

VOICES

VOICES
OF
INDEPENDENCE
CHANGE &
EMPOWERMENT IN
STOKE-ON-TRENT

2016

Prison Release Support



Stoke-on-Trent
Community of Practice
@SoTCoP



LOTTERY FUNDED

Introducing our Community of Practice

In the last 18-months, we have started and developed a Community of Practice (COP). The aim is to provide a safe venue for frontline workers to talk, listen, reflect, and receive feedback. They may then identify and implement small changes in their practice that encourage innovation within the system.

Therefore, the COP provides a forum to identify rapid practice-based solutions to common systemic problems and frustrations. Positive practice can be shared easily. As such, our COP provides a sanctuary for reflective practice, group supervision and interdisciplinary learning. A COP is also a low risk means to escalate systemic issues that are outside the control of front-line workers.

COP sessions hear evidence in the form of case studies. Each case study features a person who is experiencing multiple needs. In this context multiple needs means at least two of the following: homelessness, reoffending, problematic substance misuse and mental ill health. These are intended to highlight the strengths of current practice, what works well, as well as the systemic blockages and bottlenecks that frustrate practitioners. Discussion is solution-focused with the emphasis on imagining and moving towards a preferred future where the frustrations do not exist.

Our COP sessions have opened up new and meaningful relationships between groups of professionals and fostered more collaborative inter-organisational working.



About this report

Through this report, we intend to highlight positive practice. Where helpful we will emphasise purposeful actions for practitioners, based on front-line experience, that are intended to yield rapid results for people experiencing multiple-needs. Similarly, we will also make recommendations for commissioners and other senior leaders in relation to longer-term systemic change. These will relate to areas of the system that present barriers to effective practice that practitioners believe they cannot change. We focus on preferred futures and resources rather than historical or current failures.

The case studies that have informed our thinking summarise the experiences of people living in Stoke-on-Trent who have multiple needs. Delivering successful outcomes often requires a high level of collaboration among services and practitioners to solve 'wicked' problems.

Topics and membership

So far, our COP has reflected on a range of topics, including:

- Hospital Discharge
- Recovery in mental health and drug services
- Prison release support

The COP has connected people from a wide range of backgrounds, who otherwise might not have had the opportunity to interact in a safe space. Attendance includes a wide range of professionals, such as:

Criminal Justice	CJMH workers Prison Governor Prison Officers Integrated Offender Management Officers Probation Officers Specialist women's workers
DWP	JCP Partnership Manager Employment specialists
Housing & Homelessness	Rough Sleepers Outreach staff Hostel workers Supported Housing Workers
Lived Experience	Expert Citizens Peer Mentors
Mental Health	Ward Managers & Nurses (Hospital & Community based) Nurse Consultant Student Nurses Mental Health Asylum and Refugee specialist Solution Focus Practitioner
Physical Health	Health Inclusion Practitioner
Social Care	Wellbeing Assessors Social Workers Student Social Workers
Substance Use	Recovery Coordinators Senior Practitioners
Observers	Wi-Fi (Fulfilling Lives project in North Yorkshire) Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM Coalition)

Prison Release Support

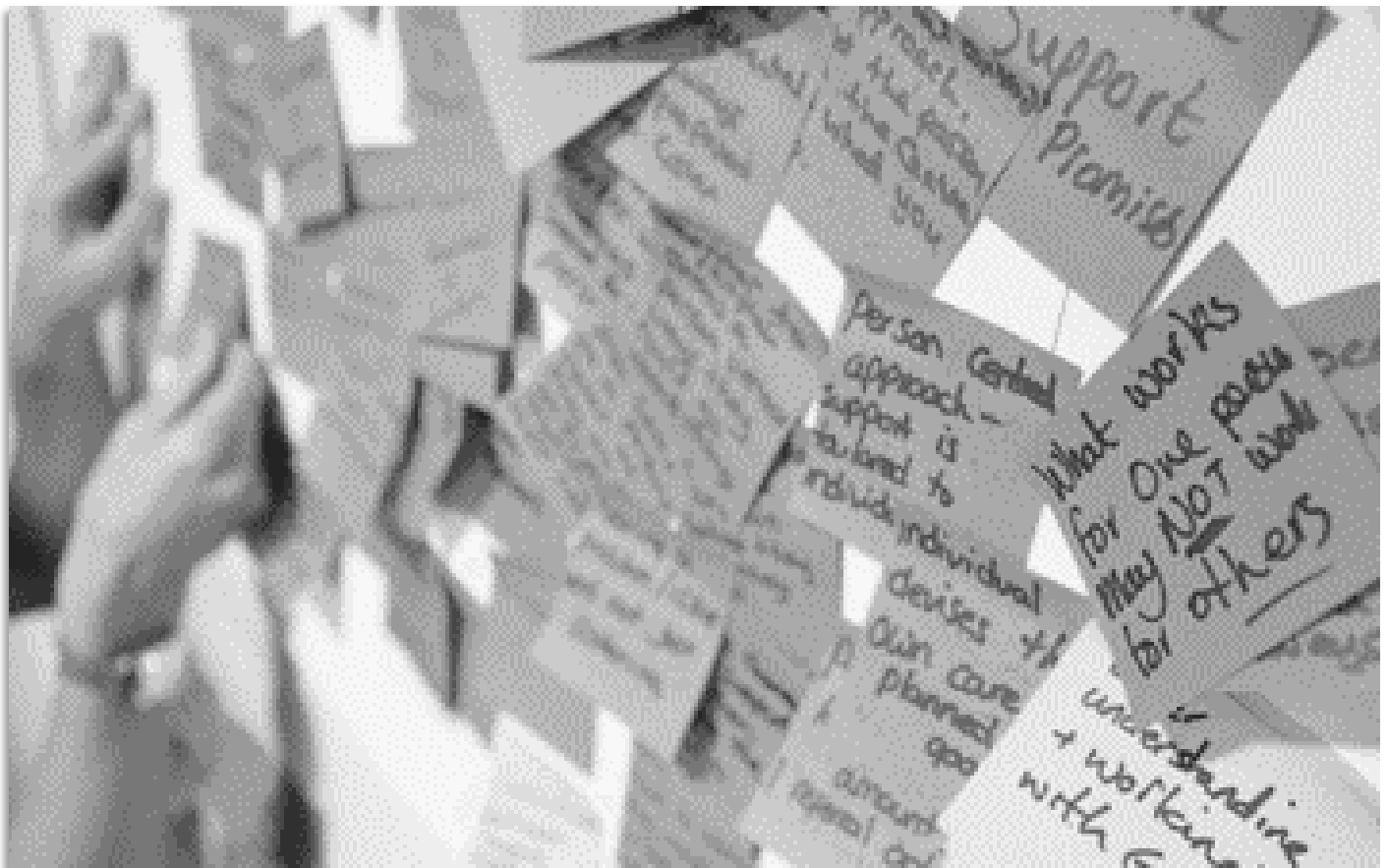
This report summarises our findings following four COP sessions, between November 2015 and February 2016, where we focused on 'Prison Release Support'. Evidence for our findings is drawn from the application of participant's collective professional and lived experience of services.

Improving support for people being released from prison was identified as the 'work focus' for these sessions. It was prioritised by members as an area which posed particular challenges for collaborative working.

The aims of the COP were:

- To enable staff working in prisons to find out about the new kinds of support that are being developed in the voluntary and community sector and how this can be accessed
- To enable staff working outside of the prison to understand something of the pressures facing staff therein and how they can assist in facilitating safe and timely release
- To explore new and innovative approaches to working with very high levels of complexity and multi-morbidity that cannot be managed easily within current practice and procedural paradigms

We considered two case studies in the sessions. One of these we focused on in some depth (see page



Foreword

This report represents another milestone in the history and development of the Stoke-on-Trent Community of Practice. More importantly it represents a recognition of a range of possibilities for people with multiple needs (and resources!) who have been imprisoned.

Uniquely the expertise which has informed the report comes from people with lived experience; people who have experience of how things are meant to work and what really happens. The COP's ability to draw on the knowledge of a former prisoner and a former prison governor in the same room is part of what sets it apart from the meetings and 'talking shops.'



Practitioners working directly and indirectly with prison services and people with lived experience have brought their energy, imagination and best hopes to meetings. On the specific topic of prison release the themes and actions emerged to provide not only ideas and recommendations but also direct action which has developed practice and improved individual's care.

Years of working in the public and private sectors have left me wary and reluctant when it comes to meetings and yet the COP is the exception. Each meeting reassures me that there is hope for some of our city's most vulnerable citizens and it never ceases to amaze me how resourceful both practitioners and people using services are.

My thanks go to the many contributors who have made this report possible and I would encourage you to share this document as an example of best practice in addressing the culture and practice of health and social care.

Enjoy the read,

Steve Freeman

Chair & Facilitator



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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

From the first session, many working from outside the prison environment perceived a sense of disconnection between their organisations and prisons. In part, this was attributable to a lack of knowledge about the roles and remits of each other's services. A former prison governor was able to explain some of the attitudinal differences which heightened this sense of isolation from each other's work. This helped members that do not work in prisons to understand the views from the 'other side'.

Perhaps inevitably, a range of challenges were linked to communication. Our conclusion was that these were often the result of poor or non-existent information sharing processes. This often led to services being unaware of critical changes such as prison release dates. This is the case in particular for repeat offenders, often serving frequent and short sentences, where the timing of the intervention is critical to ensuring that the right support is available and at the right time.

The group acknowledged that there were instances of individuals being released from prison with no fixed address. This included cases where there was a high likelihood that the outcome would be rough sleeping. It was difficult to understand the reasons behind this as most prisons locally have established resettlement provision. There was a view from those within the prison system that referrals for their clients to supported housing schemes (including hostels) and private rented sector accommodation were frequently declined on the basis that the client's support needs and risk being thought "too high". This may have inadvertently dissuaded prison staff from making referrals to supported housing services and leading them to focus on the more amenable services. Therefore people being released from prison have limited choice and the staff fewer referral options.

Perceptions of supported housing schemes and hostels may be out of date. We felt that there was a scarcity of up-to-date knowledge and information about what accommodation and support provision is available locally that can assist with prison release. Visiting and meeting staff and clients in local supported housing projects including hostels, may help improve awareness of the support on offer, demystify current perceptions and increase referral options. Time spent shadowing services may be useful to create a better understanding of each other's work - a type of local exchange programme between external agencies and prison staff would be useful to bridge the knowledge gap.

Where positive practice has been implemented, external agencies have benefited from being invited to help with pre-release planning at an early stage. Through this activity, they have been able to begin the process of engagement with the individual. In so doing, joint care and support planning can address methods of assessment, referral, reviews and arrangements for release from prison. Despite an overwhelming amount of information available on the benefits of joint working, e.g. the development of integrated offender management approaches, it is often down to the individual worker to bring services together to ensure a safe and successful release from prison.

Examples of good prison release described experiences of being well supported, where a supported housing service had visited them in prison and talked with them about what to expect. Another example was where a specialist women offenders service met with clients in prison which gave more options for them in the community.

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES

Services that are willing and able to visit individuals in prison gives the person a sense of hope and purpose leading up to release.

- Multi-agency working occurring while the individual is in prison
- People with multiple needs may require a more flexible and creative way of working, this needs to be recognised by management of services as well as staff
- More accessible housing and wider choice, for example more single housing units as well as shared options, is required for people with multiple needs being released from prison
- People with multiple needs should be given the opportunity to access services from which they may have previously been excluded
- Services need to consider a balance of risk and give context to the often challenging life situations that the person has experienced
- People require a coordinated approach to their support planning especially nearer to their release, to work towards reducing reoffending

There are instances of good and effective partnership working for prison release. We concluded that these need to be backed by a local protocol for prison release independent of length of sentence.

Any such protocol should be jointly developed, owned, and implemented at relevant levels by the local statutory sector, voluntary sector, people with lived experience (such as Expert Citizens) and other community or faith based provision. At a strategic level, Safer City partnerships, Commissioners and Local Authority could review how partnerships can be better facilitated through local structures such as prevention and multi-agency panels.



DEVELOPING A LOCAL PROTOCOL

A local protocol could build on the good work already done locally through Integrated Offender Management into a broader and more consistent system. This will bring together all of the agencies that can assist in ensuring that people are released from prison in a planned way. Central to that plan must be ensuring that adequate accommodation is available for people on release, with any necessary support in place and coordinated. The protocol will also set out clear procedures to be followed from the start of sentence until release and agree the roles and responsibilities of the different agencies.

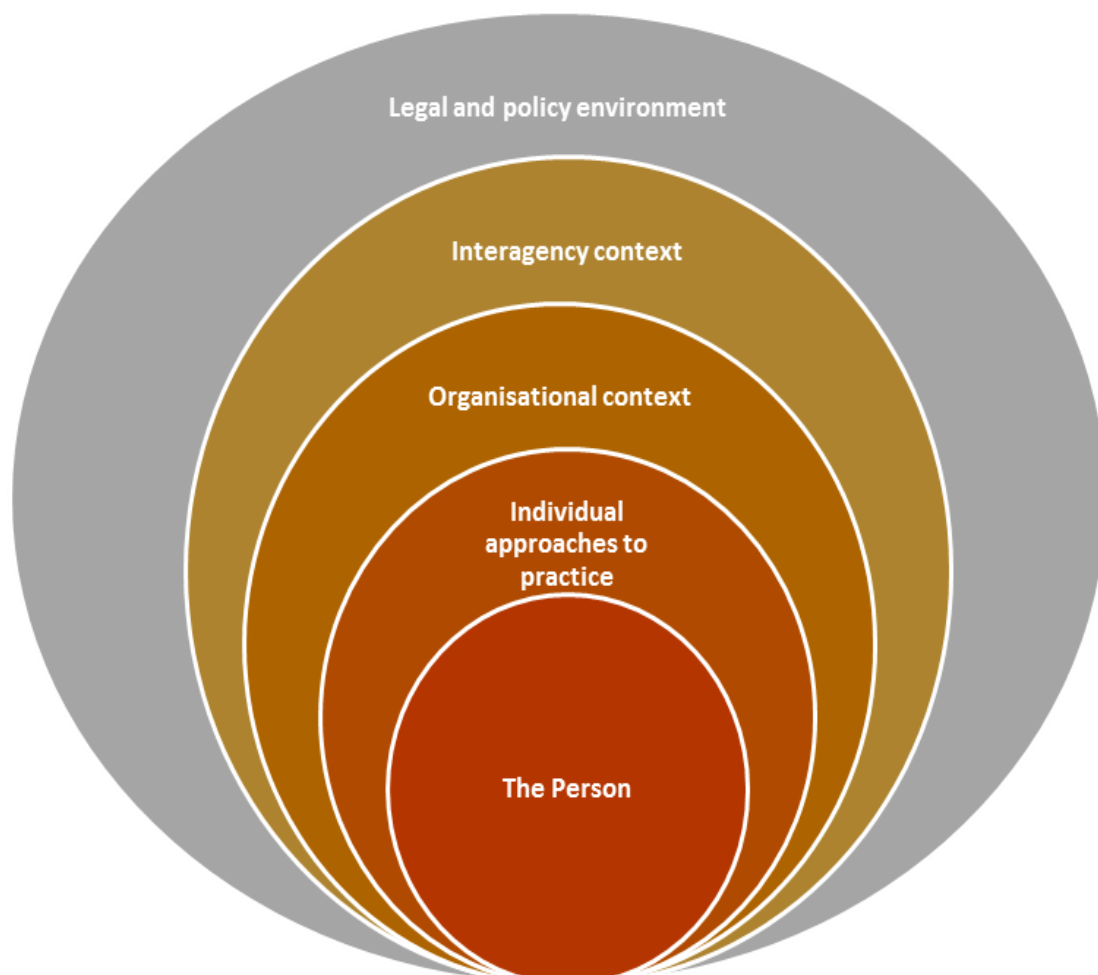
Any protocol will include agencies working towards the following aspirations:

- People leaving prison will have had their housing and support needs assessed in time to make appropriate referrals as soon as a housing need is identified
- People should not be released from prison unless all efforts have been made to secure accommodation appropriate to their housing and support needs
- Staff working in the prisons will have sufficient information and training to be able to make appropriate and timely referrals to housing and support agencies
- Staff working in all agencies will know who to contact to help to resolve any problems which arise in the process
- Agencies will work together effectively to jointly resolve housing problems and by preventing potential homelessness
- Priorities will be identified through regular meetings at a multi-agency 'Prison release panel' with information passed to the relevant agencies for action
- There needs to be a specific focus on comprehensive planning for the release of short-term prisoners with multiple needs (especially those with histories of numerous sentences).
- People should not need to repeat their story. A full assessment of the person's health and social care needs should be conducted prior to release. This would better inform continuity of the person's support when returning to the community.

And, be underpinned by the following principles from design stage to delivery:

- Every level involvement: listening to voices of lived experience and the staff that help them
- Help from the top: A co-produced North Staffordshire Prison Release Support Protocol that partners agree and implement
- Overcome attitudinal differences 'culture clashes': mutual ethos and shared goals
- Joint working : co-location and shadowing
- All around the table : multi-agency panels for prevention and support
- Cross sector learning: Communities of Practice
- Shared responsibility: share information and share risk

People with multiple needs being released from prison taps into several contexts within the system. This can include the following: the individual person, approaches to professional practice, the organisational context, the interagency context and legal and policy environments.



Stephen's Story: A 'vicious circle' of frequent and short prison sentences

Stephen is in his 40s and estimates that he has spent around five years out of prison in his adult life. When he was not in prison he would be frequently arrested and sometimes attended A&E due to drug overdoses. Since having support from a Service Coordinator through VOICES, his contact with the police has almost ceased and he is complying with his probation appointments, testing negative for drugs.

Support from his Service Coordinator is helping Stephen to live outside of prison away from crime, for example help with bills, support to cook more and the provision of a few basic items such as a TV and a sofa when moving into his house. .

Stephen describes a lack of interest in Service Coordination when they first attended prison to introduce him to the service, thinking it was a 'standard, 'say this, do nothing', dead-end thing'. However he continued to attend visits from his Service Coordinator in prison and then met regularly with them on leaving prison – at first at the local police station then in his home

“ *I have done it straight this time and I value it. I have never been given a chance before.* **”**

Steve

Stephen describes his life now as 'one million times different. *I have done it straight this time and I value it. I have never been given a chance before.*'

He is complying well with his probation officer, maintains a script and has had very little contact with the police. He describes VOICES as having a 'major role' in terms of 'influence and support' especially as he does not have family support. Of particular importance have been help with bills and managing a tenancy and setting up a lasting home.

Tara's Story: Engaging people with services and services with people

Tara is 24 years old and has a history of mental ill health, offending behaviour, homelessness and substance misuse. Tara has a history of being excluded from accommodation services and has been homeless many times when she has engaged in sex work to fund B and B accommodation. Offences include 'threats to kill', 'possession of a weapon', 'actual bodily harm', 'Section 18 assault' and 'grievous bodily harm'.

A Service Coordination Meeting was organised prior to release, attended by professionals involved in her support; a Service Coordination Plan was created and, within 3 days of release, Tara set up her own bank account; claimed benefits; registered with a GP; obtained medication; attended a probation appointment; attended a One Recovery Hub and had a follow up meeting with her Care Advocate from prison. Tara was provided with Peer Mentor support and returned to an educational course that she had previously started.



On separate occasions two managers from a local supported housing schemes visited Tara in prison – Tara was made a 'priority for housing' with both organisations. The flexibility shown had a positive impact. Tara began to see services as helpful, flexible and engaging.

Since her release Tara has not offended, she is engaging more with services and has reconnected with family. Tara's view on services has changed for the better, which means that Tara can and will seek help if and when she needs it.

Evidence for findings

Name and biography of facilitator

Steve Freeman is a Solution Focused Practitioner and Teaching Fellow at Keele University School of Medicine. Steve's clinical background is in addictions and mental health, working as a practitioner, advisor and manager. A career as practitioner, trainer and supervisor in addictions, mental health and research has included individual and group work. Steve now works as a Teaching Fellow at Keele University School of Medicine and has a freelance practice as trainer, supervisor, coach and facilitator. Steve is currently chair and facilitator of the Stoke-on-Trent Community of Practice and works closely with its host organisation VOICES.

Case studies used and where to find them

Pages 11,12: Stephen's and Tara's Case Studies

Research, articles, reports and other documentary evidence considered

<http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/partnerships--development/research-network/literature-review-series/common-concepts-for-recovery-and-desistance/>

This new report highlights common themes in research into recovery from mental illness, recovery from substance misuse, and desistance from crime, based on the literature in three different disciplinary fields.

<http://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/basic/files-downloads/Developing%20a%20Criminal%20Justice%20Network.pdf>

This guide is for VCSE organisations working in the CJS, and those who support them. It gives advice on how to set up a network of VCSE Sector organisations to help organisations collaborate, learn from one another, and develop a strategic voice to influence commissioning and other decision making including Police and Crime Commissioners.

<http://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/null/Introducing%20Desistance%20-%20August%202013.pdf>

Guide provides an accessible summary of some of the key themes in the desistance literature. It focuses on how the voluntary sector can use the theory to demonstrate the success of their work supporting desistance to policy-makers, funders, commissioners, other partners.

<https://lemosandcrane.co.uk/resources/managing-your-money-checklist08-788.pdf>

A checklist to help people leaving prison plan ahead for their release.

<http://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/basic/files-downloads/Six%20Principles%20for%20Engaging%20the%20VCS.pdf>

Research, articles, reports and other documentary evidence considered (continued)

Guide designed to provide partners from all sectors with easily accessible information on key aspects of the CJS.

<http://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/basic/files-downloads/Navigating%20the%20Criminal%20Justice%20System.pdf>

This edition of *Do it Justice* is aimed primarily at organisations who are new to the CJS and want to find out more about how it works, who is involved, and where they can engage.

<http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/documents/the-social-care-needs-of-short-sentence-prisoners/>

A literature review of the social care needs of prisoners sentenced to less than 12 months imprisonment. The review also covers screening and assessment processes to identify the needs of this group, as well as best practice at meeting these needs.

<http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/documents/revolving-door-prisoners-what-works/>

A summary of research into the needs of short-sentence prisoners and case studies suggesting possible models of intervention with this group.

<http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/2.Better%20Together%20-%20full%20report.pdf>

Understanding how homelessness and criminal justice agencies can work together to support clients.

Findings for this report were collected and written by

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