, the Secretary of State for Justice, calling for the findings of the review to be implemented and calling on the government for greater level of dialogue.⁷⁹

Future challenges for the sector

Within this challenging environment, key priorities for charities can be drawn out to drive the voluntary sector forward and to maximise its impact in the criminal justice sector.

Such priorities include a focus on proving the impact of services and influencing public attitudes. Although they are huge challenges, tackling these areas is key to attracting government funding and influencing policy.

Collecting outcomes

At present, charities collect data where possible to do so, with the bulk of evidence tending towards intermediate or 'soft' outcomes, including improved self-confidence, completion of courses, user feedback or demand for services.

Ultimately, a closer focus is needed on outcomes. Funding should therefore include capacity to carry out this work. Interventions need to be rigorously assessed in terms of whether they deliver real outcomes, and the primary outcome must be a reduction in the amount and severity of re-offending.

In some instances, the strong relationship between the charity and the offender, often over an extended period of time, allows for measurement of more long-term outcomes including sustained employment and accommodation. Some projects use close collaborations with the Prison and Probation Services (eg, Sheriffs' and Recorder's Fund mentoring project) to measure the impact on re-offending.

A positive step is the growing use of the Outcomes Star, a measurement tool developed by the London Housing Foundation, Triangle Consulting and **St Mungo's**, to track improvements with homeless people. It measures progress on ten different axes, including housing, social networks and managing money. This has been easily transferable to the criminal justice sector, and more organisations seem to be using it.

Overall however, charities can struggle to demonstrate the effects of their work as they often lack the resources, the capacity and the tools to overcome the hurdles of working with this client group. From a data point of view, they do not have access to the Home Office mechanisms for measuring the re-offending rates of their cohorts. This makes it harder for charities to judge their success, tailor what they do, recognise where they are strong, and identify what can be improved. This inevitably impacts on the sustainability of services.

Being able to show their impact on re-offending, or on any government agenda, would make it easier to make a convincing case for government funding. It would also inform commissioning by helping government to choose which organisations provide a better service, rather than simply a cheaper unit cost.

Changing attitudes and policy towards prisoners

The broad challenges that exist for charities in this sector are government attitude and wider popular perception. Work to help offenders is often unpopular and media attitudes towards offenders are generally hostile. This has an impact on all areas of charities' work, both at the service level and at a policy level. The government is unwilling to take too many risks or spend too much money on reducing

re-offending in case it reflects badly on it. The media is full of stories of people in prison apparently living in luxury. Public attitudes reduce the amount of money that charities are able to raise from individual donations.

Additionally, the very few cases where the management of serious offenders has gone wrong, resulting in high-profile crimes occurring, attracts unbalanced and ill-informed attacks on Prison or Probation Services. This creates a risk-averse culture where anything other than increasingly punitive approaches to offenders will have a low priority.

Work to influence and inform public opinion is a high priority in this sector and charities can play an important role in this. In addition to charities' specific work in this area (for example, Clean Break and PRT's SmartJustice), many charities working with offenders could also help this cause by involving local communities and promoting their work to the general public.

Although a mammoth task, an informed understanding of charities' work with offenders is essential in improving public confidence in rehabilitating prisoners and community provisions.

Conclusion

Charities can play an important role in improving the situation for prisoners both in prison and following release. They can provide the independence, the expertise and the passion needed to have a positive and lasting impact on people's lives.

How and what they are able to do is influenced by government policy, funding and access to prisons to carry out work. Trusts and foundations have helped to paper over the cracks in statutory provision and improve the ability of charities to function, but charities still face a number of challenges.

Private philanthropists have an important role to play, but working out where money is most needed and how to proceed is not easy. The next chapter attempts to make some sense of the situation and draw out priorities for donors to focus on.

The media is full of stories of people in prison apparently living in luxury. Public attitudes reduce the amount of money that charities are able to raise from individual donations.



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A donor's role

The case for donors to support people in prison and on release is morally, socially and financially compelling. People in prison are one of the most disadvantaged groups in the UK, and their rehabilitation has repercussions for everyone. Helping prisoners not only improves their own lives, but also decreases the risk of re-offending, which reduces crime and its burden on the tax-payer.

The potential is enormous, but where can private money have the greatest impact? The situation is confused and constantly shifting beneath the political rhetoric. Institutional instability and changing funding streams make it harder for both charities and philanthropists to plan strategically for an uncertain future.

However, the most urgent priorities are clear. These include direct services—such as employment programmes and housing advice projects—and second-tier work campaigning, building capacity and influencing public opinion. Funding these areas provides donors with the opportunity to achieve lasting change; not only in an individual's life, but also for the sector itself.

Supporting charities in this sector does involve risks. Funding successful pilot projects will not guarantee their adoption by an over-stretched prison service. Campaigning and lobbying work may not persuade a government that needs to look tough on law and order.

But despite these challenges, private donors continue to make a vital contribution. By funding charities that are developing innovative approaches, providing an independent perspective of the criminal justice system, and supporting thousands of prisoners and their families, donors can help to break the cycle of re-offending.

Priorities for funders

When confronted by the broad range of needs and activity within the criminal justice sector, it is easy for donors to feel uncertain about where to target their efforts.

However, it is possible to highlight particular areas of priority where private philanthropy is most needed. This is based on a combination of the factors discussed earlier in the report:

- the level of need;
- government responsibilities;

Box 13: Family ties

Prisoners who are able to keep in touch with their friends and family are significantly less likely to re-offend than those who lose contact. Kids VIP is one charity helping to facilitate prison visits and enhance this experience for prisoners and their families.

Nearly half of prisoners lose contact with their family during imprisonment and a third receive no visits during their time in custody. As of September 2007, roughly 33,500 prisoners were held over 50 miles from home, making it hard for relatives to find the money or time to visit. On top of this, prisons can be a frightening place to bring children, and there are even stories of children being strip-searched on arrival.

Kids VIP runs play areas in 104 prisons in the UK, giving an estimated 50,000 prisoners the chance to play and interact with their children. Last year it cost Kids VIP £108,000 to support these play areas. When you consider that each reconviction alone costs the criminal justice system £65,000, Kids VIP needs only prevent two people from re-offending to produce a positive return to society.

NPC has calculated that if Kids VIP helps just 1% of prisoners who would not usually receive visits to maintain family ties, it could prevent 17 reconvictions. This would save over £1m in reconviction costs alone, in addition to producing long-term savings for the criminal justice system, offenders and their families, and the wider community.

- the existence of charitable activity in the area; and
- evidence of effectiveness.

Direct services

Within direct services there are opportunities for donors to fund three main areas:

- core services;
- advice, advocacy and engagement; and
- pilot projects and evaluation.

Core services

The government is responsible for providing most of the core services in prison. Areas such as mental health counselling, education classes and drug treatments all come under existing government agendas and priorities. A donor should think carefully before funding these core services, except when charities are piloting or developing a new approach (see below).

Yet exceptions do exist, primarily in the areas of **children and families** and **debt and finance**. Both of these areas, while important, are not explicitly prioritised by government services. Family centres or classes on financial literacy are rarely paid for by government, and instead often have to rely on private philanthropy. One of the main funding programmes of the



Photograph supplied by St Giles Trust

Private philanthropy has a clear role in funding advice and advocacy services, particularly in areas where government is failing to live up to its responsibilities.

LankellyChase Foundation has been directed at children and family services in the east of England. Box 13 outlines the benefits of investing in work to improve family relationships.

Employment is a further grey area. Although the wider pathway of education, training and employment has been a government priority, the focus has been on education and training. Limited provision exists for helping people into employment and supporting them once in work. Charitable funding, or any other kind of employment-related support would be very valuable.

Funding charities in these areas could substantially improve the lives of prisoners and their families. Charities that have developed successful schemes can potentially extend their services to reach more people, or share their experiences to help and inform other organisations' work.

These kinds of core services often have high unit costs, particularly if they provide the high level of intensity that successful interventions often need. So while the impact may be deep, the numbers of people who can be reached are often limited. And without government support, finding funds to sustain the service can be challenging.

Advice, advocacy and engagement

Private philanthropy has a clear role in funding advice and advocacy services, particularly in

areas where government is failing to live up to its responsibilities. Funding programmes to provide information and support, and in some cases to advocate on prisoners' behalf, can help people access the services they are entitled to.

Particular priority areas include: **housing advice, mental health advocacy and information on legal rights**. The government has a clear role in providing direct services in these areas—housing benefit, counselling, a decent prison environment—yet currently, too many people are unclear on their rights and miss out on available support.

Private donors can also fund activities such as arts, theatre and music, designed to raise people's self-confidence, self-esteem and motivation. These improvements in turn give prisoners the impetus to take advantage of other services and opportunities and achieve 'harder' outcomes, such as getting a job or a qualification. Existing funding in this area is limited, partly because of the difficulties in proving the long-term impact of these skills. However, tools to measure the effectiveness of these services are now becoming available and work is progressing in this area. Donors should choose programmes carefully, with an eye to professionalism and clear aims.

A donor may be more attracted by **mentoring and linkworker schemes**, which provide more intensive and targeted advice and encouragement, and have a more established reputation. This is particularly pertinent for

short-term prisoners for whom there is no statutory responsibility following release. Box 14 outlines the cost savings of the **Elmore Community Services'** approach. Associated with this is the need to fund charities providing **targeted support and advice** for groups who may not benefit from the generic advice available. These include foreign nationals, BME groups, women and people with learning difficulties.

Linkworker and mentoring schemes can be limited by the lack of services to refer people on to. It is also hard to attribute hard outcomes to their work—such as people in jobs and accommodation. However, studies into preventing re-offending and other research show that this personal relationship and support is crucial within the general context of an ex-offender's life.

Piloting and developing new approaches

The third area in direct services where a private donor can get involved is funding pilot projects and evaluation. These projects propose new ways of delivering services. By testing and evaluating them properly, it is possible to help establish better ways of working. The government does fund some pilot projects, but these are limited in scope.

The attraction for philanthropists is the potential leverage they can achieve. By establishing success for a project, they can:

- provide evidence for government to take over funding;
- help it to get scaled up; and
- get it replicated across the system.

The potential benefits are significant, although it is the nature of pilot studies that success is not guaranteed. Rigorous evaluation methods must be in place to assess outcomes from each project conclusively. If successful, projects have to fight for government funding—this is where robust evidence can support a project's case.

In some cases, pilot projects may have to last longer than the typical 1-3 years in order to demonstrate their success. They may also have to operate in more than one prison to demonstrate that they can be successfully replicated.

However, even if the particular project is not sustained, it may sow the seed for future work or contribute to the evidence base of what works to reduce re-offending.

In funding any of the direct services listed above, donors may wish to consider their view on funding work in private prisons (see Box 15).

Box 14: A solution for short-term prisoners

On release, many prisoners find themselves homeless and jobless. For some, relationships with their family have broken down while in prison. Prisoners on long-term sentences are paired with a probation officer to help them make the difficult transition back into the community, into work, and into a life without crime. But prisoners on short-term sentences of less than a year do not get this help. Unsurprisingly, 59% of prisoners with short sentences are reconvicted within a year of release, compared to only 25% of prisoners released from a longer sentence.

Elmore Community Services, based in Oxford, is a charity that supports vulnerable people in the local community. As part of its work, the charity offers help to prisoners released from short-term sentences to get back on their feet, including intensive support and advice to address their accommodation, financial and health needs. In 2008, 17 of the 21 ex-offenders it worked with were not reconvicted. Given the usual 59% re-offending rate of short-term prisoners, it would be expected that 12 of these former prisoners would end up re-offending. This means that Elmore stopped a further eight people from re-offending. With costs of £40,000 to run its services for a year, NPC has calculated that it costs Elmore less than £5,000 to keep an ex-offender on the straight and narrow.

This is a tiny sum compared to what re-offending costs society. The average cost to the criminal justice system alone of a reconviction is £65,000. Considering these figures, Elmore's impressive results mean that for every pound put into the charity, £13 is saved for the taxpayer, providing a huge return of 1,300%. And this does not even cover the costs saved to the offender's family, the local community and the victims of the crimes themselves.

Ex-offenders do not need to find themselves trapped in a cycle of re-offending. But without probation support, it is charities, offenders' families and taxpayers that bear the costs of their crimes.

Indirect services

The constraints of providing direct services make a powerful argument for targeting more resources at improving the wider criminal justice system. There are three main areas:

- improving the capacity of the charitable sector;
- directly lobbying government; and
- influencing wider public attitudes.

Success in any of these areas can have a wide impact, providing more money, more space and more capacity for providing services for people in prison. Work in all these inter-linked areas is a priority and has the potential for significant reach. Nevertheless, this has to be balanced with the risk of actually realising this potential. Traditionally the charities in the criminal justice sector have struggled in this area, operating in a piecemeal fashion, rather than making any significant structural gains.

Box 15: Philanthropy in private prisons

A number of philanthropists specifically rule out giving to projects operating in private prisons. Funders such as LankellyChase Foundation are unwilling to use their charitable resource to contribute to the profit sheet of a private company. Instead, they argue that private prisons should buy in the services that they want. Others argue that this puts those prisoners in private prison, who have no choice in the matter, at an unfair disadvantage. It also increases the chances that private prisons will be cut off from new and innovative practice.

A recent development in the debate has been the decision by the charity NACRO to be part of a bid tendering for the contract of two new private prisons. While GS4 would provide the security and build the prison, NACRO would offer resettlement support. So far reactions from the sector have been mixed. As a whole it is an area that is getting a lot of attention at the moment.

Funding research, lobbying and campaigning work is an important role for donors.

Public awareness and perception is an important area for private funding.

Improving capacity

Private philanthropy can mitigate the uncertainty of the current environment for charities. This can be done through: directly funding individual organisations to help them develop business and strategic plans; funding specific support activities such as training or volunteering schemes; helping to improve their monitoring and evaluation infrastructure; contributing to their ability to write bids; or even directly funding a charity's reserves. For example, in 2006, the **Prison Reform Trust** (PRT) benefited from a grant from the Cripps Foundation that went straight into its reserves.

Certain areas of the voluntary sector are particularly weak: for example, charities working with BME groups and women. A donor interested in these groups might want to take a strategic look at how to build the capacity of charities in these areas.

Funding can also be used for sector-wide initiatives, for example, to improve co-ordination and co-operation across the sector, or its ability to influence government processes. This is often done on an *ad hoc* basis by individual chief executives, sitting on panels responding to government consultations, but there are also more formal processes. These are often co-ordinated by larger organisations or second-tier bodies.

A final way for philanthropists to improve capacity is by helping develop toolkits or frameworks that charities can use to improve their services. The London Housing Foundation helped produce the 'Outcomes Star', which has been adopted across the criminal justice sector.

Research, lobbying and campaigning

Funding research, lobbying and campaigning work is a traditional and important role for donors. Influencing government and improving its services and funding has a potentially massive impact, such as with the work of the

PRT (see Box 11). These campaigns involve several important stages:

- research into the nature of the issues;
- identifying solutions to improve the situation;
- lobbying government to change policy and provision.

Information and research is the cornerstone of this process. The government captures a certain amount for its own use and has commissioned a number of cohort studies, although it has been argued that this data is not comprehensive or impartial. Charities and researchers can also find it hard to get access to government data in some cases.

Private funding for research can help clarify problems and provide a basis for solving them, but the resulting research must be used. Recommendations for government based on fact and evidence—for example, switching to an economic case—are more compelling and present solutions rather than just problems.

While the three stages are vital in campaigning, it is only by changing government policy and action that campaigns are able to have an impact.

A donor can make two useful contributions to organisations working in research and lobbying. Firstly, providing core funding will allow charities to articulate criticisms of current policy and commissioning without fear of losing funding. Charities need the resource and the ability to be responsive to the constant stream of reviews and consultations that government produces.

The second area is proactive research and lobbying. This involves funding a charity to concentrate on a particular topic or issue, based on an analysis of need and potential impact. Separately addressing a discrete issue, such as mental health, or women, makes it easier to set achievable goals and may produce more easily discernable returns.

Lobbying can be an opportunity to have an impact on large numbers of beneficiaries, but it faces its own particular risks. When it is successful, attributing the results to individual campaigns or charities is sometimes challenging. NPC's report *Critical masses* argues that more donors should consider funding campaigning work. It explains how a strategic approach with sound monitoring and evaluation can help overcome these and other common concerns.

Public awareness

Public awareness and perception is an important yet uncertain area for private funding, and is often cited to explain government's lack of room to manoeuvre. It is important to

understand two things: what people actually think about prison; and what can be done to improve and change their attitudes. Like lobbying and campaigning, it might be logical to target particular groups, such as sentencers, or key opinion formers, such as newspaper editors. Organisations such as Make Justice Work and the Why Me? Trust are focusing on evidence-based practice to shift the public perception and politician-journalist opinion.

Identifying specific organisations

If the areas described above are NPC's priorities, how should donors choose specific organisations within each of them?

One way is by using NPC's charity recommendations. In this report, we have identified many different charities and the excellent work they are doing, and have highlighted a smaller sample of charities that we believe to be particularly effective in our priority areas. These charities are listed on our website www.philanthropycapital.org and information on them can be downloaded without charge.

NPC's recommendations are by no means a top ten or a ranking of the best organisations. Analysts try to select according to the results of the organisations, their capacity to achieve these results and the risks threatening these results.

NPC's recommendations in this sector will change over time. Analysts seek regularly to review the performance of the organisations recommended and, periodically, to add new ones.

Other charities

Donors who want to support a charity that NPC has not reviewed (for example, a local charity), could use NPC's charity analysis framework, *Funding Success*, to ask their own questions. An updated version, *Funding Success II*, will be published in Spring 2009. A comprehensive list of different charities working in the sector can be found on the Clinks website—www.clinks.org.

How to fund

Where a donor has decided which charity to support, it is also important to think about how to fund that organisation.

NPC is strongly of the view that donors should not restrict their funding to a particular project. This is damaging because charities end up unable to cover their overheads. Funding for non-project staff salaries, administration and infrastructure may seem mundane, but they are fundamental to organisations being effective and making the most of their resources. Charities should be given unrestricted funds (that is, not tied to specific projects) to counter this problem. In general, it is best for the charity to decide how to use particular funds according to the overall needs of the organisation and their beneficiaries, rather than having to restrict themselves artificially or invent project funding needs.

Given that funding in the sector is not always stable, charities stand to benefit greatly from any long-term funding. The benefit of long-term funding is that it avoids organisations having to spend their time and money searching for funds to keep services running in the short term, and instead allows them to think more strategically and plan ahead for the future. It can also enable charities to deliver activities that have to occur over the long term in order to be successful (eg, campaigns to lobby government).

Donors could also consider funding charities to evaluate the impact of their own services across all activities. Most charities in the sector are so constrained by funding and staffing that they have little capacity to prove their effectiveness. By funding charities to measure their impact (eg, through evaluations, or by improving data collection), donors could gain leverage—by allowing the charity to demonstrate that its service works so that it can attract additional funds from elsewhere.



Photograph supplied by Sarah Ainslie - Clean Break

Final word

Prisons are an important part of our criminal justice system, playing a role in deterrence and public safety. But punishment alone does not deter people from offending. It is clear that the current system is neither rehabilitating prisoners successfully, nor reducing re-offending rates significantly. Two thirds of people re-offend within two years of leaving prison and the prison population is increasing year on year.

Prisoners are one of the most disadvantaged groups of people in the UK. They often face problems such as poor mental health, unemployment, drug addictions and homelessness, which directly increase the risk that they will re-offend. Addressing these issues not only benefits prisoners and their families, but also reduces crime and its burden on victims and the tax-payer.

Charities play a key role in supporting prisoners to turn their lives around, both through direct help and by challenging political policy and public opinion. Many

of the charities mentioned in this report are doing creative and innovative work, exploring effective ways of supporting people in prison and on release, in order to help them turn away from a life of crime.

To sustain these efforts, and to ensure that they are successful, charities need private donations. While government provides core basic funding, this is subject to cuts and is narrowly focused on specific issues and programmes. Private funding can give charities the flexibility, security and courage they need to develop and sustain their services, directly improving the lives of thousands of people and helping to reduce re-offending.

Donors can have a considerable impact on this sector by looking at the priorities highlighted in this report, and using their money to fund effective organisations. A stronger, better funded charitable sector will have a greater impact on the lives of prisoners, their families, and wider society.



Photograph supplied by Shannon Trust

Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to the following individuals – and their organisations – for their input into this report:

Adfam	Vivienne Evans, Adele Shepherd
Anne Peaker Centre	Bridget Edwards
Asha Women's Centre	Lynne Fyfe
Blue Sky	Michael May, Steve Finn
Bristol Mind	Tom Hore
CBI	David Walker
Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, KCL	Dr Roger Grimshaw
Clean Break	Lucy Perman
Clinks	Malcolm Thomson
Elmore Community Services	Jill Childs, Kate Cocker
Former Chief Inspector of Prisons	Lord Ramsbotham
Hibiscus	Olga Heaven, Cherry Wittington
Institute for Criminal Policy Research, KCL	Professor Mike Hough
International Centre for Prison Studies, KCL	Rob Allen
Kids VIP	Fiona Clarke
Koestler Trust	Tim Robertson
LankellyChase	Peter Kilgarriff
London NOMS	Swazi Rogers
London Probation Service	Mary McFeely
Monument Trust	Mark Woodruff
NACRO	Jackie Worrall
OMS Analytical Services, Ministry of Justice	Penny Fraser, David Brown
PACT	Andy Keen-Downs, Angela Grimes
Policy Exchange	Ben Ullmann
Prison Advice Service	Matthew Denny
Prison Reform Trust	Juliet Lyons, Geoff Dobson
RAPt	Mike Trace
Revolving Doors Agency	Kevin Ireland
Sainsbury's Centre for Mental Health	Chiara Samele
Shannon Trust	David Ahern
Sheriffs' and Recorder's Fund	Prue Keely
St Giles Trust	Rob Owen
UNLOCK	Chris Bath

Additionally we are heavily indebted to the following individuals who provided us with valuable input after taking the time and care to read the consultation version of this report:

Rob Allen	International Centre for Prison Studies, KCL
Chris Bath	UNLOCK
Geoff Dobson	Prison Reform Trust
Peter Kilgarriff	LankellyChase Foundation
Mary McFeely	London Probation Service
Rob Owen	St Giles Trust
Lord Ramsbotham	Former Chief Inspector of Prisons
Chiara Samele	Sainsbury's Centre for Mental Health
Malcolm Thomson	Clinks
Mike Trace	RAPt
Mark Woodruff	The Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts
Jackie Worrall	NACRO

We would also like to thank Jackie Curthoys for editing this report, and Lucy Heady and Camilla Nevill, from the NPC Measurement team, for their quantitative input.

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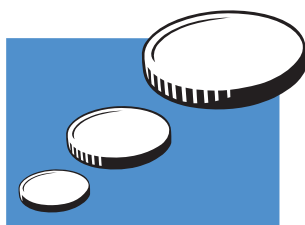
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Using this research it advises clients and their trusted advisors, and helps them think through issues such as:

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- What is the best way to support these organisations?

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A company limited by guarantee. Registered in England and Wales No. 4244715.
Registered charity number 1091450.

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ISBN 978-0-9551694-4-1

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