

THROUGH THE GATE

A collection of articles on the criminal justice sector

Various authors

September 2013

INTRODUCTION

In this collection of articles from 2005 to today, we look at innovative projects in the criminal justice sector and how charities are working in different ways to tackle key issues. We also highlight how the sector is changing in response to the new commissioning environment and ways in which charities are assessing the impact of their services to improve what they do.

Re-offending rates remain stubbornly high, with nearly half of all UK prisoners re-offending within a year of their release. This partly explains why the prison population has more than doubled over the past twenty years. These figures help make the case for reforms introduced by Justice Secretary, Chris Grayling, earlier this year. Under proposals to ‘transform rehabilitation’, 70% of rehabilitation services currently delivered by the Probation Service will be contracted out on a payment by results basis to the private and voluntary sectors. Another key part of the reforms will see a greater use of mentoring: offenders released from short-term custodial sentences—the group with the highest rates of recidivism—will now have a mandatory twelve months of supervision.

There are many concerns surrounding PBR models—informed by the Work Programme and its legacy—and debate should be encouraged. But we also recognise that these reforms should offer many charities and voluntary organisations the opportunity to help more individuals who need their support.

For this to become viable, it is vital that charities have access to data so they can understand and prove what works. Until recently, this has been a key challenge. In our report *Unlocking offending data* we conducted a survey of 236 criminal justice charities’ need for and attitude to data on re-offending. Four in five found the process of accessing data difficult, with success largely dependent on relationships with local police forces, prison or probation trusts.

In this context, we are delighted to hear from the first users of the Ministry of Justice’s **Justice Data Lab**, a pioneering new system to provide charities with access to offending data, and to be working on two pieces of work funded by the National Offender Management Service. The first, in collaboration with ICPR Birkbeck, will review evidence on the impact of programmes that focus on improving family and peer relationships, and identify intermediate outcomes likely to have the biggest impact, **alongside a toolkit** to measure them. The **second project** aims to stimulate the visibility, collection and use of evidence by voluntary sector organisations working in criminal justice.

James Noble, Programme Manager, September 2013

A SELECTION FROM OUR BLOG

‘Flog young offenders, put them in stocks and pelt them with oranges’

Matt van Poortvliet, February 2010

The public has a limited understanding of the youth justice system, and tends to assume that sentences are ‘softer’ than they really are. Research shows that when they know more about how the system works, they favour more constructive and less punitive approaches. NPC’s report *Trial and error* shows that the things we tend to think of as ‘tough’ generally do not work well. Three in four young people leaving prison re-offend within a year of release: taking delinquent young people into prisons to ‘scare them straight’ actually increases offending; and military-style boot camps do nothing to reduce criminality. Successful schemes set firm boundaries but also provide support and alternatives to offending.

Small is beautiful too

Iona Joy, December 2012

At a Funding Network event, two young men from the two main opposing gangs in Birmingham presented their project working with gangs, *One Mile Away*. At considerable personal risk they go into schools and clubs to act as role models advocating another path. Some simple maths on whether individuals go to prison or to school or work shows good value for money. It only requires a few to be diverted from prison (£47k a time) for efforts to be worthwhile. And their vision has already won support from the *Prince’s Trust*. I thought to myself, why isn’t the government funding this? And then I thought, what chance would such a project have of getting through a typical procurement process? It’s a tiny organisation, working with a small number of incredibly hard to reach and costly people. How could it bid when commissioners want a single vast provider sorting everything?

Relationships as agents of change

Charlotte Weinberg, March 2013

At the very heart of desistance from crime lies a largely immeasurable concept: the power of relationships, positive or negative, as agents of change. Safe Ground’s work centres on equipping people with the skills and confidence to form and maintain strong, sustainable relationships. In 1999, the Home Office commissioned our pioneering family relationships and parenting programmes, *Family Man and Fathers Inside*, delivered in over 40 adult male prisons to over 5,000 men. Like most small charities in the current economic climate, our existence is blighted by uncertainty. We know we must continue to evolve to survive the impact of reforms to the criminal justice system on the voluntary sector. We know we must also remain steadfast in our principles. Real change demands real investment, and strong, meaningful relationships are an investment like nothing else.

Spotlight on Safe Ground

Tracey Gyateng, September 2013

I was thrilled to read a recent [article](#) by Adam Moll from Safe Ground, one of the first users of the [Justice Data Lab](#), a pilot Ministry of Justice analytical service that enables services to measure their re-offending impact. Adam writes about the importance of demonstrating Safe Ground’s impact, especially in response to increasing demands from funders for greater and better evidence. Being the first organisation to try something new, especially when there is no requirement to do so in an increasingly competitive market, requires strong determination. I don’t mean to say that organisations who do not make a submission to the Lab care less about their service users, as there are important reasons why the Justice Data Lab is not yet suitable for all organisations (see NPC/Clinks [frequently asked questions](#)), only that organisations need to be brave to put the impact they make under the spotlight.

KEEPING CONVICTS IN THE FAMILY

As institutions, prisons exist to provide punishment to criminals and act as a deterrent against committing crime. A third purpose though, to rehabilitate prisoners, argues for a gentler prison environment.

The harsh environment of prisons can mitigate against rehabilitation. Indeed, as a means of rehabilitating offenders, the prison system is an abject failure. Almost two thirds of prisoners re offend within two years of release. More than half of these return to prison. One adverse effect of the prison environment is on families. The hostile environment can pose both practical and emotional barriers to visiting inmates. NPC highlighted the importance of family ties in our research report on prisoners and ex-offenders, *Inside and out*, and our follow-up brief, *Investing in family ties*.

One might favour family visits on humane grounds. Alternatively, one might recognise the role family visits play in reducing re-offending. There is considerable research supporting this link and government recognises its importance. NPC's research estimates that the average ex-prisoner who re-offends costs the criminal justice system £111,300. There are huge additional costs too, such as those borne by the health service and the victims of crime.

Strengthening family ties

Charities play a vital role in helping prisoners maintain contacts with families. Running visitors' centres is a direct way to do this. Basic services include help with the booking of prison visits and the provision of information. Some of the better resourced centres provide refreshments, emotional support, childcare and counselling.

NPC recently visited visitors' centres at Brixton and Holloway prisons. Each of these is run by the charity Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT) which also runs centres at a further six prisons in the South East. The Holloway centre includes a supervised play area which can make bringing children to prison far easier. Seeing these facilities first hand, one is struck by how cold and unwelcoming prisons are. Brixton's centre is newer and more basic than Holloway's but at each the charity strives to provide an environment which welcomes families.

Charities working in prisons depend on the prison regime and need the cooperation of the governor to operate effectively. Even with such cooperation, funding is often lacking and charities such as PACT invariably work in difficult conditions. Consequently, charities struggle to provide the necessary services. The success of their work depends on both paid staff and the commitment of many volunteers.

Research showed the average prison visitors' centre managed by charities like PACT costs £40,000 a year to run. This is close to the cost of locking up a single prisoner for a year (£38,000). NPC's calculations showed that historically more than one quarter of prisoners have lost family tie visits to prisoners has fallen by 40% per prisoner in the past four years. Without increased support for visitors' centres and other means to encourage visits, rates of re-offending will remain horrendously high and could increase further.

Society needs a balance of punishment and rehabilitation. It is right to fret about the correct balance of punishment and rehabilitation when designing the prison system. This balance needs to be based on sensible economics as well as decent morals. The present system manifestly fails on the first count. Supporting charities that support family visits offers a route to a saner and more effective criminal justice system.

HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY

Suicide and attempted suicide are part of the daily reality of life inside Styal Prison for women—particularly on Mother's Day weekend. Two years ago, 41 women tried to kill themselves during that weekend alone.

While most mothers are enjoying breakfast in bed on Mother's Day, many mothers in prison are driven to attempt suicide. For women with traumatic lives, relationships with their children are often vital—so it is no surprise that Mother's Day is so distressing.

Jenny has been in Styal Prison in Cheshire on remand for more than three months and is still awaiting trial. She says that her relationship with her 13-year-old son is the only thing that makes her want to change her chaotic life and 'get on the straight and narrow.' *'It's the hardest thing about being in here, worrying about your kids,'* says Jenny. *'But it hurts to talk about it. I have to shut it out because there's nothing I can do; I can't go home. But I shouldn't have to shut my son out.'* Jenny refuses to let her son visit her in prison because it is too upsetting. *'The visits are the only thing that have got worse since I was here last time [in 2001],'* she says. *'We aren't even allowed to hug our children.'*

Fears about smuggled drugs mean that women are not allowed physical contact with any visitors. Even babies can be strip-searched. Being separated from their children is too much to bear for many women. And separation from their mothers can be devastating for children too. The relatively small number of women's prisons means that women are often locked up far away from home, so it is difficult for their children to visit them.

When a mother goes to prison, her children are almost as likely to be taken into care by the local authority (8%) as to stay with their father (9%). For those who go into care there is a one in ten chance that they will end up in prison. Some of the women at Styal boast that they were born there.

Revolving door

There are many different paths that lead women to Styal prison. The charity, Revolving Doors Agency, launched a report last month, which found that two in five inmates had mental health problems, had been abused or neglected as children and were dependent on drugs—creating a 'conveyor belt' of crisis, crime and prison.

Revolving Doors recently reviewed Styal prison and made a range of recommendations that suggest focussing on mental health, coordinating support, helping women find housing when they leave prison, and providing 'through the gate' and long-term support. Research like this is vital if prison services are to help rather than hinder these vulnerable women.

Helping women detox in prison, for example, raises their hopes only to let them down if they have no support when they leave. Help finding accommodation when the women get out is vital, since drug-ridden hostels are not an option for women who want to stay clean and get their children back from local authority care.

Revolving Doors has found that the average sentence at Styal lasts just nine weeks because most women are in prison for non-violent offences, such as extracting electricity from a meter, driving an untaxed car and having fake ID. These short sentences provide little time for rehabilitation and often cause women to lose their jobs, houses, and even children. Nevertheless, it makes sense to provide the women with the support they need. Revolving Doors helps make sure they get it. By supporting this charity, donors can help ensure that more women in prison make it through Mother's Day alive—and are at home with their children next year.

UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF EX-CONS

Bobby Cummines spent 13 years in prison, but today leads UNLOCK, a charity for reformed offenders. He talks about his own transformation from ex-con to House of Commons specialist advisor.



'I started off life as a criminal. I didn't know what straight people did, and I wasn't really that interested. I've been involved in gang violence, I've been shot and obviously I've shot other people. It was a violent, vicious life.'

These are the words of Bobby Cummines, a straight-talking man with a cheery smile. He is sitting in an armchair in a pinstripe suit, sipping tea. He doesn't look much like a violent criminal. Nor does he act like one. In fact, Bobby has just got back from a trip to South Africa, where he stayed with a high court judge and enjoyed a barbeque with South Africa's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

These days, Bobby is more likely to be seen walking the corridors of power, in his role as a specialist advisor to the House of Commons, than walking down prison corridors. The kingpin of reformed offenders, Bobby is the founder and Chief Executive of the charity UNLOCK, described as 'the National Association of Reformed Offenders'.

The brightly-painted attic office in Snodland, Kent where Bobby now works is a world apart from Kings Cross where he grew up. Aged 16, Bobby was the youngest person in Britain to be convicted for possession of a sawn-off shotgun. He spent 13 of the next 20 years in high-security prisons for offences including manslaughter and a string of bank robberies. So how did this man go from leading a gang to leading a charity? From being a notorious criminal to being a well-known advocate of penal reform? From robbing banks to fly fishing with the Directors of Coutts?

Bobby's reform came about gradually, while he was in prison. His probation officer persuaded him to make the best of his strong planning and negotiation skills, which he'd previously used to plot crimes. So Bobby took an Open University course in humanities and social sciences, and was hooked.

'If I stood outside Marks and Spencer tonight and rattled a tin for reformed offenders I'd probably get two black eyes. It takes a bit of bottle to fund something like this.'

Hooked on learning

'I got the learning bug,' he says. 'I was watching the people around me in prison planning the next job. I was thinking, "They're going to die in this place." And I thought, "I'm worth more than that."

'It was amazing. It was a whole new world opening up to me. The only way I can describe it is like being out of focus, getting your eyes tested and getting a new pair of glasses. You start to see things properly. Education was my liberation. Prison brutalises people. When you're inside, you don't serve a sentence—you survive a sentence, and the most violent survives. I'm grateful that education humanised me.'

As well as discovering education, he was strongly influenced by the kind and remarkable people he met in prison, from charity workers to prison staff. *'I thought to myself, I couldn't hurt these people, these are really nice people.'* One such

person was the prison librarian, who helped Bobby to publish a book of poetry while inside. A few years later, Bobby and the librarian were married with a daughter.

But after leaving prison, Bobby struggled to get work because of his criminal record. He stacked shelves, then went to university in Greenwich to do a degree in housing. While he was there, Bobby was conscious of the need to give something back. He began to volunteer for Kent Probation Service, winning its 'volunteer of the year' award. For much of the nineties, Bobby worked with mental health clients and ex-offenders in a hostel, dealing with hostage negotiations, suicide management and other crises.

Giving something back

'I'd done so much bad I wanted to level the scales up a bit,' he says. 'I wanted to do a little bit of good. And also, I could see what the hostel staff were up against. It don't matter how good or kind people are, if they don't understand the mindset of the ex-offender.'

It was out of this philosophy that UNLOCK was born. In 1999, Bobby was one of a small group of ex-cons, including the actor Stephen Fry, who once spent time inside for credit card fraud, with a vision of helping ex-offenders overcome the barriers to reintegration. The charity started with no money, and operated from Bobby's garage. But it had the support of a probation officer and UNLOCK's founding President Sir Stephen Tumim, a former judge and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

'If I can turn one kid around, then it's all been worthwhile.'

UNLOCK initially focused on raising the profile of the needs and views of ex-offenders. In Bobby's words: *'The media got captured by the idea of ex-offenders [helping] ex-offenders. And because of my background—I was quite a well-known villain in those days—it caught their imagination even more.'* Over time, UNLOCK has developed into a charity that provides practical support and advice for people going straight, with a particular focus on tackling the financial exclusion of ex-offenders.

Before UNLOCK got involved, it was almost impossible for people with a previous conviction to get affordable insurance. What's more, if they moved back in with their family, that whole household's insurance would be invalidated. UNLOCK has now managed to persuade eight brokers to offer reasonably-priced insurance to ex-offenders. In five years, they have not had one fraudulent claim. This is crucial for Bobby, because *'it shows people you can trust ex-offenders'*.

Giving ex-cons a chance

Bobby is passionate that reformed offenders can and should be trusted. *'UNLOCK represents some of the most unloved, marginalised... even hated people in society,'* he says. *'But what people don't realise is that we are the National Association of Reformed Offenders, not those still at it, and for every one we turn round, that's three victims of crime that ain't gonna happen.'*

Bobby also goes into schools to turn children away from crime. He tells them of a prison sentence, and de-glamorises the criminal life. *'If I can turn one kid around, then it's all been worthwhile,'* he says. *'I can get up in the morning, look in the mirror, and like me. I couldn't do that before. I don't want to see young guys lying on the bed that I laid on for 13 years, wasting their life away, and going to bed at night when they get out with a gun under their pillow. I want them to go to bed with a dream under their pillow, an aspiration to being something, and being taxpayers instead of a burden on the taxpayer.'*

The main challenge that UNLOCK faces is, unsurprisingly, resources. *'There's no compassion for this lot,'* he says. *'If I stood outside Marks and Spencer tonight and rattled a tin for reformed offenders I'd probably get two black eyes. It takes a bit of bottle to fund something like this ... and we're so grateful to our funders. People can change, but they need the opportunity to change. UNLOCK can help to change things, to make this place a safer place for all of us.'*

A TITANIC MISTAKE?

Built in remote locations to house up to 2,000 prisoners, are super-jails the answer to overcrowding in Britain's prisons? NPC fears that so-called 'Titan' prisons will only make matters worse.

'Titan' prisons were first suggested by a government-backed review in 2007. Since then these super-jails have taken centre stage in government prison policy. With overcrowding in British prisons reaching record levels, are these new giant jails the answer to our prisons' problems? The answer from prison charities is a resounding 'no'.

You can see why the government is a fan. Super-prisons are double the size of normal jails and would ease chronic overcrowding for a relatively low cost. Something needs to be done. The prison population has increased by almost 30% in ten years—reaching an all-time high of 83,100 in August 2008. Recent research by The Prison Reform Trust, one of NPC's recommended charities, showed that two thirds of prisons are officially overcrowded. In many prisons, three people share a two-person cell. Some inmates have to travel up to 150 miles from home for their prison place.

Prisoners are also frequently moved around between prisons, meaning they cannot enrol on courses, or maintain contact with their families. But with the prison service being asked to make year-on-year savings of 3%, there is little room in the budget for new prison places to ease these problems.

'Two thirds of prisons are officially overcrowded.'

Fixing problems takes time

One reason for the steep rise in prisoner numbers is that re-offending rates are high. More than 64% of prisoners are reconvicted within two years of their release. Prison charities fear that 'Titan jails' will only exacerbate this trend.

A huge number of people in prison suffer from mental health problems, substance misuse, and come from deprived backgrounds. Fixing these problems takes time, patience and intensive interventions. The proposal to build giant, impersonal jails, with low staff-to-prisoner ratios, will only make it more difficult for prisoners to get the help they need.

Focus on rehabilitation

Instead of cramming more inmates into more prisons, the focus needs to be on rehabilitation and helping prisoners to rebuild their lives, rather than short-term economic gain.

If prisons don't prepare prisoners for life on the outside, then many inmates will find themselves back inside within six months. NPC has come across excellent charities doing intensive, one-on-one rehabilitation work with prisoners. This kind of work can hold the key to rebuilding shattered lives and cutting re-offending rates—which would ultimately reduce the need to build 'Titan' prisons at all.

Autumn 2008, Jo Lee Morrison

- *In April 2009 the Labour government dropped plans to build three "Titan" prisons housing 2,500 offenders each. However, in January 2013 Chris Grayling, the justice secretary, announced something very like a new Titan prison, with capacity for more than 2,000 inmates. Mr Grayling intends to shut down 9 prisons in whole or in part, losing 2,600 places in the process, expecting to save £63m (\$102m) a year. Future Prisons has called for the government to shut more than 30 run-down and poorly-located prisons and replace them with 12 state of the art 'Hub Prisons', containing up to 3,000 inmates.*

LIFE BEHIND BARS

Following a series of ‘Seeing is believing’ visits to Wandsworth Prison, NPC reports back on what life is really like on the inside—and how to make prisons more effective.



Leaving the leafy green of Wandsworth Common, it's difficult not to feel a sense of claustrophobia as you pass under spirals of barbed wire and through the locked gates into Wandsworth Prison. It's a very different image from newspaper stories that portray prison life as 'cushy' and prisoners as spoiled.

'It's certainly not like Butlins, which is what some people tend to think,' says Bobby Cummines, reformed offender and chief executive of the charity UNLOCK.

'Prison should be about rehabilitation but instead it's a destructive thing.

There are a lot of angry people in there who think the world doesn't care about them so why should they care about the world? When they come out they just carry on committing crimes like before.'

'A good prison is one that sets people up for a different life when they come out, by helping them with education, with jobs, and with housing.'

Bobby Cummines, Chief Executive, UNLOCK

A cycle of re-offending

Bobby's comments are reinforced by findings in NPC's recent report, *Breaking the cycle*. This is an update on our earlier report, *Inside and out*, which looks at life in prison and after release. It highlights the fact that two thirds of prisoners re-offend within two years of leaving prison, committing at least one million crimes. The report argues that 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.

'People need to be doing purposeful activity, not shut in their rooms playing Playstation and watching TV,' says Bobby, whose charity improves the social and financial inclusion of people with past convictions. He argues that members of the public who see these things as luxuries are wrong. *'The reason prisoners are given toys like Playstations is because it's a way to sedate people, which means you don't have to provide these people with meaningful activities.'* A good prison, he says, is one that sets people up for a different life when they come out, by helping them with education, with jobs, and with housing.

Charities lead a number of schemes that provide the help and opportunities prisoners need to lead a life free from crime. In Wandsworth Prison, Shannon Trust runs a literacy project, recruiting and training literate prisoners to teach fellow prisoners how to read.

We met some of these men on a recent 'Seeing is believing' trip to the prison. One wanted to find work as a gardener on release, and realised he would need to read packets of seeds. Others wanted to understand job application forms. All of

them realised that learning to read would give them a much better chance of keeping on the straight and narrow once released.

Successful schemes

So what makes a scheme successful? One key factor is that it is based on each individual's situation and the particular problems he or she faces. *'A prison scheme needs to focus on what people really need to become a good person,'* says Bobby. In his experience, charities are a perfect vehicle to develop and deliver such schemes, due to their focus on what is best for prisoners, their ability to be responsive and innovative, and their lack of association with 'the system'. This view is echoed in NPC's report findings.

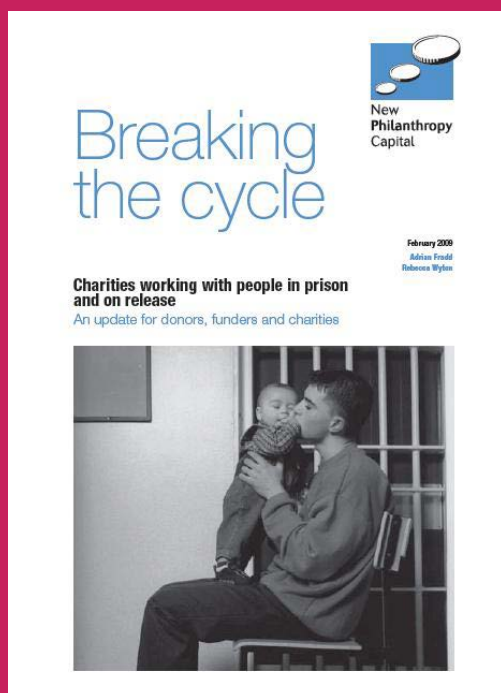
Another factor that can affect the success of a scheme is the openness of the prison governor to charity-run programmes. Governors have the final say on whether charities can work in their prison, and which prisoners they can work with.

In *Breaking the cycle* we highlighted one situation where a recent change of governor in a London prison led to the closure of 20 out of 24 charitable programmes. But Bobby adds that it is not only the governor, but the relationship between him or her, the prison staff and the prisoners that matters most. *'It's like a triangle,'* says Bobby, *'If all the points don't match up then you won't have a healthy prison.'*

The rehabilitation of prisoners should matter to us all—whether we care about the safety of our communities, cutting costs for taxpayers, or the welfare of one of the most disadvantaged groups in the UK. With a shrinking government budget for support services like mental health care, drug treatment, or help finding jobs or housing, the role of charities will become more and more vital in helping to keep offenders on the straight and narrow.

Summer 2009, Jane Thomas

BREAKING THE CYCLE



Prison should be about rehabilitation, not just punishment. Yet two thirds of people re-offend within two years of leaving prison, committing at least one million crimes and costing the taxpayer £13bn a year. People in prison need services and support to help them overcome their problems and lead a life free from crime. Charities often play a crucial role in helping them achieve this and in reducing re-offending rates amongst ex-prisoners.

NPC's report, *Breaking the cycle*, is an update of our earlier report on people in prison and on release, *Inside and out*. It looks at how recent changes in the criminal justice system have affected the work of charities, and investigates how funders can create lasting change. The most urgent priorities for funding 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.

Download the report for free on NPC's website.

FROM BOOT CAMPS TO DANCING SHOES

NPC's research into youth offending argues that charities are a vital source of innovation in a sector averse to risk.

In the late 1990s, the teenagers of Cotgrave were getting into trouble. The small, ex-mining town in Nottinghamshire had problems with anti-social behaviour and bike thefts, with teenagers riding motorbikes dangerously around the streets. The area was seen as rough, the boys had a bad reputation in local schools, and the worst were in and out of prison.

Today, these problems have virtually disappeared. The brain-child of a group of 12 year olds, a small charity called Rev and Go was set up enabling young people to ride and maintain off-road bikes at local tracks, in exchange for a contract of good behaviour and abstinence from vehicle crime. Led only by volunteers, the teenagers have been responsible for the group from the start: they decide membership by a code of good behaviour (barring those that bring drink or drugs), maintain the bikes ready for racing and gain qualifications in mechanics. The local police and youth service say it is responsible for dramatic reductions in the joy-riding and anti-social behaviour that had plagued the area.

If you have a problem with joy-riding, it's not obvious that the solution is to give teenagers motorbikes and let them decide the rules. But then it's probably also not obvious that young offenders could be reformed by dance lessons, gang members by boxing clubs or that bad behaviour might be improved by a change of diet. There is a certain 'common sense' about what young people involved in crime need—old fashioned discipline, bootcamps and curfews.

NPC has been researching the issue of youth offending over the last six months, and one thing we have learnt is that many 'common sense' approaches do not work. Boot camps, curfews and custody may pass the infamous 'public acceptability test', but there is little evidence that they prevent crime or reform character. Three in four young people in prison re-offend within a year of release, at vast expense to the taxpayer. Curfews lead to arrests when they are broken—extending the criminal record and drawing young people further into the criminal justice system. In fact, what intuitively might seem a sensible idea for reducing crime can actually *increase* it. Programmes taking delinquent young people on organised prison visits—presumably to show them how grim it is and deter them from a life of crime—show that offending actually *increases* among participants. Military-style boot camps for young offenders were stopped in the late 90's because regimental drill did nothing to reduce criminality and participants became more badly behaved.

'What intuitively might seem a sensible idea for reducing crime can actually increase it.'

So what does work in preventing youth crime? There are no easy answers, but many informal and less conventional approaches—using everything from arts to sport, literacy to nutrition, therapy to fostering—are extremely promising and deserve proper attention. For example, Dance United provides an intensive, 12-week programme in which young offenders are treated as trainee professional dancers who must adhere to a number of strict principles and routines. The curriculum not only teaches them dance, discipline and public performance, it also develops their literacy, numeracy and social skills. And its results are impressive: four in five go on to education, employment or training, and less than a third of those who engage re-offend—results that are much better than for those on community orders.

The problem is, dance just doesn't *sound* very 'tough', and many charities using alternative approaches struggle for funding from government, and sometimes for credibility and access to working with young offenders. In a sector averse to risk, fearful of tabloids, and concerned to look 'tough' on crime, the voluntary sector has a particularly important role, and donors can ensure that innovation and effectiveness are not stifled by a sense of what is 'publicly acceptable'.

Autumn 2009, Matthew van Poortvliet

HOW SHOULD CHARITIES BE INVOLVED?

The question of what role charities should play when working with private prisons is a hotly-debated topic.

At the end of 2010, Nacro, the national criminal justice charity, made waves when it became involved in a bid to run prisons, in partnership with a private security firm, GS4. While NACRO was ultimately unsuccessful, another partnership between a private company and two charities, Turning Point and Catch 22, did win the contract. We asked Juliet Lyon, the Director of the Prison Reform Trust, and Jackie Worrall, Director of Policy and Public Affairs at Nacro for their perspectives on the issue.

Juliet Lyon, Director of Prison Reform Trust



The Prison Reform Trust (PRT) is concerned that prisons should be just, humane and effective. They should be reserved for the most serious and dangerous offenders, freeing up investment for more constructive community solutions

to crime. A major reservation we have about introducing the profit motive to prisons is that it necessarily creates a strong vested interest in what some see as a growth market, namely increasing the number of people held in custody.

Voluntary organisations have a vital role to play in the care of prisoners, whether they are held in public or private institutions, and in their resettlement on release. PRT understands some of the potential benefits of charities being involved in designing, planning and managing a prison. However, collaboration of this sort with the private sector, particularly at the bidding stage, does raise a number of questions.

As partnering with charities undoubtedly improves the image of a private company, and arguably its profitability, should a charity provide this cloak of respectability for an enterprise that is ultimately answerable to its shareholders for the profit it makes? Should charitable funds be used to help generate profit for a partner organisation? Will charitable aims be distorted by the interests of the dominant partner? Being tied in to contractual relationships for many years may produce benefits for each partner, but the risks to the charity's identity, and ultimately to its charitable status, aims and impact, also need very careful consideration.

Jackie Worrall, Nacro



Nacro has a long history of providing services to prisoners and prison staff. We currently work in around 40 prisons, both public and private, providing resettlement help and advice.

When the opportunity arose to bid to run prisons, it made sense for Nacro to be part of a consortium involved.

We are committed to providing high quality services to prisoners and reducing offending, so we believed it would have been in the interests of the whole community for a charity like ours to be involved in shaping a well-planned regime. Nacro has never proposed to start building prisons or managing security. As a partner our role would have been to provide an effective and constructive resettlement regime that would have supported prisoners during sentence and after release.

We do not believe in any way that our involvement in prison bids would compromise our ability to lobby or criticise private providers or government policy. We remain opposed to the Government's strategy of expanding the prison system. We would like to see newly built prisons replacing old or badly-located prisons, rather than extending the prison estate. But we would be failing in our mission if we allowed criticisms to deflect us from providing resettlement help to as many prisoners as we can. The best way for Nacro to ensure that prison regimes and resettlement services are of a good standard is to get into prisons—public and private—and work to improve the regimes by participating in delivering them.

SMART THINKING FOR YOUNG OFFENDERS

As the leader of the SOS Gangs Project for St Giles Trust, Junior Smart works with young offenders who are serving sentences for gang-related crimes. His commitment stems from his own experience behind bars.

'In 2001 I was living a life like a lot of the young people we help now,' he explains. 'I ended up being sent down for 12 years for drug offences, later reduced to ten.'

Sitting in the St Giles Trust's office, in the heart of Camberwell, one of the most deprived areas of London, Junior reflects on his life in the 12 months leading up to his court case. *'In that time I took a good look at myself. And it was like when you take a shirt out of a tumble dryer and you see all the creases. I decided I needed to iron out every fault in myself.'*

He remembers asking his probation officer the night before he got sentenced what support there was for people like him. I was told, *'Where you're going, mate, you'll have the Samaritans and you can call them up and talk to them all night long.'*

'But I didn't want to call the Samaritans,' explains Junior. *'I wanted to join them. I wanted to be part of something.'* Within a few weeks of starting his sentence at High Down Prison in Surrey, he applied for a job with the Samaritans and became a 'listener'.

Back on track

Although Junior took matters into his own hands, he feels that more help is needed to help prisoners get their lives back on track. *'There is a real lack of support for people in prison,'* he explains. *'Lots of people say they deserve it, but let me tell you, nothing prepares you for the reality of prison. The media says prison is a cushy ride, like a hotel with Playstations. But I've never stayed in a hotel where I could touch the toilet bowl from my bed. Or where you're in a tiny room with three men you may never even talk to.'*

After the first step of becoming a listener, Junior completed all the offending behaviour courses he could and took up all the prison education on offer. He also became a classroom assistant. Fast forward to two years before his release and he was starting to look for work he could do in the outside world.

'St Giles Trust kept coming up again and again when I was looking,' he says. *'Lots of organisations say they work with ex-offenders but they're not willing to actually employ them. Yet, of the St Giles staff, over 30% are ex-offenders. We do what we say we're going to do on the tin.'*

Junior's first job was mentoring young offenders in Rochester Prison. He would travel there every day from his semi-open prison. *'I could see it was really working,'* he says. *'I just tried to draw on the things that had been working for me, such as working out who your real friends are, and who is a positive influence in your life.'*

Despite this success, Junior was planning to turn down his request for parole before he landed the job at St Giles. *'It sounds crazy,'* he says. *'But I didn't want to come out and be dependent on others. So I decided to stay inside until I got a job and could be independent.'* However, after a job interview with St Giles, he was offered a job almost immediately. *'I ran down to the probation officer and she had my parole release in her hand, just about to shred it. I got there just in the nick of time.'*

The next day Junior started work. *'My first assignment was actually at the place I'd just come from!'* he jokes. Today, the SOS Gangs Project, which Junior leads, employs five full-time staff and five volunteers, and has helped more than 300

current and ex-offenders caught up in gang culture. To date, only 18% have re-offended. That's an impressive figure. NPC's research into young offenders highlights that, on average, three out of four young people leaving custody re-offend within a year of release.

Support for offenders

The SOS project runs tailored support packages, traditionally for young people aged 18–25, though the charity has recently expanded this scope. Staff start working with offenders before their release and identify what help they will need on the outside. A support worker then continues to work with ex-offenders after their release.

St Giles Trust has recently expanded the SOS project to run SOS Project Plus, where trained ex-offenders go into schools to demystify gang culture. *'Young people often get involved in gangs because they meet needs that are lacking in that person's life, whether that be parental support or financial needs,'* says Junior. *'If you see someone in your area who has all the things you want, then you're going to go hang out with him. Young people sometimes don't even realise that they are in a gang.'*

Both projects have seen great results. Junior tells us about one mum who said that she had been able to go back to studying because she didn't have to worry about her son getting into trouble any more. Junior also points to one of his colleagues who works on the SOS project, another ex-offender, who now mentors children on his local estate.

'The thing that really drives me is seeing change,' says Junior. *'When you help someone into employment and they become a role model, that's a lovely shift in dynamic. Seeing that is the best feeling in the world.'*

Rehabilitation revolution

Junior agrees with the UK Secretary of State for Justice Kenneth Clarke that we need a *'rehabilitation revolution'*.

'On the whole prison estate there is a very small number of people who are so dangerous that they'll never be released again,' he says. *'All the rest of the 86,000 prisoners will come out eventually. So we're kidding ourselves if we think we can just lock them up and forget about it.'*

Prison does work, claims Junior. *'It works in the sense that when that one person is in custody they can't commit crime. But if you don't have a proper rehabilitative process in place, the person will come out and go back to doing what they know.'*

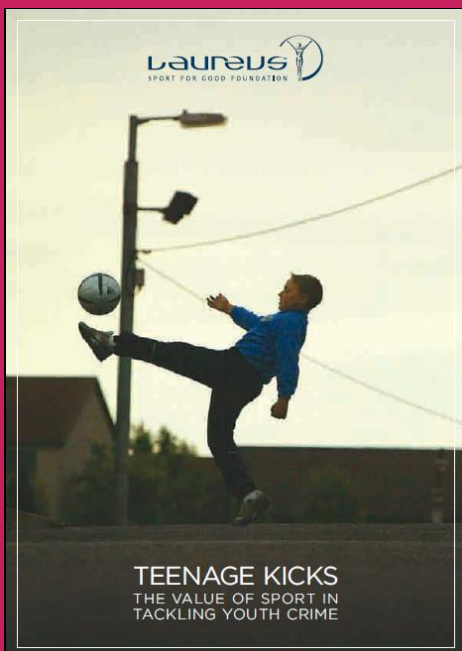
He points to the £47 discharge money that prisoners get on release. *'If I gave you £47 and told you it had to last three weeks what would you do?' he asks. 'I'd struggle. Yet we're expecting people to come out of an environment where everything is done for them to an environment where they have to do it all themselves, and live off £47. Some don't even have families or a place to go to.'*

Junior believes that one reason the SOS project is so successful is the fact it imposes no time limits. *'Probation officers often drop prisoners as soon as their licence has finished. That doesn't happen at St Giles, we're not time bound. We're innovative and flexible.'*

The fact that many of the mentors are ex-offenders also adds credibility to the programme and is instrumental in its success. *'You wouldn't go to a mechanic with tooth problems,'* says Junior. *'You'd go to a dentist, who has seen lots of teeth, and who can fix it. Because we use trained ex-offenders in our work our clients can drop the bravado. If they were talking to someone else they might say, "I'm a hard man. I've been to prison". If they said that to me I'd laugh because I know what prison's like. On our project, clients can be a lot more honest, which I think leads to longer lasting change.'*

Junior remembers hearing two probation officers talking about his appointment at St Giles Trust. *'They said, "Have you heard the new idea? St Giles want to employ an ex-offender, and not just any offender but an ex-gang member and they want him to work with other offenders", and they were laughing! I stood there and I thought to myself, I'm going to show these people we can do it.'*

TEENAGE KICKS

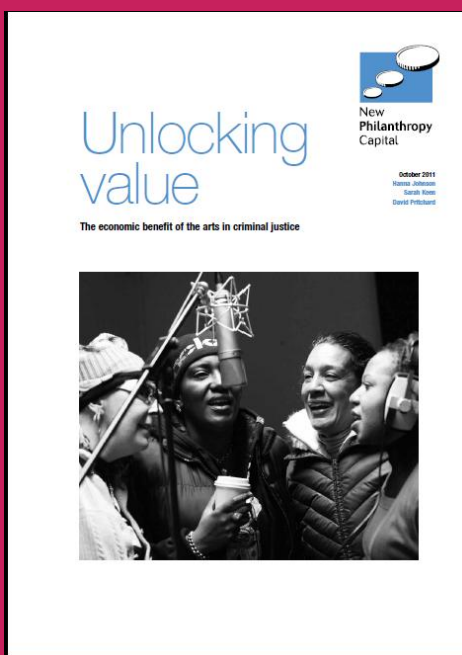


Sport can get young people off the streets, out of trouble, engaged in education, and back on track. Everyone can benefit from playing sport, but it can make a particular difference to young people who are difficult to engage in other ways. For these reasons, sports-based projects can be highly successful in reducing youth crime. Anecdotally, we know about the positive impact sport has on young people. But in order to make a convincing case for investment, we need hard evidence.

In *Teenage kicks*, NPC applies the principles of economic analysis to three projects using sport to tackle youth crime in different ways. The report, commissioned by the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation, explores the case for investment in high quality, well-run sports projects, which can often be the 'hook' needed to engage young people in wider programmes of education and support.

Download the report for free on NPC's website.

UNLOCKING VALUE



The arts have long been used to help rehabilitate offenders or improve the life chances of those at risk of getting involved in crime. There are plenty of stories of people whose lives have been changed by their involvement with arts organisations, yet arts charities traditionally struggle to provide hard evidence of the difference their work makes.

The criminal justice sector in particular is often targets-driven, and arts charities working with prisoners and ex-offenders are under increasing pressure to provide evidence of their impact. This report looks at three charities using art to work with prisoners and ex-offenders: Clean Break, Only Connect and Unitas. It calculates the money these charities' work saves the criminal justice system, putting forward the economic case for investment in arts charities.

Download the report for free on NPC's website.

PAYMENT-BY-RESULTS 'COULD SQUEEZE OUT' VITAL PRISONER REHAB SERVICES

Meeting a prisoner at the gates is not the only way to effectively reduce re-offending, says Vicki Prout, who warns that payment-by-results could lock out vital service providers.

On 20 November 2012, the Justice Secretary Chris Grayling made his first major policy speech since he was appointed back in September. At a Centre for Social Justice event he said that "the current criminal justice system is letting down victims and offenders alike", and outlined his plans for the future, telling us that "saving money does not mean reducing work with offenders—it's about spending money effectively".

Grayling set out five key priorities for the Ministry of Justice: better rehabilitation; more support for children in custody; making prison 'cheaper not smaller'; reforming legal aid so that it commands public confidence; and offering more support for victims. He was also very clear about his plans to open the criminal justice sector up to more providers, using payment-by-results to allow "a whole host of new participants" to provide rehabilitation services.

Controversially, Grayling is pressing ahead with these plans before the evaluation of pilot schemes put in place by his predecessor, Ken Clarke.

I don't think anyone would argue with the fact that the issue of re-offending in this country is one which needs to be addressed. The facts speak for themselves: a prisoner released from a UK prison has a one-in-two chance of being re-convicted within one year; the UK's prison population has doubled over the past 20 years to over 85,000 prisoners; re-offending costs the government between £9.5bn and £13bn each year.

Re-offending does not always mean reconviction

I can also understand why government is attracted to the payment-by-results model: the approach is designed to motivate providers to use effective methods to tackle a problem, in this case cutting re-offending, while shifting the risk away from the public purse. However, a report from Make Justice Work earlier this year on payment-by-results in the criminal justice sector raised the concern that simply using reconviction as a proxy for re-offending misses out on a host of other important facets of rehabilitation.

Then there is the significant financial risk taken on by charities through payment-by-results contracts: charities and funders must learn from the many unhappy examples under the Work Programme.

Even in cautiously embracing the payment-by-results approach, it's naïve to assume that we already know what works when it comes to cutting re-offending. Chris Grayling today spoke about how he doesn't want people to leave prison alone, that he wants them to "meet a mentor at the prison gate". Studies into preventing re-offending and other research show that the personal relationship and support offered by a mentoring scheme is crucial. But this is just one approach: there are a myriad of different projects up and down the country, supporting ex-offenders in a variety of ways. It is important that the shift towards payment-by-results does not mean that potentially effective services are squeezed out simply because they are not on an 'approved list' of approaches contractors are willing to fund.

None of this is easy: as mentioned earlier, re-offending is a coarse measure of rehabilitation, and even if we accept it, organisations can find it challenging to access the data they need to demonstrate their impact in this area. Next month NPC will publish a report recommending how government data can be used to help charities and other providers

assess what re-offending-reduction services work best—which could in turn help commissioners make informed, evidence-based decisions.

Chris Grayling told us this morning that his 'Rehabilitation Revolution' will be all about investing effectively. I hope this includes investing in understanding the effectiveness of the many charities across the UK pioneering new approaches to rehabilitation.

Vicki Prout, 20 November 2012, Civil Society

UNLOCKING OFFENDING DATA



Re-offending is one of the biggest challenges facing Britain today. Charities and social enterprises play a vital role in breaking the cycle of offending—but they need better access to data on offending in order to understand and prove what works.

A prisoner released from a prison in England and Wales has a one in two chance of being reconvicted within a year, which partly accounts for the doubling in the UK prison population over the past twenty years to over 85,000. The overall cost of crime to UK society is estimated at £64bn per year.

Government, charities and social enterprises can help address this challenge by providing offenders with the right support. But to be clear about what works to reduce re-offending—and avoid decisions based on instinct or anecdote—those working in criminal justice need access to evidence about which approaches are successful.

In this report, we outline the results of a survey of 236 criminal justice charities' need for and attitude to data on re-offending.

Around half had attempted to access offending data from government, but only a fifth were successful every time. Four in five found the process of accessing data hard some or all of the time.

Many measure the impact of their work based on soft outcomes (like confidence) but struggle to access the right data to know whether they really reduce re-offending. With government increasingly commissioning services based on outcomes, small charities that can't prove their impact on re-offending rates risk missing out.

This is why, in December 2012, NPC proposed the creation of a Justice Data Lab to provide a national system for accessing offending data. In April 2013, the Ministry of Justice did just that—public service providers can now supply the details of offenders they have worked with to government data analysts, who then assess the re-offending rate of that group.

Download the report for free on NPC's website.

ONE GIANT LEAP FORWARDS

The 2 April 2013 marked the launch of the *Justice Data Lab*—the Ministry of Justice’s flagship open data initiative.

At NPC we welcome the launch with arms wide open, and look forward to the opportunities it will provide for criminal justice charities all over the country. It might mark only a small step for government, but for charities, this is a potentially giant leap forwards.



Historically, obtaining statutory data from government has been an arduous, and sometimes impossible, process. In our Unlocking Offending Data survey, we asked over 230 charities and social

enterprises about their need for and attitude to data on re-offending: Half had tried to access data on re-offending, but only a fifth were successful every time. And of those that managed to access the data, 83% felt this had been a hard process.

As Chris Grayling’s Rehabilitation Revolution steams ahead, charities and social enterprises are being asked to demonstrate the impact of their work as part of the new payment by results contracts. In the justice sector, this means providing hard evidence of how your charity’s services actually reduce re-offending.

But to be clear about what works to reduce re-offending those working in criminal justice need access to evidence about which approaches are successful. The Justice Data Lab provides an opportunity to do exactly this. The MoJ holds detailed information on re-offending, and through the Data Lab, charities can now submit data requests for the re-offending rates of the people they work with. This service will comply with data protection laws—only aggregate data will be supplied, nothing on individuals—and is free for a year. Access to this data will enable charities to really get to grips with the impact their service is having. And it will be even more important as the commissioning of services is shaken up over the next few years.

So, this represents a giant leap for charities, and also a big win for NPC. We have been working with the Oak Foundation to promote the open data agenda, and have been supporting the MoJ in developing the Data Lab. We know the Data Lab won’t solve everything, and that measuring re-offending rates provides only a snapshot of the impact criminal justice charities have. But providing charities with access to statutory data so they can prove their worth is a big deal. And charities are already lining up to submit their requests— an important indication of the appetite for this service.

So, these are exciting times for open data, and should this model prove successful other government departments could open their databases in a similarly controlled manner, heralding a new era of impact reporting for the charity sector. This is food for thought at the moment, but watch this space for more work in this area.

CHECKLIST FOR PROVIDERS

In the midst of *Transforming Rehabilitation* reforms, how will commissioners make their choice? Being able to demonstrate your impact will certainly play a part, but charities often find it hard to anticipate commissioners' evidence needs: our recent survey of criminal justice charities showed that 96% would welcome more information about commissioners' requirements. In response, we've been speaking to commissioners to understand the key messages:

1. There's recognition that statistical evidence of impact on re-offending is very hard to obtain. So while it would be valuable to have—and the [Justice Data Lab](#) is a great opportunity—it is still perfectly possible to be commissioned without it.
2. Few organisations can rehabilitate offenders by themselves and there is no “silver bullet”. A range of providers are expected to contribute to offenders' journeys from crime, which makes an understanding of intermediate outcomes or ‘pathways’ important (we suggest looking at the NOMS Commissioning Intentions document for more information). Above all, commissioners want to work with providers who can articulate the intermediate outcomes they are aiming for, how these will reduce offending and *how* their service will achieve them.
3. Commissioners seem more interested in what the evidence shows than the standard of evidence or methodology used. They're looking for a diverse mixture of sources (quantitative and qualitative), alongside an impartial assessment and reasonable conclusions.

As a result, we've compiled a checklist of some of the specific areas providers should present evidence on:

- Information on client groups targeted and previous experience working with them
- An understanding of the issues impacting on re-offending for this group, and what existing evidence suggests are the best solutions
- What the service aims to achieve and how—we refer to this as a [theory of change](#)
- The uniqueness, values, passion of the organisation
- Assurance about your track record, such as data on levels of engagement with previous projects
- A realistic account of resources, scale and geographical coverage. Ideally, this might include other sources of funding you can bring to the contract. Another message is not to over-promise; to start small and build a relationship with the commissioner over time
- An accurate assessment of costs and value for money (and recognition that services will be delivered within a limited funding regime)
- Understanding of how your contribution will complement other services, and previous experience of working in partnership
- The ability to be flexible and adaptive—for example, strategies for dealing with challenging cases
- Systems for assessing whether projects have been successful and how you use evidence to continuously improve
- The ability to innovate, to have new ideas and to feedback to commissioners when you think they are wrong

Within this list different commissioners do emphasise different areas, but one thing they all agree on is the need to act quickly. Contract negotiations for *Transforming Rehabilitation* will take place during autumn 2013, so providers should be marshalling and communicating their evidence as soon as possible.

James Noble, August 2013

TRANSFORMING THE CHARITY SECTOR

NPC (New Philanthropy Capital) occupies a unique position at the nexus between charities and funders, helping them achieve the greatest impact. We are driven by the values and mission of the charity sector, to which we bring the rigour, clarity and analysis needed to better achieve the outcomes we all seek. We also share the motivations and passion of funders, to which we bring our expertise, experience and track record of success.

Increasing the impact of charities: NPC exists to make charities and social enterprises more successful in achieving their missions. Through rigorous analysis, practical advice and innovative thinking, we make charities' money and energy go further, and help them to achieve the greatest impact.

Increasing the impact of funders: We share the passion funders have for helping charities and changing people's lives. We understand their motivations and their objectives, and we know that giving is more rewarding if it achieves the greatest impact it can.

Strengthening the partnership between charities and funders: Our mission is also to bring the two sides of the funding equation together, improving understanding and enhancing their combined impact.

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