

Settled: Good practice in homelessness prevention among prison leavers



Our Vision

Shelter Cymru's vision is that everyone in Wales should have a decent home.

We believe

- a home is a fundamental right and essential to the health and well-being of people and communities.
- there must be major changes to law, to the culture and delivery of services and the level of resources if homelessness and housing need are to be finally eradicated in Wales.

Our Values

Independence

We work for people in housing need without fear or favour. We will constructively challenge to ensure people are properly assisted and to improve practice and learning.

Respect

We work as equals with the people who use our services. We provide information, advice and support to help people identify the best options to find and keep a home and to help them take control of their own lives.

Settled: Good practice in homelessness
prevention among prison leavers
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Executive Summary

2015 is a landmark year for housing in Wales, with the implementation of Wales' first Housing Act. One of the most controversial elements in the Act is the removal of automatic priority need status for homeless prison leavers, a move which brings Wales more in line with England and Northern Ireland.

This change was widely criticised by many housing organisations and opposition AMs during scrutiny of the Bill, however the Welsh Government has committed to improving access to homelessness prevention services for people leaving prison.

Shelter Cymru's defence of priority need for prison leavers is well known. However, now that the Act has received Royal Assent this report aims to contribute positively to the debate on how best to assist homeless prison leavers in the absence of the priority need safety net.

This research became even more pertinent with the enactment of the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014, which included the creation of Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) to take over the responsibility of the Probation Service for offenders deemed low to medium risk.

These two pieces of legislation will significantly change the way in which homelessness services are delivered to prison leavers. It is hoped this report will help to shape future policy and practice among agencies working with this service user group.

Methodology

This report is based on:

- A review of more than 40 documents, project reviews, policy documents, and studies
- 15 interviews with current and former prisoners who have experienced homelessness
- 17 interviews with project staff to inform a detailed analysis of 11 case studies which display a number of good practice characteristics, either dealing directly with prison leavers or homeless people.

Findings

The report comprises 11 case studies that demonstrate some of the most innovative and effective ways in which services across the UK are working; and an analysis of key issues related to the housing of prison leavers.

Training

Under the Housing (Wales) Act the private rented sector (PRS) will be increasingly used by local authorities to discharge their homelessness duties. As such it is vitally important that people have the skills in place to manage and sustain a private tenancy.

While a lot of resources have been directed toward assisting prisoners to get access to local authority or third sector support and advice, comparatively little effort has gone into training prisoners in housing and debt issues. Training on these issues could assist prisoners in making the PRS a viable solution to their housing needs.

Training may also help to overcome other problems faced by prison leavers, including lack of a continuous good tenancy history or up-to-date references. An accredited training certificate could be used as proof of understanding of housing rights and responsibilities by prison leavers who lack the necessary references, and could be used as a means to prove their ability to maintain a positive tenancy.

Through-the-gate and partnership approaches

During interviews with prison leavers there was a general sense of disillusionment when it came to the support they were offered in prison and confusion regarding the specific roles played by agencies working out of the prison.

This, coupled with a general feeling of mistrust towards local authorities or people working within the prison system, resulted in a number of problems presenting themselves. The key issues included:

- The importance of building a trusting and timely relationship between prisoners and support staff well in advance of release
- A lack of prisoner understanding of the function of each agency, or specifically who would be taking ownership of their support
- The importance of personnel consistency.

This report has identified two ways in which projects have sought to overcome issues surrounding trust and relationship building:

- Projects identify and engage with prisoners at the commencement of their sentence. They then maintain contact with their service users throughout their sentences, so that a more seamless transition into post-release support is able to occur
- A few projects are working with prisoners to offer peer mentoring services within the prison system and to continue peer support this post-release.

The literature review revealed a number of challenges to meeting prison leavers' housing needs, including:

- Meeting the criteria to be owed a main duty by the local authority
- Difficulties in accessing the PRS
- Limited options for housing people with high support needs
- Communication barriers amongst partnership agencies
- Difficulties for prison leavers accessing bank services and welfare benefits.

Building strong links between support agencies, criminal justice agencies and housing providers from the PRS, social and voluntary sectors can increase the chances of overcoming these barriers.

Transparency and sharing of information between these agencies can ensure the right level of support is in place for the prison leaver, correct risk assessments are made and trust is built between partners, greatly increasing the likelihood of successful tenancies in any housing sector.

Housing First

Due to prison leavers' criminal histories, alcohol and substance misuse or mental health issues, they may be automatically excluded from some private rental properties and even housing association and supported accommodation provision.

Prisoners who do get an opportunity to be housed in the social sector are likely to have two routes: either directly via the social housing waiting list, or indirectly through the 'staircase' model of supported accommodation. However, this extensive multi-stage process can prove problematic for some prison leavers.

The Housing First model could offer a viable third option as an alternative to the traditional 'staircase' model or the direct waiting list route. The Housing First model advocates placing homeless people directly into independent, permanent tenancies, believing that the best place to prepare for independent living is in independent accommodation.

There is evidence to suggest that Housing First is a highly cost-effective approach, especially when cost savings are compared to traditional supported accommodation, homeless shelters, or possible prison and hospital stays.

Floating support

The research found evidence of the importance of floating support to meet prison leavers' housing needs. Floating support can help prison leavers to overcome challenges that they might face living in the PRS, such as accessing grants to pay for bonds and rent up-front, acting as an intermediary if relationship breaks down, sourcing furniture and white goods, setting up bill payments and organising the payment of benefits.

There is also considerable evidence of the cost-effectiveness of floating support in terms of reducing rent arrears, preventing eviction and the resulting costs, reduction of hospital admissions and reduction of reoffending.

Recommendations

Training

- There is great potential for prisons to provide housing and pre-tenancy training for all prisoners facing homelessness. This is a powerful tool to give greater confidence to private landlords to take on prison leaver tenants who may lack references or a flawless tenancy history. We have identified a number of models that could be adapted to serve this purpose. We recommend that pre-tenancy training is provided to all Welsh prisoners who may benefit from it.

Through-the-gate/partnership

- Effective partnership working is crucial for working with homeless prison leavers. Organisations should investigate practices to improve partnership work and referral processes. These could be in the form of co-locating, regular face-to-face communication, official protocols setting out responsibilities, or shared IT systems.

- It is equally important to adopt partnership approaches with prison leavers themselves, ensuring they are fully involved in devising their own housing solutions. Prison leavers should be allowed to have more input into their support plans. Prior to release, all relevant agencies should sit down with the prisoner and discuss the support plan. This will create a more person-centred approach where the prisoner can take some ownership of their issues, be involved in decision making that affects them and become familiar with who, and not what agency, will be assisting them.
- All homeless prison leavers should have a housing plan in place before release. This will relieve pressure on Housing Options and support agencies as well as prisoners themselves.
- All prison leavers should leave prison with up-to-date ID. Either the prison or a designated support agency should assist with this so that no prisoner is released lacking basic identification.
- If prisoners have access to a bank account upon release the likelihood of delays in applying for benefits can be reduced. There are fledgling examples of partnerships between prisons and credit unions currently in the UK which allow prisoners to use the prison address when opening up accounts. This also encourages saving while incarcerated and can aid in the transition to life outside the prison system.

Peer mentoring

- Peer mentors should be utilised both within the prison system and outside in the community. During this research a number of prison leavers spoke of their distrust of agencies working out of prisons due to their perceived lack of independence. Being mentored by someone who has real world experiences and understands prison leavers' issues can start to break down these barriers and encourage better communication. As well as encouraging service users to open up, peer mentoring projects provided training and employment opportunities.
- There is also potential for peer mentors or other former prisoners to open up dialogue with private landlords at a local level, for example by addressing landlord forums, in order to break down some of the barriers that exist.

Housing

- More funding needs to be put into establishing Housing First projects in Wales. There is considerable evidence that Housing First may be a more cost-effective solution than traditional housing and support models. Housing First is particularly well suited to the social sector, although it can also work in the PRS.
- If prison leavers are to be encouraged into the PRS they need extra help to 'make a house a home'. Many will not have the basics such as white goods and soft furnishings. Local authorities or support workers need to establish working links with charities that can help provide these goods. Good practice would be to have as much of this set up prior to the person being released.

Floating Support

- Generally, housing and support are not mutually exclusive and there needs to be a greater partnership between the two for a better chance of preventing recidivism. Support for prison leavers should continue the moment that they are released and as such gate pick-ups should be the default.
- All prisoners housed in the PRS should have access to tenancy support services. Delays in receiving benefits and the desperation of being without money were cited by a number of interview participants as incentives to reoffend. Support agencies can help ensure that benefits are being received, rent is being paid and the service user starts the tenancy on a sound financial footing.

Introduction

'Having a settled place to live was the biggest thing for me. You could go into a room and see what you could do with it. 'You're building your castle' If you have a stressed out day, you can go and relax.'

Prison leaver

2015 is a landmark year for housing in Wales, with the implementation of Wales' first Housing Act. One of the most controversial elements in the Act is the removal of automatic priority need status for homeless prison leavers, a move which brings Wales more in line with England and Northern Ireland.

This change was widely criticised by many housing organisations and opposition AMs during scrutiny of the Bill, however the Welsh Government has committed to improving access to homelessness prevention services for people leaving prison.

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This research became more pertinent with the enactment of the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014. The provisions in the Act include the creation of Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs), which take over the responsibility of the Probation Service for offenders deemed low to medium risk.

These two pieces of legislation will significantly change the way in which homelessness services are delivered to prison leavers. With more emphasis being placed on the both the private and third sectors to support prison leavers it is hoped this report will help shape future policy and practice among agencies working with this service user group.

Housing and recidivism

It is widely accepted that a lack of appropriate housing is closely linked to recidivism. Almost half of adults released from prison (45 per cent) are reconvicted within one year of release; the rate is 58 per cent for those serving sentences of less than 12 months.¹ This proportion rises to 79 per cent if prison leavers are homeless upon entering prison.²

The Surveying Prisoners Crime Reduction study 2010 (SPCR) found that 15 per cent of prisoners reported being homeless before entering prison – including staying in temporary accommodation or sleeping rough.³ SPCR also found that in England and Wales prisoners

¹ Prison Reform Trust, Bromley Briefings, 2014

² *ibid*

³ Results from Wave 1 of SPCR can be found in the Ministry of Justice 'Compendium of re-offending statistics and analysis' November 2010

serving sentences of less than 12 months were twice as likely as those serving longer sentences to have been homeless prior to custody (17 per cent compared to eight per cent).

The Social Exclusion Unit 2002⁴ estimated that being in stable accommodation reduced the risk of reoffending by one-fifth. Prisoners themselves have also highlighted it as an important factor with 60 per cent believing that having stable accommodation is an important factor in preventing them from reoffending in the future.⁵ A quarter of those surveyed in a recent study admitted to committing a crime in order to have better access to accommodation.⁶

Priority need for prison leavers in Wales

In 2002 the Welsh Assembly Government stood apart from England and Northern Ireland by introducing the Homeless Persons (Priority need) (Wales) Order which gave priority need status to homeless prison leavers.

Although the Order has never been formally evaluated by the Welsh Government there have been a number of small-scale research projects including *This time round: exploring the effectiveness of current interventions in the housing of homeless prisoners released to Wales*,⁷ carried out by Shelter Cymru in 2008.

This study identified numerous examples of good practice and pinpointed a range of success factors including: early intervention within sentences; quality and availability of support services during and after custody; quality, availability and location of temporary and long-term accommodation; proximity of family and friends; and ability to access employment opportunities.

Shelter Cymru also carried out research in 2012⁸ which found that some local authorities were achieving move-on rates from temporary accommodation for prison leavers that were comparable with move-on rates for general homeless households. In three authorities, prison leavers were no more likely to drop out from temporary accommodation than any other household.

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014

The Housing (Wales) Bill was introduced into the National Assembly for Wales on 18 November 2013, setting out an ambitious programme of reform in key areas including: regulation of the private rented sector (PRS); reform of homelessness legislation; better provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites; reform of housing finance and social housing rents; charging more than 100 per cent Council Tax on empty and second homes; and enabling fully mutual housing co-operatives to issue Assured Shorthold Tenancies.

The Bill proposed to remove automatic priority need status for prison leavers and create a new priority need group for prisoners who are vulnerable as a result of being in custody.

⁴ Social Exclusion Unit 'Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners' 2002

⁵ Results from Wave 1 of SPCR can be found in the Ministry of Justice 'Compendium of re-offending statistics and analysis' November 2010

⁶ P Mackie with I Thomas 'Nations apart? Experiences of single homeless people across Great Britain' 2014

⁷ P Mackie 'This time round: exploring the effectiveness of current interventions in the housing of homeless prisoners released to Wales' 2008

⁸ J Bibbings 'Policy briefing: Homeless ex-offenders in Wales, 2010/11' 2012

The rationale for this proposal was that ‘...some key stakeholder organisations questioned the value of the current duty to house former prisoners balanced against the burden it places on local authorities and others in housing need.’⁹

Other agencies, including Gofal, Cymorth Cymru and Shelter Cymru, argued that removing the priority need safety net without first establishing a strong prevention service would lead to ‘many vulnerable former prisoners being denied access to accommodation.’¹⁰

In response the Welsh Government insisted that other changes in the Housing Bill will help the most vulnerable former prisoners to find accommodation:

‘Several respondents expressed concerns about some aspects of the proposal, particularly the potential impact on the successful resettlement of vulnerable prisoners and the impact on reoffending. The broader provisions on homelessness will provide much-improved help for prisoners before release to find them suitable accommodation.’

‘I would like to emphasise that the needs of vulnerable former prisoners will continue to be met through the legislation, within the context of a more proactive approach to prevention.’

–Carl Sargeant AM, (former) Housing Minister

The Bill received Royal Assent on 17 September 2014 and formally became the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

Necessary but not sufficient

Despite these differences of opinion on the removal of priority need for prison leavers, there was consensus among all stakeholders that housing in itself is not sufficient to prevent recidivism.

A range of studies emphasise the importance of effective multi-agency partnership work in meeting prison leavers’ support needs, highlighting the role of holistic support in assisting prison leavers in maintaining their tenancy through the most vulnerable stages of post release and giving them the best opportunity of not reoffending.^{11 12 13}

The consensus view is that mistakes may have been made in the past by assuming that providing settled housing will by itself solve all the problems of a person leaving prison. While settled housing should not be deemed sufficient on its own to prevent reoffending, without it other measures may have limited success.¹⁴

⁹ Housing (Wales) Bill Explanatory Memorandum par 4.21

¹⁰ Gofal ‘Response to the Consultation on the proposal to amend the duty of a local authority to accommodate a former prisoner as a result of their priority need status’ 2013

¹¹ ODPM and Home Office ‘Guide to Housing and Housing related support options for offenders and people at risk of offending’ 2001

¹² Homeless Link ‘Better Together: Preventing Reoffending and Homelessness’ 2011

¹³ LGA ‘Going straight :reducing reoffending in local communities’ 2005

¹⁴ Shelter Cymru ‘Homeless prison leavers and priority need: Response to the consultation on the proposal to amend the duty of a local authority to accommodate a former prisoner as a result of .their priority need status’ 2013

In 2008 the Welsh Government funded research into the housing needs of prison leavers. *Necessary but not sufficient: housing and the reduction of re-offending* concluded that there is a clear link between accommodation and offending but that the accommodation has to be appropriate and stable to reduce recidivism and enhance community safety.

The report authors argued that there was an over-reliance on homelessness legislation as the route for re-housing people leaving prison:

*'Many people leaving prison come out to a waiting list, not to a service. In accommodation terms, this may mean staying in insecure housing such as with family/friends or in bed and breakfast which can increase the risk of re-offending and therefore reduce community safety. In addition, prisoners are disempowered in the process, having very little direct contact with housing advice services or housing providers and little knowledge of the options available.'*¹⁵

It is important to state that housing is not seen as panacea in preventing reoffending, but provides a solid ground on which prison leavers have the best opportunity to gain employment, access training and integrate into the community.

Increased focus on prevention

Necessary but not sufficient also found that an over-reliance on homelessness services post-release meant too little focus on carrying out early prevention work. For homeless prisoners the only option was often to present to the local authority on the first day post-release.

This presented considerable difficulties to some service users who may find it very difficult to cope with the bureaucracy and long waiting times, and was also resource-intensive for support staff that needed to attend alongside their service users.

This was confirmed by our interviews with prison leavers and support workers:

'I wasn't helped at all really when I left prison as I had completed my sentence. I went to the local authority but was left waiting there for help for about seven hours. It felt so isolated. Others would have just walked away and got high and who knows what would happen to them'

Prison leaver

'On a typical release day a case worker can spend from 9am-6pm sitting waiting in Housing Options with the client. It is such a long process. We will try to keep the client engaged by doing goal planning or taking them for a coffee, but those first few days after release are crucial and they are in such a vulnerable place.'

Project worker

The main premise of Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act is that homelessness is easier to deal with via early intervention. The new duties under the Act require local authorities to intervene when households are within 56 days of homelessness, to try to prevent problems escalating. This means that authorities are required to engage with prisoners while in prison

¹⁵ C Humphreys and T Stirling *'Necessary but not sufficient: housing and the reduction of re-offending'* 2008

so that, as far as possible, on the day of release accommodation is available and a housing plan is in place.

Ministry of Justice reforms

At the same time as the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 comes into force, reforms are underway within the Probation Service with the aim of increasing access to resettlement services for prison leavers.

In May 2013 the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) outlined its vision for the future of the Probation Service in its paper '*Transforming Rehabilitation: A Strategy for Reform*'.¹⁶

Transforming Rehabilitation is the Westminster Government's strategy for changing the way in which the Probation Service manages prison leavers. These reforms involve replacing the previous 35 individual Probation Trusts with a single National Probation Service, which will be responsible for managing high risk prison leavers, and 21 CRCs, which will be responsible for the management and supervision of low to medium risk prison leavers (those sentenced to less than 12 months in prison) after release.

The preferred bidder for the Wales Community Rehabilitation Company is Working Links in strategic partnership with Innovation Wessex, a probation staff mutual.

The reforms also include a commitment to establish new 'resettlement prisons' in each contract area where prisoners will be relocated three months prior to release, or if on short sentences will serve their entire sentence. The hope is that providers will work with prison leavers while they are still in custody and continue to engage with them after they leave.

Transforming Rehabilitation coincides with the enactment of the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014, which includes a number of key provisions, among which is the extension of statutory monitoring and supervision of prisoners serving short sentences for a mandatory period of up to 12 months.

The new legislation means that all those released from short custodial sentences will now first be subject to a standard licence period for the remainder of their custodial sentence served in the community; and then be subject to an additional supervision period for the purpose of rehabilitation. The licence period and supervision period together will last for 12 months.

Under the new system, each prisoner is assigned a key worker to co-ordinate their resettlement planning during the last 12 weeks of their sentence. In Wales this includes an assessment of housing needs in accordance with the Housing (Wales) Act as well as other statutory needs assessments under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and the Mental Health (Wales) Measure 2010.

Local authorities are working in partnership with the CRC and other agencies to carry out prevention work. Welsh Government is co-ordinating partnership work via the All Wales Reducing Reoffending Strategy and related delivery plan.

¹⁶ Ministry of Justice '*Transforming Rehabilitation: A Strategy for Reform*' 2013

The Welsh Government is planning to fund an evaluation of the impacts of the Act on prison leavers, which will assess the extent to which prisoners have equal access to prevention services and how effective this approach is in practice.

In summary, much activity is underway in Wales to improve early access to homelessness prevention services for people in prison. There are considerable opportunities to learn from past mistakes as well as building on existing good practice.

The next part of this report discusses the findings of our good practice review.

Good practice: the case studies

'Entitlement to housing is very important to me. If it wasn't there, I'd have become very ill. I'd be out on the street. The cold stops you from sleeping, so taking drugs makes it easier. That life would kill me. I couldn't live that life again. I couldn't cope.'

Prison leaver

More than 40 documents, project reviews, policy documents and studies were identified and analysed to establish what constituted good practice in a number of key areas. Discussions with key workers and prison leavers narrowed these key areas to the following categories:

- Training
- Through-the-gate and partnership approaches
- Housing First
- Floating support

Using these as markers 11 projects were identified which displayed the established characteristics of good practice.

Training

'You bring people into the prison and you don't do anything to teach them... like life skills, budgeting, housing things, you know. You need to get them back into a routine of cooking and that, you know. I noticed it with other people; they couldn't cope on the outside.'

Prison leaver

Prison leavers spoke of being accommodated in the social sector as their main housing goal; however with the introduction of the new Housing Act and local authorities' new power to discharge homelessness duties into the PRS, this is increasingly unrealistic.

Many prison leavers lack a clear picture of the range of housing options that will be available to them, including negative perceptions of the PRS that prevent them from seeing this as an option.¹⁷ Housing and tenancy training within prison can help overcome some of these negative perceptions.

¹⁷ J Luby and J Gallagher 'Finding and sustaining a home in the Private Rented Sector – The essentials. A guide for frontline staff working with homeless offenders' 2012

It is also important to have the skills in place to manage and sustain a tenancy when moving into the PRS. Private landlords often work within tight financial margins and may be quick to start possession procedures if rent arrears start building up, if there are neighbour nuisance problems, property damage, anti-social behaviour or other breaches of the tenancy terms.¹⁸

While a lot of resources have been directed toward assisting prisoners in getting access to local authority or third sector support and advice, comparatively little work has gone into training prisoners in housing and financial capability.

The main focus in the past has been to find a housing solution so that the prisoner is not released as 'no fixed abode' rather than trying to resolve underlying factors leading to homelessness. Educating prisoners on housing and tenancy issues could help them sustain their tenancies in the future and thus help reduce recidivism.

Pre-tenancy training is a useful tool in assisting local authorities in discharging their duty into the PRS by influencing landlords to take on prison leavers as well as other potentially vulnerable tenants.

There have been examples of programmes that focus solely on housing and tenancy training for prisoners; however many of these have not progressed passed the pilot stage. A recent joint partnership between Tamworth Borough Council, NOMS and NACRO is one such example. '*Released...Rehoused*' was a programme of 18 one-day training sessions delivered in West Midlands prisons, to give information about housing to prisoners who will be homeless on release.¹⁹

This course was designed not only to solve prisoners' housing issues, but also to look at housing myths, the type of housing prisoners can expect on release, what skills they will need to maintain their tenancy and how they can take responsibility for improving their housing situation post-release.

The issues that this training aimed to address will become more relevant in Wales once prisoners are made aware that priority need will no longer be the route into social housing it once was and that other options will most likely be offered.

Stakeholders pointed out that this course was more suited as a gateway into further training as one day was not comprehensive enough to tackle a lot of the issues in a thorough fashion.

'Some tenancy training would have been really useful...I was only offered training but in the hostel, not the prison, that would have been more useful...I found it useful as it was good learning about stuff that could have helped me move straight into a home rather than just in here.'

Prison leaver

Although examples of such specific housing and tenancy training in the prisons are rare, there are other successful training programmes, based both within prisons and outside. The

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ H Morgan '*Evaluation of the ReleasedRe-housed*' 2013

following case study projects display good practice in developing or adopting successful training programmes within the prison system, or in assisting vulnerable people to improve their chances of making the PRS a viable housing option.

Case Study 1: Streets Ahead

Beginnings

The 'Streets Ahead' Cardiff and Vale Project emerged from the success of sister projects in Bridgend and Swansea and works to improve life skills and employability for homeless and vulnerable adults who want to improve their skills, gain qualifications and grow in confidence for work, life, volunteering and further study or training.

Through their engagement with vulnerable adults, many of whom had gone through the prison system, they recognised a gap in training which could have been conducted before release from prison. It is from here in HMP Cardiff that they run a course in productive 'life skills' themed workshops.

Training is not carried out solely in prison with opportunities for engagement with the project through referrals through the Wallich's own supported accommodation or other supported accommodation. Within prison service users are either referred by professionals or are able to self-refer onto the course through the resettlement units at HMP Cardiff.

Aims and Objectives

To offer advice and guidance on developing vital skills needed for building a future outside of the prison walls by learning coping mechanisms to deal with stressful situations. They support prisoners to:

- build their confidence
- learn to budget
- sustain positive personal and professional relationships outside of prison
- find meaningful employment.

Achieving the aims and objectives

Courses and workshops are tailored to clients' needs with the aim of reducing isolation and encouraging vulnerable adults to participate in meaningful activity; however, the focus is usually based on improving employability or social skills. These include the *Positive Relationships* course and *Employability and Entrepreneurship* learning sessions within the prison.

Outside the prison they work in partnership with many organisations such as Tŷ Gobaith, Tŷ Tresillian, Huggard, Remploy, Penarth Job Centre, Cardiff Job Centre, and the YMCA.

The project works in partnership with Clarks Legal to deliver *I'm a Jobseeker, get me out of here*, a short course on employability to homeless prisoners. The topics cover confidence building, dressing for work and interview skills. Service users have an opportunity to do a mock interview at the course conclusion to bring together all they have learned.

Prisoners are then able to engage with the Streets Ahead project upon release to continue their training and support.

Table 1: Project summary: Streets Ahead

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Project Impact | <p>The project has met all its performance indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 70 vulnerable people will engage with social activities each year (210 in total) • 30 workbooks relating to life skills will be completed each year (90 in total) • 30 workbooks will be completed each year relating to improving social skills (90 in total) • 30 workbooks related to citizenship will be completed each year (90 in total) • 90 people will report feeling less isolated. Additionally two Streets Ahead volunteers have gone onto gain full-time employment within the Wallich. |
| Main Challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project is funded to support vulnerable adults in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan area. This means any prisoner who engages within the prison but is released to another area of Wales can no longer engage with Streets Ahead upon release • The above is also an issue for referring people within their own organisation. For example the PREP²⁰ project in Bridgend cannot refer their service users to the project even though both projects are run by the Wallich • Because the project is Big Lottery funded, without any further investment there is only a finite time it can exist. This means hard-fought relationships, especially within HMP Cardiff will be lost • It is very hard to track the longitudinal success of the project outside of prison due to disengagement once released. |

Case Study 2: Renting Ready

Beginnings

Crisis has promoted the use of pre-tenancy training for many years as an essential part of helping homeless people access the PRS. Working with hundreds of projects across the country they identified that although much pre-tenancy work was delivered often it was geared towards a specific service user group, focussed only on a few key subjects and often delivered informally.

As a leading advocate of using the PRS to alleviate homelessness, Crisis wanted to develop a comprehensive accredited training programme that could be delivered to a range of

²⁰ The PREP project case study can be found later in this report.

service user groups, which filled gaps identified in existing provision and could be used to promote best practice across the country.

Aims and Objectives

- To deliver a comprehensive pre-tenancy training course for homeless people moving in to PRS from all Crisis Skylight areas²¹
- To roll out the course to other external organisations to deliver pre-tenancy training
- Increase access to PRS for people who are homeless and on low incomes as pressures on housing markets make young professionals more attractive to landlords
- To ensure people have the skills to live independently
- To equip tenants moving from homelessness into PRS with the skills to sustain their tenancies
- To allow PRS landlords to see that the person has undertaken the course and understands their rights and responsibilities as a tenant
- To manage expectations and myth-busting by demonstrating that people who are homeless or on low incomes can be 'good tenants'; and by managing service user expectations – many have a negative idea of the PRS.

Achieving the aims and objectives

The London-based training course is currently run over four and a half days; however this has been adapted in other areas to meet the needs of the local PRS market. The accredited course is delivered in all Crisis Skylight areas across England and Scotland to anyone wishing to move on into the PRS. The training is not specific to prison leavers; however the skills that are learned would be of benefit to anyone leaving prison without the necessary life and social skills to succeed in the PRS.

Course topic structure

- Housing options – Housing Benefit, tenure, responsibilities, how to end tenancies
- Getting ready to move – what are landlords looking for in a tenant, what questions to ask, what standards to look for, where to get help with costs i.e. deposits/bonds
- Money matters – budgeting, how to read bills, different financial products i.e. loans or bank account
- How to make your money go further – saving money on bills, eating on a budget, getting the best deals
- Make a house a home – furniture, cleaning, DIY skills, how to get involved in the community
- Flatmates – how to find them, what to ask, what kind of person are you, kind of sharer, how to prevent problems.

²¹ Crisis Skylight centres are accredited education, training and employment centres, which offer practical and creative workshops together with formal learning opportunities that lead to qualifications and employment.

Table 2: Project summary: Renting Ready

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|------------------------|---|
| <p>Project Impact</p> | <p>As of summer 2014 there have been 22 courses run with 204 people attending. The project doesn't currently have national statistics of its effectiveness, however in the London area:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four rounds of training have taken place since March 2014 • 31 individual service users have attended the training • 13 of those service users have since been housed in the PRS • nine of the 13 service users housed have reached and surpassed their six-month sustainment point in tenancy • Two of the 13 service users housed are at the four-month point and on track to sustain beyond six months • Two of the 13 service users housed are new in their tenancies • Six of the 13 service users housed have successfully gone on to secure employment following being supported into their tenancies. <p>The course has been spoken of positively by the Residential Landlords Association (RLA):</p> <p><i>'Renting is a serious business - so make sure the property and the landlord are safe, legal and secure. Get advice and ask any questions before you sign. RLA landlords support Renting Ready as a sure way to avoid future misunderstandings.'</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Alan Ward, RLA Chairman</p> |
| <p>Main Challenges</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative perceptions of prison leavers, homeless people and vulnerable people in general means that a lot of PRS accommodation that could be available to this demographic is not • Promoting the course as a gateway to successful tenancies in the PRS requires a culture shift in the PRS • There is still a need for tenancy support attached to any PRS tenancy due to the potentially chaotic background of the tenant. This is not always the case, however, it goes some way to reassure landlords and may sway their decisions on offering the tenancy to the service user • Accessing prisons is a challenge for course providers due to security issues. This can be problematic with months wasted waiting for permission to enter a prison before starting a course • Prison leavers still believe they will be housed by the council or they exhibit an 'it will be fine' mentality, making engagement in the training difficult • Lack of references and a requirement for 'cash up front' can hamper anyone getting into the PRS. This is specifically relevant for homeless people and prison leavers who may not have a positive tenure history. |

Through-the-gate and partnership approaches

'In some prisons there were loads of agencies, you are always offered the different agencies; some for housing needs, some for health needs, some for drug issues if you've got them. Always the support options were there. You tell them your issues, ticking their forms, sign this... but nothing happens. I don't know who I spoke to or what they did. I reckon they were just ticking boxes for funding. They never came back to me to help me or if they did it didn't exactly leave a lasting impression.'

Prison leaver

During interviews with prison leavers there was a general sense of disillusionment when it came to the support they were offered in prison. Prison leavers either spoke of a history of too many agencies vying to offer assistance, or alternatively not enough, usually with the same negative outcomes. This coupled with a general feeling of mistrust towards local authorities, or people working within the prison system, resulted in a number of problems presenting themselves. From the interviews with service users and staff, the following themes were identified.

- First, gaining the trust of prisoner so that they will be forthcoming in the information they offer can be a challenge. This can go a long way in creating more positive outcomes, however, fear of disclosing past problems means important information may be omitted. Opening up to strangers about personal issues is especially difficult in an environment of heightened vulnerability. Projects spoke of a lot of time taken up going back and forth to prison to establish basic information;
- Second, engaging with prisoners at the end of the sentence doesn't leave a lot of time to build a positive relationship, often meaning there is little time to get all the support in place before release;
- Third, prisoners may struggle to understand the function of each agency, or specifically who would be taking ownership of their support, which leads to a further sense of apathy and disillusionment. Likewise can be said when numerous agencies offer various assistance to a prison leaver resulting in problems coordinating support;
- Finally, personnel consistency was important to prison leavers meaning a change in personnel could have an adverse effect on them and result in an erosion of trust

These factors can result in prisoner being released without adequate support in place or having to 'go it alone' at a time when they are most vulnerable.

This report has identified two ways in which projects have sought to overcome issues surrounding trust and relationship building.

First, projects identify and engage with prisoners at the commencement of their sentence. This can help with prevention work as the quicker housing assistance is undertaken, the greater the likelihood of a positive outcome. Projects then maintain contact with their service users throughout their sentences, so that when they are released a relationship has been established and more seamless transition into post-release support is able to occur.

Second, a few projects are working with prisoners to offer peer mentoring services within the prison system and to continue this post-release. Trusted prisoners who have been trained in advice, or prison leavers who have been through the same issues as current prisoners, are best placed to break down barriers between service users and support workers because they have unique real world experience. This offers a new perspective to service users as they have a shared understanding and can set an example for others. Because of this shared experience, current or recently released prisoners may find it easier to disclose sensitive information, enabling the right level of support to be provided.

'To know that the person I'm talking to has also been in the same ship I've been in....you can talk to them. They're able to respond in the way that you would like to have them respond. Totally. It's a good thing. They understand you.'

Prison leaver

The literature review presented a number of challenges in meeting prison leavers' housing needs, including:

- A shortage of social housing
- Prison leavers meeting the criteria to be owed a main duty by the local authority
- Difficulties in accessing the PRS due historic tenancy problems
- Limited options in some local authority areas for housing people with high support needs.

Building strong links between support agencies, criminal justice agencies and housing providers from the PRS, social and voluntary sectors can increase the chances of overcoming these barriers. Transparency and sharing of information between these agencies can ensure the right level of support is in place for the prison leaver, correct risk assessments are made and trust is built between partners, greatly increasing the likelihood of successful tenancies in any housing sector.

There are numerous examples of effective partnership work around the UK. These partnerships are most important when agencies offer different specialities but are most effective when combined to offer consistent support that addresses all the needs of their service users.

The case studies below display characteristics that seek to overcome the aforementioned issues.

Case Study 3: Provision Prisoner Resettlement Project

Beginnings

According to Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) County Borough Council's own figures, the number of prisoners homeless upon release from custody has been consistently high, forming around 52 per cent of all homeless households placed in temporary accommodation in RCT in 2011-2012.²²

In October 2013, following a restructure of the Housing Options service a specialist role was created within the Housing Solutions Team to work specifically with prisoners and prison

²² This measure comes from RCT's own analysis of the breakdown of placements by priority need status of temporary accommodation between 2011-2012, undertaken by the Temporary Accommodation Officer.

leavers. The purpose of this role is to improve housing outcomes for homeless prisoners by offering more effective homeless prevention work prior to release.

The Offender Specialist Officer post is core funded through the local authority on a pilot basis for two years.

Aims and Objectives

- To prevent homelessness wherever possible for prisoners prior to release by identifying suitable housing options
- To reduce the number of homeless prisoners accessing temporary accommodation by securing other forms of interim accommodation where permanent accommodation cannot be identified immediately
- To reduce the length of time prison leavers spend in temporary accommodation
- To assist prisoners who already have accommodation upon entry into prison to sustain their accommodation
- To reduce the number of homeless prison leavers presenting to the Housing Advice Centre by identifying alternative housing options prior to their release
- To effectively promote the homeless prevention agenda within prisons and with other partners who regularly work with prisoners.

Achieving the aims and objectives

The Offender Specialist Officer identified a number of challenges early on in the role:

- Prisoners were being engaged during the resettlement period at the end of a sentence which was too late to do adequate prevention work
- Different prisons offered varying levels of housing-related support to prisoners, ranging from very intensive to non-existent
- Many prisoners tended to miss appointments early on in the project because the appointment times for resettlement were always scheduled in their 'free' time after they had been locked in their cells for long periods
- Incorrect identification of housing need at induction – occasionally this led to short-term prisoners losing accommodation that could have been saved
- False information being declared by the prisoner
- Late or non-existent referrals to the local authority by the releasing prison.

To overcome a number of these issues they decided to embed the induction process at the beginning of sentences.

HMP Cardiff hosts the St Giles Through the Gate project²³ where current prisoners conduct prisoner assessments at point of entry, make support referrals and offer limited advice on housing related matters. It is at this point that the Offender Specialist Officer gets referrals

²³ Case study 7.

for any prisoner who has come from, or is likely to return to Rhondda Cynon Taf. In order to improve the early identification of housing problems the Offender Specialist Officer made changes to the induction questionnaire.

In other prisons, as well as in Cardiff, the Offender Specialist Officer goes onto the wings to make introductions, connect with prisoners that may not have engaged with them on induction and generally be as proactive as possible in building relationships and trust with the prisoners.

At this point they address prisoners' immediate housing issues, including managing tenancy closures or planning to clear arrears; benefits are either cancelled or the relevant department made aware of incarceration. The Offender Specialist Officer acts as a coordinator for support and works closely with local agencies to fill any gaps in support.

Due to social housing shortages in the area a great deal of project activity involves working closely with landlords in the PRS and matching prison leavers with these properties. A dedicated PRS worker is employed in the same office as the Offender Specialist Officer and they both work closely to identify suitable accommodation.

The project finds that due to variations in local market conditions they have greater success with landlords in some parts of the authority area than others. Where average rents are lower, landlords are more willing to let to prison leavers and the project has greater success negotiating rent reductions to local LHA levels.

One way the Housing Solutions Officer incentivises landlords is by arranging payment of Housing Benefit to go directly to the landlord. They also encourage landlords to inform them if tenants have not been paying their rent, or are at risk of losing the tenancy in other ways, in order to intervene with early prevention work and prevent a possible repeat presentation as well as potential recall to prison.

The Offender Specialist Officer organise pick-ups at the prison gate to take prison leavers to their new accommodation. They will maintain contact with the service user for six weeks to make sure that they have settled in the tenancy, the rent is being paid and to see if any other support is required.

Table 3: Project summary: Provision Prisoner Resettlement Project

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| Project Impact | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Between October 2013 and December 2014 the project has had 273 clients, the majority coming from either HMP Cardiff, HMP Parc and HMP Eastwood• Out of the 273 referrals received, 112 placements in B&B accommodation were directly avoided as a result of project intervention• The above intervention resulted in over £164,640 in direct cost savings for the local authority to their temporary accommodation budget• Close working links established with external agencies including the Probation Service and various partner support agencies• The project has successfully negotiated with some prison leavers' families |
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| | <p>to take in the service user until supported accommodation has been found</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In a number of instances service users have been able to gain positive tenancy references by their current landlords when they are looking to move into another property • Although Rhondda Cynon Taf Housing Options find very few homeless applicants intentionally homeless, where they have done so households have been assisted into the PRS through assistance by the Offender Specialist Officer. |
| Main Challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rent levels are vastly different in different parts of the local authority meaning the most desirable areas are often the least affordable, and the most affordable are relatively isolated and are often in impoverished areas. For most people under 35 options are limited to areas that are further away from central amenities and lacking access to regular public transport. These factors are well evidenced as reasons for recidivism • There is no flexibility in either the 13 week Housing Benefit rule or the 52 week remand rule which limits the amount of assistance the project can offer to prisoners in keeping their tenancy open • Very limited access to one bedroom properties in RCT. Priority is more likely to be given to people wishing to downsize. |

Case Study 4: Supporting Prisoners Advice Network (SPAN)

Beginnings

Prior to SPAN's inception, Shelter Scotland ran a prisoner advice project in a number of Scottish prisons. From this they recognised a gap in 'through-the-gate support' that led to them seeing the same prisoners time and time again. When the prisoner advice project ended SPAN was created to offer through-the-gate support in partnership with SACRO²⁴ and the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB). Shelter Scotland acted as project coordinator and offered housing advice within the prison while SACRO and the CAB offered tenancy support to prison leavers in the community.

Shelter Scotland's SPAN project is currently funded by the Big Lottery Fund for three years from January 2013 to December 2015.

Aims and Objectives

SPAN's key aim is homelessness prevention by working with prisoners in HMP Perth, HMP Grampian and HMP Inverness who are being released to any geographical area in the UK.

The project aims to retain prisoners' accommodation during the period of the sentence. It is unique in Scotland in that they also work with prisoners' families to make sure that they are not at risk of homelessness if their relation or partner is sentenced to a period in prison.

²⁴ SACRO is a national community justice voluntary organisation working across Scotland to make communities safer by reducing conflict and offending

Achieving the aims and objectives

Within 72 hours of entering the prison an assessment is carried out with all prisoners and part of this covers accommodation issues. It is at this stage the prisoner is informed that staff from Shelter and their local authority may come in to the prison and are asked whether they want to see them.

SPAN recognises the importance of building relationships with prisoners due to a widespread lack of trust with prison workers. Project workers arrange regular face-to-face updates with service users regardless of whether there has been progress with their case.

In general SPAN's priority is to engage with prisoners who enter prison who may be at risk of losing their tenancy due to their sentence length. They will then see people who have notice of proceeding of eviction against them. As there are no priority need categories in Scotland homeless prisoners are normally directed to the local authority due to their statutory obligations to provide homeless accommodation. In these cases a homelessness application is completed eight weeks prior to release.

The project will help prisoners close down tenancies depending on the length of the sentences and the amount of arrears that they will be likely to accrue. SPAN has had a number of successes in negotiating with social landlords to keep tenancies open. According to SPAN on average an eviction costs the local authority £6,000, a figure that the project uses as a negotiating tool when comparing it to possible rent arrears that may be accrued while in prison. If this is successful, or the eviction process has started but not been finalised, the project seeks to encourage the prisoner to make a repayment plan, even while they are in prison, to display willingness to bring down arrears.

Due to universal access to social housing in Scotland many people are staying in temporary accommodation for long periods of time, which may be unsuitable and increase the risk of recidivism. On average, households using temporary accommodation stayed there for 18 weeks. However one in four households spend over six months there, and one in 10 spend over a year in temporary accommodation.²⁵

The PRS is an alternative option; however, in Scotland this route has been challenging for prison leavers who have had difficulty obtaining referees, bonds and rent up front. Some local authorities such as Dundee have rent deposit schemes, however, according to project workers it was not available to prison leavers. Shelter Scotland and Dundee City Council have now negotiated the Private Rented Sector Homefinder Protocol which allows prison leavers access to the scheme and thus better access to the PRS. SPAN advisers then negotiate between service users and landlords so that they can enter a tenancy upon release from prison.

Initially SPAN struggled to find PRS landlords willing to take on the risk of housing prison leavers. Only two local landlords engaged with them with the proviso that rent was paid directly and tenancy support was available for at least six months. However, once tenancies were successfully established the project was able to make the case to the local authority for greater partnership working.

²⁵ Shelter Scotland 'The use of temporary accommodation in Scotland' 2015

Now the council has signed up to the Protocol and granted the project access to all registered PRS landlords in Dundee. This means many prison leavers do not have to go through the homeless route at all.

Tenancy support offered to prison leavers includes sessions on cooking, cleaning, budgeting, completing Housing Benefit forms, anti-social behaviour, and tenant rights and responsibilities. Other support needs are addressed via referral arrangements. Also, within Dundee, the project has close working links with a number of charities that provide soft furnishings and white goods at the outset of tenancies, giving prison leavers a greater chance of making the tenancy a success.

Table 4: Project summary: SPAN

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| Project impact | <p>A total of 327 prisoners were seen in the 2014 calendar year at either HMP Perth, HMP Grampian and HMP Aberdeen</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 96 service users who went into prison with a tenancy still had the tenancy when released • Seven service users who went into prison with a private rented tenancy still had the tenancy when released • 92 prisoners who were homeless on imprisonment received advice on homeless rights and legislation and a referral made to the homelessness section of the local authority • The project has helped manage 41 tenancy terminations due to the length of prisoners' sentences or other external circumstances • Four prisoners were no longer homeless after interventions from SPAN • 163 prisoners now have sufficient knowledge to make independent steps to improve their housing situation • 122 prisoners have improved their housing situation. <p>The project has started to utilise peer mentors within some of the prisons and has noticed that these mentors are able to achieve a level of trust with service users that most advisers have had to work hard to gain.</p> <p>Currently they have a cohort of six Prison Mentors speaking to people on induction, on the prison wings and in the advice centres. They are currently being accredited to Level 1 National Standards in Housing Law, Information and Advice.</p> <p>The hope is that after their sentence they will be able to continue to work with SPAN and move up to Level 2 accreditation.</p> |
| Main Challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project workers did not feel the PRS was a suitable option for service users with high support needs and they were unwilling to risk offering inappropriate housing to those unable to manage them • Each prison and local authority work differently so maintaining a consistent approach can be challenging. For example some prisons have questioned |

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| | <p>the use of peer mentors whilst others have seen the benefits and fully embraced the idea</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of social housing in Scotland can mean people being stranded in temporary accommodation for long periods• Funding is secured for only three years, creating uncertainty about support consistency, staff jobs and retention of good practice. |
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Case Study 5: Prolific Offender Resettlement through Co-ordinated Housing (PORCH)

Beginnings

The PORCH Project was formed in Exeter in 2006 in partnership with the Prolific and Priority Offender Unit in Exeter to provide specialist housing and support to promote the resettlement of prolific and other persistent offenders in the community.

PORCH now works within the TurnAround Team, a multi-agency team consisting of workers from the Drug Intervention Programme (DIP), Health (drug and alcohol team), the Police Service and the Probation Service as well as Case Administration Workers and a Police Researcher. The team works collectively to assess and address the needs of the offenders who commit the highest number of offences in the community.

Each individual prisoner has an allocated 'lead' who co-ordinates and assesses their interventions and progress. If the individual is subject to probation intervention then the lead will be a Probation Officer. However, other members of the TurnAround team may be assigned the lead if appropriate.

Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of the project is to reduce re-offending and contribute to safer communities by facilitating access to sustainable accommodation and support to prison leavers. The service is available to both men and women, over the age of 18, who live in Exeter, east and mid Devon, or who are returning to these areas from prison.

TurnAround Team members work in close partnership to coordinate effective multi-agency support. Team meetings are held weekly in order to:

- Address specific issues or concerns about service users
- Share good practice
- Arrange joint visits and probation appointments
- Organise treatment with substance misuse workers
- Organise and coordinate housing and housing support.

Referrals come from a variety of sources including prisons, drug treatment agencies, the Police Service and the Probation Service and directly from supported accommodation. Many come from the Police Researcher who monitors custody for those involved in theft and burglaries whose crimes are considered have the most impact on the community.

Achieving the aims and objectives

Following a referral, initial contact will be made within three weeks and involves a detailed needs and risk assessment in order to develop a package of support that suits each service user's individual needs. This includes referrals to other agencies within the team as well as the Probation Service and the Police Service if necessary.

If the service user is housed in a hostel with 24/7 support the project team will liaise with the hostel and organise a move-on plan in which different levels of support are offered. If the service user is in the PRS the team will visit from once a week to daily depending on the service user's support plan.

The majority of PORCH project service users display some kind of vulnerability and therefore have priority need status. However most of the temporary accommodation available in the area, which includes B&B, is unsuitable for these service users due to their high support needs and historic prolific behaviours.

As such PORCH actively seeks suitable supported accommodation in the area or, alternatively, housing in the PRS with floating support. PORCH has set up a joint enterprise with the local authority, managing two of their five-bed properties on a shared accommodation basis. These tenants are then eligible for the Exeter City Council Move-On Panel which fast-tracks them into social housing. An alternative exit from the shared house would be to apply for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) for rent in advance and a deposit to assist service users into the PRS.

PORCH has established good relationships with private landlords and letting agencies and has a number of HMO landlords who they can refer to. In many cases PORCH will assist service users to make Housing Benefit claims and will ensure it is paid direct to the landlord.

They will continue to support the service user until it is agreed that they can maintain living independently. If the service user is returned to jail for any period of time, project workers carry out further prevention work including assisting with Housing Benefit and tenancy closures, in order to maintain good relations with landlords and ensure that the service user has the best chance of being re-housed in the future.

Table 5: Project summary: PORCH

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| Project Impact | <p>Statistics are based on data gathered between April 2013 and March 2014:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• PORCH has worked with a total of 96 prison leavers, some of whom are repeat referrals and of whom 69 are new referrals• Accommodation has been arranged for prison leavers 174 times; this has been through a variety of providers such as hostels, supported accommodation, local authority and private landlords• During the final six months of the reporting period PORCH has carried out a service user survey and has received 100 per cent positive feedback. Respondents indicated that overall they were 'very satisfied' with the service. Positive comments include: |
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| | <p><i>'I would most definitely have not got where I am without the help and support from PORCH. With their help there will be much more personal growth and improvements –thanks and appreciation.'</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Service user</i></p> <p><i>'PORCH has helped me stay out of prison, stopped me from reoffending and helped me stop taking drugs.'</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Service user</i></p> |
| <p>Main Challenges</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exeter has a large student population which has driven up rents. Currently the university has started to build its own accommodation, freeing up large shared houses which landlords are leasing to the local authority. However, rent costs are slow to come down and a top-up to LHA, especially if you are under 35, is still required • Though finding accommodation is starting to get easier for the project, sustaining tenancies is harder. Due to the nature of the project's service users, breaking the cycle of offending is a challenge. Keeping the properties tidy and clean, paying rent (if not going direct to landlord), budgeting and generally engaging with the project can all be challenging • The project is funded until June 2015 and workers are usually only employed on 12-month contracts, creating uncertainty for employees • Though there are many examples of good partnership work, both within the TurnAround Team and other external support agencies, there is difficulty engaging with mental health teams. Information sharing has been challenging due to patient confidentiality, to the extent that even finding out appointment times has been problematic. |

Case Study 6: Prisoner Release Empowerment Project (PREP)

Beginnings

Historically in Bridgend there have been a large number of people found intentionally homeless. In 2013/2014 16 per cent of applicants were found to be intentionally homeless compared to a Wales wide average of four per cent.

Furthermore, the homeless charity the Wallich, identified what they saw as high numbers of prison leavers being found intentionally homeless, and who subsequently experienced problems accessing social housing.

In response the Wallich successfully applied for Big Lottery funding for three years to assist prison leavers found intentionally homeless to find housing in the PRS and to supply intensive support to stay in their home.

Aims and Objectives

The project works directly with prison leavers who have been classed as intentionally homeless by the local authority and thus have no accommodation duty. The aim is to have housing set up on release and thus remove the risk of rough sleeping.

Achieving the aims and objectives

The PREP team consists of three workers: Project Coordinator, Project Officer and a part-time Support Worker and Administrator.

The project has built up good relations with HMP Parc, enabling project workers to make initial contact with service users early on in sentences, although support will intensify in the final months pre-release.

Project workers prioritise building relationships with PRS landlords but have had more success with letting agents. They find accommodation, arrange bonds, arrange Environmental Health checks on the properties and source other funding streams that could assist service users’ transition to settled accommodation.

The seamless transition into tenancies is helped by the fact that the Wallich runs the only bond scheme in Bridgend, which is based in the same building as PREP. This is particularly beneficial as referrals, appointments, completion of Housing Benefit applications and so on can be swiftly processed ‘under the same roof’. There is no need for service users to have multiple appointments in a variety of different locations.

A number of their service users have multiple needs including mental health, substance misuse or alcohol misuse issues. The project works to find out service users’ support needs early on so that referrals to these specialised agencies are already in place prior to release.

There is no time limit on how long the support will last. The nature of the project is to empower people to move into independent living so service users are encouraged to take steps towards this in a managed and structured way.

Table 6: Project summary: PREP

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| Project Impact | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since the start of the project PREP has received 136 referrals. This number includes people who are still in prison • PREP has worked with 85 people, and sourced accommodation for 68 people to date • There have been 32 successful instances of move-on from the project • No service user has lost their tenancy since the beginning of the project, although this doesn’t include those who have been recalled to prison • PREP currently has positive relationships with eight lettings agencies. |
| Main Challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project only has two and a half people working on the project and although they are coping with referrals there is a waiting list • Moving into the PRS usually requires money up front in the form of bonds, rent in advance and letting agents’ fees. Though the project has good |

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| | <p>relationships with a number of lettings agencies that take paper bonds, they have difficulty sourcing finance to top up the Bond Board's maximum level. PREP has had success gaining funding from the Vicar Relief Fund which enables cash bonds to be offered, although access to this fund is not consistent enough to be relied upon</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• People renting in the PRS often require credit checks which can be a barrier for prison leavers• Lack of up to date ID can prevent prison leavers from opening bank accounts and increases delays in moving people into settled, independent accommodation• For many prison leavers shared accommodation is the only available option, which may throw up a number of support issues• The project has found it challenging to source properties within the main towns that fall within LHA levels. Being housed away from these areas increases the likelihood of social isolation• Finding professional support for those with dual diagnosis is a challenge as most agencies specialise in only one issue. This leaves prison leavers with multiple complex needs being passed between support agencies that deny owing a duty to them. Project workers can spend significant amounts of time assisting service users to get a GP referral for mental health services which in turn pass them onto other agencies. |
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Case Study 7: Through the Gate Project

Beginnings

The Through the Gate Project follows on from the successes of the Peer Advice Project in London. It was initially set up in 2002 in HMP Wandsworth to address the high demand for advice within the prison system by training existing prisoners to act as Housing and Support Advisers who can continue in this role post-release to support other prison leavers.

Funded through charitable trust The Waterloo Foundation, St Giles Trust Cymru was officially launched in January 2013 in response the high level of homelessness among the prison population.

Aims and Objectives

The project aims to offer seamless support to prisoners within the last few months of their sentence, through the prison gate and back into the community.

The project trains serving prisoners to City and Guilds Level 3 in Information, Advice and Guidance and enables them to help other prisoners by gaining valuable practical experience as part of the vocational element of the course. Within the community the project supports prisoners leaving custody in Cardiff, Vale of Glamorgan, and Newport by offering a gate pick-up service and then offering ongoing support as long as prison leavers require.

Achieving the aims and objectives

Currently there are 10 Peer Advisers working within the prison and four working outside. Alongside the peer element of the project there are three paid Caseworkers, one trained Assessor and one Education, Training and Employment Caseworker.

Situated on every wing in HMP Cardiff is a prison information desk where Peer Advisers play an invaluable role offering support to current prisoners as well as supporting some of the work that Prison Officers previously carried out. They have also been trained to offer basic housing information to prisoners. However any complex or specialist housing problems such as the closing down of tenancies or rent arrears are undertaken by the prison or other third sector organisations working out of the prison.

Peer Advisers assist prisoners to make appointments at the resettlement office where they are able to undertake a full assessment of the prisoner's support needs including a 'future goals' plan that they are encouraged to work towards.

The prison has allocated Peer Advisers an office that they use alongside St Giles Caseworkers. Here they have access to computers to carry out project administration such as processing applications; writing internal interview appointment letters; and studying for their NVQ. They also have access to private rooms to undertake needs assessment interviews.

Peer Advisers assess whether service users have any additional support needs such as Education, Training and Employment (ETE) and then refer to specialist support as appropriate. If Peer Advisers believe that a prisoner is likely to be deemed vulnerable and is returning to the Cardiff area, they can make a referral to the YMCA Recon Project²⁶ with which St Giles have a loose partnership.

Once the assessment has been completed the service user's case is passed onto an external Caseworker or Peer Adviser who visits the service user to initiate contact and begin working on their support plan. Upon release the external Peer Advisers or Caseworkers will have referrals set up with other agencies including drugs and alcohol agencies or mental health support.

Community-based support includes taking people to probation meetings and other appointments; organising food packages if benefits are delayed; helping with job applications; ordering ID; and sometimes just giving service users an ear to voice their concerns.

²⁶ Cardiff YMCA Housing Association offers a set number of bed spaces in their hostel accommodation for service users who are leaving prison and are too vulnerable to access floor space or pod space on their release. To do this the YMCA HA work in partnership with Cardiff County Council, The RE-ORG, St Giles Trust, and Woman's Turn Around Service (Changing Lives).

Table 7: Project summary: Through the Gate Project

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| Project impact | The project's evaluation has coincided with this report being published and as such any statistics were not able to be released until after the evaluation's conclusion. |
| Main Challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding suitable Peer Advisers can be a challenge due to specific criteria needing to be met by each applicant, including being substance free; having basic literacy levels; and being a trusted/risk assessed prisoner serving a sentence long enough to complete the training • The project relies heavily on the support of all prison staff members from senior management to officers on the wings. At any point the project can be suspended if this support is retracted. In addition, Advisers may be removed from the project at the prison's discretion • In Cardiff it is difficult to get people directly into hostel accommodation with many prison leavers being placed in 'pod spaces'. This type of accommodation is available overnight and has to be vacated through the day. This is deemed appropriate by the local authority but unsuitable by the project due to concerns that prison leavers may be vulnerable to substance misuse or mixing with old peers at a vulnerable time • On a typical release day a Caseworker can spend more than six hours sitting in Housing Options with the service user. Project Workers state that this is when a prison leaver is most vulnerable, and keeping them engaged while they are anxious and frustrated by delays can be challenging. This time would be better used doing other prevention and support work. |

Housing First

'It gets difficult emotionally not being settled. The fear of re-offending is still there and being unsettled doesn't help. The thoughts are always there. Recently I wanted to go back to prison to have my own cell. I've wanted to hurt myself and I haven't had those thoughts for years. That scared me.'

Prison leaver

Despite the considerable involvement of the third sector in providing housing advice and support to prisoners and prison leavers, finding accommodation remains very challenging. Due to prison leavers' criminal records and prison histories, alcohol and substance misuse or mental health issues, they may be automatically excluded from some private rental properties and even housing association and supported accommodation.²⁷

²⁷ Homeless Link 'Better Together: Preventing Reoffending and Homelessness' 2011

From April 2015 there is no longer guaranteed access to social housing for prison leavers. There are several reasons why prison leavers may fail to obtain housing through this route, including previous tenancy records, rent arrears, or a history of anti-social behaviour.²⁸

Prisoners who do get an opportunity to be housed in the social sector are likely to have two routes: either directly via the social housing waiting list, or indirectly through the 'staircase' model of supported accommodation. The former is currently the main route into mainstream social housing, while the latter concerns access to support and housing options mainly for single homeless people.²⁹

The staircase model of supported accommodation provides help to people who have multiple needs such as mental health or substance misuse issues to gain access to appropriate support alongside housing.

This can be an extensive multi-stage process involving initial contact with outreach workers or day centres; a move into direct-access hostels; a further move into second stage or specialist hostels; progression to semi-independent or shared accommodation; and ultimately - once deemed 'housing ready' - an independent tenancy, with or without floating support.³⁰ Access to the initial stages of the 'staircase' for those with substance use or mental health problems is usually dependent on engagement with treatment services, and further progress requires demonstration of improvements in substance misuse and mental health issues.³¹

Although this approach has enabled many homeless people with chaotic backgrounds to enter independent living, for others this approach is not successful. For example:

- Perceived failures at any stage, for reasons such as behavioural issues or relapse, can result in eviction, being stuck at one stage for long periods, or regressing to a previous stage. This can result in people disengaging or becoming disillusioned and believing that the end goal is not achievable
- Lack of social housing means that people can remain stuck on housing waiting lists for long periods, even after undertaking all the requirements to attain independent living.

Due to the high demand on social housing the PRS may be the only realistic option for many prison leavers,³² provided that they are able to obtain high quality, sustainable accommodation and are properly supported.³³ To this end, the Housing First Model offers a viable third option as an alternative to the traditional 'staircase' model or the direct waiting list route.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ D Gojkovic, A Mills and R Meek 'Accommodation for ex-offenders: Third sector housing advice and provision' 2012

³⁰ Shelter 'Good practice: briefing Housing first Bringing permanent solutions to homeless people with complex needs' 2008

³¹ *ibid.*

³² J Luby and J Gallagher 'Finding and sustaining a home in the Private Rented Sector – The essentials. A guide for frontline staff working with homeless offenders' 2012

³³ Crisis 'Response to the NOMS Draft Policy on Offender Housing' 2011

Housing First is based on the concept that a homeless individual or household's primary need is to obtain stable housing, and that other issues that may affect the household can and should be addressed once housing is obtained through comprehensive, yet non-compulsory, support.

As the name suggests the model advocates placing homeless people directly into independent, permanent tenancies under the premise that the best place to place to prepare for independent living is in independent accommodation.³⁴ Housing First separates treatment from housing, considering the former voluntary and the latter a fundamental need and human right.³⁵

Furthermore, evidence from international Housing First evaluations suggests there are considerable savings to be made using this model. Many evaluations conclude that Housing First is a highly cost-effective approach, especially when cost savings are compared to traditional supported accommodation, homeless shelters, or possible prison and hospital stays.^{36 37 38}

Within the UK there are a growing number of Housing First projects, each based on the initial US model but with slight differences to suit the local environment. Below are two examples of Housing First that are representative of models based in the UK.

Case study 8: Housing First Glasgow³⁹

Beginnings

The Housing First Glasgow pilot was developed by Turning Point Scotland (TPS) in response to high levels of repeat homelessness and an increase in drug deaths among people with active substance misuse problems in Glasgow. It was initially funded as a three-year pilot running from October 2010 until September 2013. The pilot was funded by TPS, the Big Lottery Fund, and Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board but has now moved passed the pilot stage and has recently won a five-year Big Lottery Bid.

This was the first Housing First project to be developed in the UK, explicitly targeting homeless people involved in active drug misuse. The project accommodates service users in 'normal' independent self-contained housing association flats, on a scatter-site basis,⁴⁰ in a Scottish Secured Tenancy (SST). Currently the project provides housing and support to 26

³⁴ S Johnsen & L Teixeira 'Staircases, Elevators and Cycles of Change. 'Housing First' and Other Housing Models for Homeless People with Complex Support Needs' 2010

³⁵ D K Padgett, L Gulcur and S Tsemberis, S. 'Housing first services for people who are homeless with co-occurring serious mental illness and substance abuse' 2006

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ D P Culhane, S Metraux and T R Hadley 'The impact of supportive housing for homeless people with severe mental illness on the utilization of the public health, corrections, and emergency shelter systems: The New York' 2002

³⁸ J Perlman and J Parvensky 'Denver Housing First Collaborative Cost Benefit Analysis and Program Outcomes Report' 2006

³⁹ All statistics and additional information have been supplied by the project evaluation report covering the initial funding period ending September 2013 - S Johnsen 'Turning point Scotland's Housing First project Evaluation' 2013

⁴⁰ Term used to describe housing that is spread around a certain areas rather than concentrated in a single neighbourhood.

individuals who were homeless and actively involved in substance misuse at the point of recruitment, as well as many others for whom settled housing has yet to be sourced.

Initially housing was provided by two housing associations, these being Glasgow Housing Association and Queens Cross Housing Association. Since then a number of other housing providers have allocated tenancies to the project.

Aims and Objectives

The project's overall aim is to reduce homelessness by accommodating and supporting individuals who are in active addiction.

The project's main objectives are to achieve:

- Improvements in service users' personal living situations – moving away from street homelessness and sustaining tenancies
- Reductions, or no increase, in substance misuse – linked to service users' support plans
- Reductions, or no deterioration, in injecting and associated risk behaviours
- Reductions in involvement with criminal activity
- Improved psychological wellbeing
- Improvements in overall physical health
- Improved capacity to participate in and be valued by society.

Achieving the aims and objectives

The project's main philosophy is that if homeless people are provided with the security of their own home, along with adequate support, they will be better positioned to recover from addiction.

The project adheres to a number of key principles:

- Service users are provided with independent accommodation in scatter-site SST tenancy
- There are no requirements regarding housing readiness. There are no admission criteria regarding independent living skills, sobriety, or readiness to address an addiction
- The project operates a harm reduction approach to substance misuse
- There are no time limits on either the length of tenancy or the duration of support provided
- There is service user choice regarding levels of engagement with support. Service users are encouraged to meet with a member of staff at least once per week, but the intensity of support is determined on a service user-centred basis. Service users are offered a limited degree of choice as regards the flat they are allocated, but only insofar as is usually the case for social lets in Glasgow
- The holistic support is available 24/7
- The project aims to target some of the most vulnerable members of the homeless population, these being individuals actively involved in substance misuse – a group who

often have difficulty coping with traditional services or are resistant to service interventions.

The project consists of a Service Co-ordinator, two Assistant Service Co-ordinators, and three Peer Support Workers. All are employed full-time. The Service Coordinators carry out service user assessments and visits, and line manages the Peer Support Workers. The project also has a formal link with an Occupational Therapist, employed by the National Health Homelessness Service, who plays a role in allocation and support needs assessments.

The Peer Support Workers, who have histories of homelessness and substance misuse, deliver most of the day-to-day support although the Service Co-ordinator and Assistant Service Co-ordinators are also actively involved in frontline support delivery.

The project maintains flexibility in terms of when, where and how they engage with service users. Project workers do not sign service users off the project if they consistently fail to attend scheduled appointments or respond to communications. Similarly, support continues if a service user spends prolonged periods in institutional care such as hospital, prison, or rehab.

Table 8: Project summary: Housing First Glasgow

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| Project Impact | <p>All statistics and information have been provided by the project evaluation report covering the initial funding period ending September 2013.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the end of the pilot period the majority (17) of the total 22 service users continued to utilise the services of the Housing First project • A number of stakeholders commented that the project’s ability to retain the involvement of the vast majority of service users was in itself a very positive outcome, especially given that several of these individuals were widely regarded by service providers in the city to be ‘serial disengagers’ with long histories of service resistance or chaotic patterns of engagement • The majority (18) of the 22 service users recruited to the project had been allocated an independent tenancy by the end of the pilot period. Of those that were, half (nine) had by the end of the pilot period sustained their tenancy for more than two years, a further two had been in their home for between one and two years, and four for less than one year • Significantly, no service users were evicted. Two tenancies were however terminated for other reasons • For the majority of service users, general health has improved, in some cases dramatically • The majority of service users experienced a reduction in the severity of their dependence on illicit drugs, with seven of those who had been active users at the point of recruitment no longer considered dependent one year on. Furthermore staff records indicate that by the end of the pilot period, 10 of the service users who had had a problem with drug misuse at the point |
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| | <p>of recruitment were abstinent from illicit drugs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instances of neighbourhood disturbance, where service users have been either the perpetrators or victims of anti-social behaviour, have been relatively rare. |
| Main Challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overcoming stakeholder reservations regarding the risks involved in accommodating people in active substance misuse is an ongoing challenge • Lack of understanding of the Housing First model means that frontline staff including homelessness, drug and alcohol and local authority workers have been reluctant to refer service users to the project • Frontline staff feel they may be blamed should service users fail to sustain their tenancies or cause disturbances within their neighbourhood • Lack of suitable housing means that people have the support they need from the project but not the tenancies to allow them to move on out of temporary accommodation • The planned direct payments to tenants via Universal Credit has left a number of service users anxious because of their active drug use • The level of support that some service users initially require can be very time-intensive meaning that others may be without necessary support at times of crisis • Making the 'house a home' by fitting it out with white goods and furnishings has been a challenge in some cases and can lead to dips in motivation for the service user. |

Case Study 9: Housing First Anglesey (HFA)

Beginnings

In 2012, Anglesey County Council identified a need for a service to support homeless people, including rough sleepers, who have a range of often complex needs. A consultation was undertaken and the authority's Supporting People team decided to create a Housing First project which was started in April 2013. The Wallich Housing First Anglesey was first set up as a pilot project but due to its initial success has been funded for a further two years.

Currently there are four staff members made up of three Support Workers, one Senior Support worker and a Project Co-ordinator. The project also utilises a number of volunteers to assist with the tenancy support including one ex-service user volunteer.

Originally the project had a capacity of 12 clients but has since expanded to 14.

Aims and Objectives

The project's main aim is to assist homeless people in finding a permanent home quickly and provide appropriate support once housed. The project is available to men and women

who are aged 25 and above, have a local connection, are at risk of homelessness or currently homeless, and have support needs that can be met through housing related support.

Once housed the project assesses service users' support needs and develops an in-depth, intensive support plan.

Achieving the aims and objectives

Service users cannot self-refer to the project: they are referred by the Probation Service, the Police Service, NACRO and other support agencies. Service users are given a statement of what is expected of them, and what they can expect from the project, and a support plan is developed and agreed upon.

The project works hard to source accommodation for their service users. In many cases housing in the social sector is difficult to find due to welfare changes and a lack of one-bedroom accommodation on the island. The majority of the project's work is undertaken in the PRS but finding amenable landlords willing to take on chaotic tenants is difficult. To overcome this barrier landlords are guaranteed that intensive support will be offered to the tenant and the rent will be paid to them directly.

The project has a high success rate in negotiating rent reductions to below the LHA level and in some instances below the single room rate for under-35s. In other instances they have used DHPs to top up the rent, or have implemented strict budgeting plans to assist the service user to find the difference.

Initial support can be very intensive and workers can spend weeks at a time with one service user, sourcing accommodation, assisting in finding deposits, then meeting with landlords, agreeing the tenancy and assisting in setting up Housing Benefit.

Once housed the project offers an on-going support package including assistance with budgeting, welfare benefits, keeping appointments and promoting positive lifestyle choices.

The project has close ties with the Police Service and the Probation Service. Under the project's non-engagement policy, if the project has not heard from a service user for three days then the police are called.

Although it is a fundamental tenet of the Housing First approach that accommodation is not dependent on engagement with support, working in the PRS tends to compromise this since landlords may seek eviction if tenants disengage. Project workers explain at the start that non-engagement can result in service users being at a heightened risk of losing their tenancy.

Table 9: Project summary: Housing First Anglesey

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| Project Outcomes | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 30 service users supported by HFA from start to current• 16 positive 'move-ons' from the project• Nine service users are currently housed with a further five being supported but awaiting housing |
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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HFA won the 2013 Cymorth Cymru Promoting Independence Award for preventing homelessness. |
| Main Challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rent levels fluctuate vastly across the island with more affordable accommodation situated away from the main towns and devoid of good transport links • All of the service users are single and due to a shortage of single room accommodation on Anglesey social housing is very difficult to source • Shared accommodation is unsuitable for the majority of the service users due to their chaotic lifestyles and high support needs. Most are dual diagnosis and trying to put two service users, or one service user and someone outside the project together can create more issues • PRS landlords can be reluctant to take on tenants with high support needs. Some may have previously been evicted, have rent arrears or ASBOs. Finding accommodation that is affordable is also a barrier • It is challenging to encourage budgeting to those who are active substance misusers. |

Floating support

'I would never have been able to get all the forms filled in and benefits and DLA sorted without support, they are so complicated. What they done for us on the first day, would have taken us two or three weeks to get round to everything. They also check on my medication, calling regularly to see how I am doing, make sure you are getting back on your feet, stay with you until they're happy and believe you are happy, a real personal relationship, brilliant.'

Prison leaver

There is no accepted definition of 'floating support'; however, generally it covers support services which are not tied to accommodation and are transferable between properties according to tenants' needs, enabling people in varying circumstances and with varying needs to live securely and independently.

There are many benefits to this type of support:⁴¹

- This type of support can be provided to anyone who requires it irrespective of the type of accommodation they live in
- The separation of support from housing allows floating support workers to be advocates for the service user and not representatives of the landlord
- Services are flexible and can respond rapidly to crises or emergencies

⁴¹ Department for Communities and Local Government *Research into the effectiveness of floating support services for the Supporting People programme, Final Report 2008*

- People in isolated or rural areas can be provided with support in their own homes – services can have a greater ‘reach’ than accommodation-based services
- The level of support can be tailored to meet the needs of individuals
- Floating support adopts a ‘holistic’ approach to assessing an individual’s needs and acts as a focal point for brokering access to other services
- Floating support can help to overcome challenges that prison leavers may face living in the PRS, such as accessing grants to pay for bonds and rent up-front, acting as an intermediary if relationship breaks down, sourcing furniture and white goods, setting up bill payments and organising the payment of benefits.

There is also considerable evidence of the cost-effectiveness of floating support in terms of reducing rent arrears, preventing eviction and the resulting costs, reduction of hospital admissions and reduction of reoffending.^{42 43 44}

The following case study is an example of how floating support can work successfully even with those deemed high-risk, allowing service users the best opportunity to integrate back into the community.

Case study 10: The Dangerous Offender Floating Support Team

Beginnings

The Dangerous Offender Floating Support Team was established in 2003 through the Supporting People programme and has gone through a number of different funders in the intervening years.

The original tender offered support to prison leavers living in the Avon geographical area which included three local authority areas - Bristol, South Gloucestershire and Bath and North East Somerset.

At present the project has been integrated with St Mungo's Broadway but receives funding from many different sources due to its importance to the local authorities it works with.

Aims and objectives

The project’s main objective is to ensure that dangerous prisoners who leave custody are resettled successfully in the community and are able to take an active part in communal life. The prison leavers that engage with the project are all categorised as ‘high-risk’ or dangerous⁴⁵ in relation to their potential to cause harm to others in the community. The team works closely alongside the Avon and Somerset Public Protection Teams of the Police and Probation Services, as well as other health, employment, education and community services to provide one-to-one support to around 62 prison leavers at any one time.

⁴² J Campbell and L Morgan ‘*Shelter Cymru Valleys inclusion Project Final Evaluation*’ 2012

⁴³ RSM McClure Watters ‘Northern Ireland Housing Executive Effectiveness of Floating Support Final Report’ 2012

⁴⁴ G Torr ‘*An Evaluation Of The Effectiveness Of A Tenancy Support Service*’, 2000.

⁴⁵ MAPPA 1-3

Achieving the aims and objectives

There are four people working on the project, one Manager and three Support Workers. They offer intensive, front loaded support to service users with the aim of tapering off as people move towards independence.

Because of the nature of the service users' crimes most referrals come through the Avon and Somerset Public Protection Teams of the Police and Probation Services and other related services that work with high-risk offenders.

Due to the nature of the offences the project service users are accommodated via the 'Protocol for housing dangerous and potentially dangerous offenders'. Under the Protocol arrangements have been made with the local authority and partner RSLs to allocate designated properties or beds to dangerous prison leavers. Prior to this the project engages with the service user at the Approved Premises to build trust and start early support work.

The project emphasises service user involvement, utilising a number of tools to enable the service user to evaluate their own progress.

Support can include:

- Preparing for independent living by learning to pay bills, interact with landlords, arrange utilities, pay rent and arranging white goods and furnishings for the tenancy by accessing additional funding through grants and trusts
- Registering with a local GP
- Setting up a bank account
- Helping to deal with former debt and arrears
- Assistance with setting up and maximising benefits as well as advocating appeals
- Travel to and from appointments
- Holistic support in times of need and stress.

The project will work with the service user for as long as necessary, tapering off as required. Service users can reengage with the project at any time after they have moved on.

Table 10: Project summary: The Dangerous Offender Floating Support Team

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| Project Impact | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In total the service has worked with 104 service users over the course of the last 12 months. This is an average of 62 service users at any one time. Contractually they are only meant to support 50 service users but demand for their service is high. However, quality of service has not diminished• 96.2 per cent of service users are maintaining their accommodation and living independently• 52 service users moved on successfully from the project in the course of the last year. Of these 85 per cent of them have not been convicted of any further offences |
|----------------|---|

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The overall non-reoffending rate over the life of the project is around 85 per cent • In the previous year the team achieved additional income for service users of more than £30,000 by advocating on behalf of service users • One high-risk prison leaver was supported to return to college and begin learning new skills • In July 2013 the team won the ‘Best Adult Community Programme Award’ from the Howard League for Penal Reform, the second such award they have won over the life of the project. |
| Main Challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding social housing in Bristol can be challenging as only a few tenancies are designated to high-risk prison leavers • PRS accommodation at LHA levels is largely confined to unsuitable, undesirable areas. Many landlords are unwilling to rent to this client group • As clients felt the impacts of recent welfare changes an immense amount of support work has gone into setting up ESA, JSA, PIP etc. and advocating in appeals processes • Project workers feel that social and private landlords are faster to evict people in the present economic climate. This affects all tenants, although the consequences for high risk prison leavers are much worse than for other tenants • Social stigma means the project does not get the recognition that it deserves in the wider arena. This affects access to funding, accommodation and employment opportunities • Prison leavers who have been in prison for extended periods of time become institutionalised and more at risk of being recalled due to their fear of the outside world. This inflates the prison population and costs the government more money than the cost of re-housing and rehabilitation. |

Conclusion

‘If I didn’t have help, I would have come back out, I would have gone onto the streets and I would have ended up selling drugs, robbing people, robbing houses, robbing cars... But because I got somewhere settled, I don’t need to think about all that’

Prison leaver

At a time when the Welsh policy landscape is changing both in relation to homelessness and criminal justice, this is a great opportunity to improve the way in which homelessness prevention services are provided to prison leavers.

This report recognises it is critical to assist prison leavers into appropriate and stable housing and presents a number of good practice examples that demonstrate some of the

most innovative and effective ways in which services across the UK are working to this end. Although many of these projects are currently quite isolated there is great potential to replicate their approaches in a more widespread way.

Homelessness prevention is most successful when early intervention practices are put into place, which puts that responsibility squarely within the penal system. One of the main lessons to emerge from this study is the largely untapped potential of housing and tenancy training, which, when delivered pre-release, can assist prison leavers to develop the skills to manage and sustain independent living.

Training may also help to overcome other issues raised by both prison leavers and project workers, namely prison leavers' lack of a continuous good tenancy history or up-to-date references, which are increasingly required by landlords and letting agencies. An accredited training certificate could be used as proof of understanding of housing rights and responsibilities by prison leavers who lack the necessary references, and as a means to prove their ability to maintain a positive tenancy.

A further lesson to emerge from this study is the importance of building positive relationships with prison leavers early on in their sentence, a factor that was highlighted numerous times by project staff in encouraging full disclosure and maintaining engagement. In order to build strong relationships, services need to make contact early on in sentences; maintain regular contact; ensure that personnel are consistent; make the most of peer approaches; and actually involve service users in decision-making that affects them.

Better cross-agency information-sharing and partnership work is also important to assist prison leavers effectively. It is well evidenced that building strong links between support agencies, criminal justice agencies and housing providers from all sectors can increase the chances of prison leavers maintaining a stable lifestyle.

Transparency and sharing of information between these agencies can ensure that the right level of support is in place and that correct risk assessments are made. Some of the most effective ways of doing this are by holding regular case conferences and by allowing services shared access to prison and Probation Service databases. However, this research identified that many services experience considerable problems in this area.

Concerns surrounding data protection and lack of training among partnership agencies were some of the reasons why information could sometimes be withheld, causing delays or gaps in support. A failure to share information between agencies, coupled with many prison leavers' lack of current ID, may lead to delays in accessing benefits, and missed appointments. This may result in heightened anxiety for vulnerable prison leavers. Problems like these can be overcome prior to release, so long as a coordinating agency takes ownership of it.

Prison leavers face significant barriers in accessing bank services and welfare benefits due to lack of ID and fixed address, and this may result in prison leavers being without funds for weeks at a time. Prison leavers who participated in this research said that the delay in access to money increased the likelihood of reoffending.

Currently there are a number of IT systems within the criminal justice system, but support agencies have limited access to national databases such as P-NOMIS and C-NOMIS.

Understandably information on these systems is highly confidential, so permission from the Governor is needed before it can be accessed by unofficial staff. This means that in some cases it is the responsibility of Prison Officers to update the systems when any work has been undertaken with a prisoner in relation to their resettlement or support needs. According to support project staff, this can lead to records being kept in an inconsistent or patchy way.

Better access to information systems would greatly improve support providers' knowledge as to exactly what are the most suitable resettlement plans for an individual prisoner; assist services to gauge more precisely what the most current issues are; and provide a clearer idea of the larger, often complex picture.

Outside of prison, the same information-sharing issues are present and investigations failed to identify any shared IT systems between partner agencies. Where information-sharing did work well, partners were co-located and regular service user meetings were undertaken.

As well as the importance of good partnership working and information-sharing, this study emphasises the importance of housing that is stable from the outset. Prison leavers spoke of housing in terms of a gateway to employment, training, health services, education, and towards a sustainable way of life that most take for granted.

Many prison leavers spoke of the negative impact to their mental health and well-being of living in hostels long-term. Some described the daily struggle to maintain their own sobriety in hostels where substance misuse was rife. Others described an increased feeling of isolation.

Everyone has a fundamental right to housing under Article 11 of the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It is well evidenced that long-term temporary accommodation stays can lead to increased social isolation and a deterioration of mental health.

Conversely, there is strong evidence that providing settled housing as the first stage towards resettlement - rather than an end goal - may give people a stronger foundation from which to address further support needs and avoid recidivism. For this reason we recommend that Housing First is investigated further as an alternative to the traditional 'staircase' support model, especially in areas where temporary and supported accommodation are at a premium.

There is clear evidence that housing and recidivism are inexorably linked. However, preventing reoffending is a very complex issue. Although this report has identified a number of good practice examples around the country the prison leaver population is diverse and a 'one size fits all' policy will not always be effective due to the challenging nature of prison leavers' housing and support needs. As such this report should not be seen as a definitive guide but rather as a survey of projects displaying good practice in working with chaotic service users during times of significant financial challenges.

Where organisations do get it right, it is often because of passionate individuals who are committed to improving the lives of their service users, maintaining strong cross-sector links and partnerships, building trust-based relationships and demonstrating a person-centred approach to support.

Recommendations

Training

- There is great potential for prisons to provide housing and pre-tenancy training for all prisoners facing homelessness. This is a powerful tool to give greater confidence to private landlords to take on prison leaver tenants who may lack references or a flawless tenancy history. We have identified a number of models that could be adapted to serve this purpose. We recommend that pre-tenancy training is provided to all Welsh prisoners who may benefit from it.

Through-the-gate/partnership

- Effective partnership working is crucial for working with homeless prison leavers. Organisations should investigate practices to improve partnership work and referral processes. These could be in the form of co-locating, regular face-to-face communication, official protocols setting out responsibilities, or shared IT systems.
- It is equally important to adopt partnership approaches with prison leavers themselves, ensuring they are fully involved in devising their own housing solutions. Prison leavers should be allowed to have more input into their support plans. Prior to release, all relevant agencies should sit down with the prisoner and discuss the support plan. This will create a more person-centred approach where the prisoner can take some ownership of their issues, be involved in decision making that affects them and become familiar with who, and not what agency, will be assisting them.
- All homeless prison leavers should have a housing plan in place before release. This will relieve pressure on Housing Options and support agencies as well as prisoners themselves.
- All prison leavers should leave prison with up-to-date ID. Either the prison or a designated support agency should assist with this so that no prisoner is released lacking basic identification.
- If prisoners have access to a bank account upon release the likelihood of delays in applying for benefits can be reduced. There are fledgling examples of partnerships between prisons and credit unions currently in the UK which allow prisoners to use the prison address when opening up accounts. This also encourages saving while incarcerated and can aid in the transition to life outside the prison system.

Peer mentoring

- Peer mentors should be utilised both within the prison system and outside in the community. During this research a number of prison leavers spoke of their distrust of agencies working out of prisons due to their perceived lack of independence. Being mentored by someone who has real world experiences and understands prison leavers' issues can start to break down these barriers and encourage better communication. As well as encouraging service users to open up, peer mentoring projects provided training and employment opportunities.

- There is also potential for peer mentors or other former prisoners to open up dialogue with private landlords at a local level, for example by addressing landlord forums, in order to break down some of the barriers that exist.

Housing

- More funding needs to be put into establishing Housing First projects in Wales. There is considerable evidence that Housing First may be a more cost-effective solution than traditional housing and support models. Housing First is particularly well suited to the social sector, although it can also work in the PRS.
- If prison leavers are to be encouraged into the PRS they need extra help to 'make a house a home'. Many will not have the basics such as white goods and soft furnishings. Local authorities or support workers need to establish working links with charities that can help provide these goods. Good practice would be to have as much of this set up prior to the person being released.

Floating Support

- Generally, housing and support are not mutually exclusive and there needs to be a greater partnership between the two for a better chance of preventing recidivism. Support for prison leavers should continue the moment that they are released and as such gate pick-ups should be the default.
- All prisoners housed in the PRS should have access to tenancy support services. Delays in receiving benefits and the desperation of being without money were cited by a number of interview participants as incentives to reoffend. Support agencies can help ensure that benefits are being received, rent is being paid and the service user starts the tenancy on a sound financial footing.