

Peer Mentors under TR: the new Advise, Assist and Befrienders?

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FOREWARD

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ABSTRACT

The role of Peer Mentors was highlighted as a key part of the Transforming Rehabilitation programme, despite concerns by practitioners and academics regarding implementation difficulties. Semi structured interviews explored the views and experiences of peer mentors and service users during Autumn 2015, a year into TR implementation. Key themes included the impact of volunteering on the barriers facing ex offenders, the importance placed on shared experience in improving engagement, and the perception of a 'Them and Us' divide with probation workers. Findings contribute to an existing evidence base of a disparity between Government rhetoric and frontline implementation, and concerns around limited resources available to reduce reoffending rates. Recommendations include creating a pathway for service users at the end of sentence into mentoring and for the probation service to consider why service users may view mentors rather than staff as those interested in their rehabilitation.

INTRODUCTION

'When someone leaves prison I want them to already have a mentor in place...often it will be the former offender gone straight who is best placed to steer the young prisoner back onto the straight and narrow'

(Chris Grayling speech to Centre of Social Justice 2012)

Mentoring was seen as a key part of the 'Through the Gate' programme, part of the Transforming Rehabilitation agenda, which brought prisoners serving less than 12 months into statutory criminal justice services. The need to successfully bring down the reoffending rates for this hard to reach "revolving door" offending group was part of the rationale for opening up the probation service to privatisation in order to "*capture the skills of the specialist organisations, many in the voluntary sector, who have so much to offer.*" (Grayling, 2012). This research project seeks to shed light on the process of mentoring offenders within the context of the Transforming Rehabilitation agenda.

The first section of this introduction will briefly set out the role of the voluntary sector in criminal justice before exploring the impact so far of Transforming Rehabilitation from a voluntary sector perspective. The second section will focus on mentoring and its current evidence base.

The role of the Voluntary Sector within Criminal Justice

Voluntary sector involvement in criminal justice is nothing new, in fact the origins of the Probation Services can be said to follow from the work of Victorian Court missionaries. The umbrella organisation Clinks, who support voluntary sector organisations (VSOs) who work with offenders, estimate that there are 1750 organisations whose main client group is offenders, and 4916 organisations who work non exclusively with criminal justice clients. Although some VSOs are large national charities, for example Victim Support, NACRO and SOVA, the vast majority are small and medium sized organisations set up to fulfil a local need.

The attractiveness of the voluntary sector to policy makers can be seen in the way it complements a number of strands of recent political thinking. Its appearance of being 'cost

effective' and providing additional resources to cash strapped public services in order to 'do more with less', chimes with the austerity agenda and the older managerialist approach to public services (Gregory 2010) taken by successive governments. However, it also fits with the idea of localism due to the sector's predominance of smaller organisations working at a local level to address local problems, and the (now seemingly out of favour) big society ideal of increasing social capital and working within the local community.

However, Hedderman and Hucklesby (2016) warn that *"the very characteristics which make involving the voluntary sector in service delivery attractive to funders, also make them hard to evaluate in the sorts of ways which government and other funders increasingly require"* (p.117) stating that small scale organisations generally lack the capacity and expertise to fulfil the monitoring and evaluating demands of public sector bodies increasingly require.

Corcoran and Grotz (2016) argue that because of the "common sense" idea that volunteering is a "good thing" there is a lack of exploration in both empirical research and any debate on the "dark side" of volunteering; which they describe as including the potential for exposing volunteers to harm, harmful relationships being developed between volunteers and offenders and issues around mismanagement.

The current context of Transforming Rehabilitation

Transforming Rehabilitation (TR) was the name given to the significant changes made to the Probation Service by the Coalition Government's Ministry Of Justice. They split the Probation Service into two, with one side; the National Probation Service (NPS), remaining with the public sector and responsible for completing reports for Court and the management of high risk offenders. The remainder was split into 21 geographical package areas, named Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRC) and opened up to bidders from the private and voluntary sector. There was an expectation that CRCs would build a supply chain of additional companies to provide specialist interventions. In addition to the above changes, the Government announced that, for the first time, the CRCs would also undertake supervision of prisoners sentenced to 12 months custody or less, which was called the Through the Gate programme.

Just as voluntary sector involvement within criminal justice is not new, the more formal role for the voluntary sector did not begin with Transforming Rehabilitation. In 2004 the Carter Report can be said to have introduced the idea of breaking up the public monopoly of criminal justice services, and the creation of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) in the same year provided *'a second wave of enthusiasm for diversifying providers and including the voluntary and community sector'* (Martins et al 2016 p.17). New Labour's Offender Management Act (2007) formally created the mechanisms for commissioning of services from the voluntary sector as well as the formation of Probation Trusts. The variable and patchy nature of commissioning since then, has, according to Martins et al (2016) left *'the scope for the sector to play a more significant role in delivering rehabilitation and resettlement support in prison and beyond the prison gate...(as)fairly limited'*. (p.18)

When the Transforming Rehabilitation (TR) agenda was announced, the Government heralded the opportunities for Voluntary Sector organisations to bid for probation services either alone or in partnership with private and public sector providers. Alternatively they could become second or third tier providers in the commissioning chain. A report by the New Philanthropy Council (2015) states *"Throughout the process MOJ said it wanted the voluntary sector to be involved at all levels....Ministers and Civil Servants regularly praised features of the sector such as its experience, integrity, closeness to local communities and potential for innovation...."*

Despite these claims, when the Transforming Rehabilitation contracts were unveiled, no charities who had bid to run Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) as a "prime" were successful and private sector partnerships won 20 out of 21 competitions. A recent National Audit Office (NAO) report on TR (2016) concluded that *'voluntary bodies were largely unsuccessful'*.

The NAO report also stated that the failure for contracts to be awarded to the voluntary sector was *"due to their more limited resources and appetite for risk"*. However a round table discussion published by the New Philanthropy Council, looking at the TR process from the perspective of the voluntary sector, believed they were instead undone by last minute rule changes requiring a 'parent company guarantee' and a belief that they were only ever 'bid candy' to provide the appearance of a diverse market of bidders. The report states that

the result of the TR process exposed a tension within Government between the policy rhetoric and stated commissioning intentions—which sought voluntary sector involvement; and procurement teams who sought to apply strict commercial terms. ...the interests of the MOJ commercial and procurement teams prevailed and the choice was made to minimise financial risk to Government and to get the best economies of scale available (NPC report 2015 pg 2-3)

If the voluntary sector did not do well at bidding stage, what has the situation been like since then? The NPC account also highlights that TR was also impacting on other funding streams, as independent charitable funders and local commissioners were questioning whether it was still their role to fund initiatives linked to rehabilitation and resettlement, as there was an expectation that the CRCs would be doing this.

A preliminary survey of 156 voluntary sector organisations (VSOs) was completed by Clinks and the Third Sector Research Centre in August 2015 to gauge the impact of the reforms a year in. Findings highlighted that only a small number of the larger VSOs reported having been able to secure contracts with the CRCs to deliver services. There still appeared to be little clarity about what services the VSOs would be delivering or how they would be resourced to do it. The slow pace of change was causing a 'state of limbo' impacting on strategic planning and making staff retention difficult.

The above mentioned NAO office report, cited by Rob Allen (2016) also reports that there had been initial problems with Through the Gate resettlement services, including that '*some providers encountered challenges in accessing prisons and mobilising their resettlement suppliers*'. Allen (2016) contrasts this with a Prison Inspectorate report on HMP Lewes which reported that a survey of prisoners which took place in Winter 2015 found that '*a much lower proportion knew anyone in the prison who could help them on release than in 2012- whether with problems relating to accommodation, employment, finance, education or drugs*'.

Based on the above, concerns raised by Maguire (2016) about the "*major risks and challenges*" posed by Transforming Rehabilitation for the voluntary sector, can be said to be being realised. This introduction will now focus specifically on mentoring.

What is Mentoring?

Fletcher and Barry (2012) state that mentoring is a difficult concept to define, encompassing a wide range of 'helping' activities including guiding, coaching and practical assistance by an individual with some form of experience or 'expert' knowledge. They further define 'peer mentoring' to involve mentors who *'speak the same language and have walked in the same shoes'* (p.2)

Hucklesby and Wincup (2014) state that *'mentoring activity is now widespread and can be found at all stages of the criminal justice process and with all types of offenders'* (p.373). Figures from the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (MBF) (cited by Fletcher and Barry 2012) identify 3000 different UK mentoring and befriending projects. Under this umbrella term a range of different interventions take place within criminal justice; Samaritans Listening schemes have operated in England and Wales prisons since 2004, there is mentoring of offenders on community sentences by the Offender Engagement workers in the London area (Rico, 2015) and the pilot Ministry of Justice Social Impact Bond scheme, supporting prisoners leaving HMP Peterborough. All three of the above schemes utilise "ex offender" or "peers" to mentor service users, but this is not a feature of all mentoring projects currently working within criminal justice and it is unclear as to how many mentoring schemes use ex-offenders.

SOVA, a large national voluntary service charity, record demographic statistics on their volunteers, including whether the volunteers have disclosed a previous criminal background. Their records for 2014-2015 indicate that around 1 in 10 of their volunteers had disclosed a previous criminal conviction. (please see Appendix 1) It is of course noted that this figure only pertains to individuals happy to disclose their conviction and that data may vary year on year.

Mentoring can be linked to the concept of desistance; in that by providing the opportunity of increasing an individual's pro social relationships and providing encouragement of more positive lifestyle choices , it has the potential to reduce the likelihood of reoffending.(Brown and Ross 2010)

Like volunteering in general, mentoring is seen as attractive because of its 'cost effective' nature (Fletcher and Barry 2012), and the legitimacy found in the voluntary, less formal relationship, contrasted to the more traditional and authoritative worker-client roles (Brown and Ross 2010). Peer mentoring in particular is seen as providing appropriate 'identity

models (Maruna 2001 cited in Fletcher and Barry 2012) as they can demonstrate that a life away from offending is achievable.

However, Hucklesby and Wincup (2014) argue that the '*fiscal advantages are overstated*' and the move of mentoring into mainstream criminal justice is more about increasing the reach of the State. For example, now monitoring short sentence prisoners, who were not previously subject to statutory service involvement. Finally they argue that

Mentoring follows the well trodden path of interventions, including restorative justice, which when bolted onto or incorporated into a punitive and coercive criminal justice process transform into practices which bear little resemblance to their original principles. (p.374)

What does existing research tell us?

In a NOMS analytical summary Taylor, Burrows et al (2013) reviewed 23 international studies published between 1990 and 2012 on mentoring with adult offenders with the aim of identifying evidence of direct relationships between mentoring and reduced reoffending. They stated that due to the considerable variation in the aims, content and nature of the mentor-mentee relationships, and the lack of good quality research evidence, it was "*difficult to generalise about effectiveness and good practice*" (p.1) The report focused on intermediate outcomes which were directly or indirectly associated with reducing reoffending such as employment, housing improved family or community relations or attitude or motivation to change. Their analysis indicated that there was 'tentative' evidence that mentoring programmes were associated with positive outcomes around employment and engagement in other interventions or programmes.

Brown and Ross (2010) looked at post release mentoring for women prisoners in Australia, where clients were recruited inside prison and provided with support upon release. They found a high rate of attrition amongst clients immediately after release, but those who did engage typically maintained this for an extended period. Interviews with mentees found that those who had engaged did so due to a '*readiness for mentoring*' and an appreciation of the relational value of engagement. However, they identified a link between engagement and the need for an 'accommodating lifestyle' in that '*for women with extensive drug and alcohol*

problems, or other types of chaotic post release lifestyles, the problems of the moment seemed so overwhelming that mentoring seemed both unmanageable and irrelevant’ (p.41).

Research specifically looking at the impact of peer mentors within criminal justice is limited. Three mentoring pilot schemes examined by Hucklesby and Wincup (2014) identified barriers to using ex offenders as mentors, including some criminal justice agencies being unwilling to work with this group due to security concerns and more practical issues around security clearances to prisons which meant that despite goodwill and intentions no peer mentors were used.

Fletcher and Barry (2012) undertook an expert consultation looking at potential barriers to successful peer mentoring scheme. It is noted however that participants did not include any frontline workers or mentors, instead concentrating on the views of managers responsible for recruitment, management and training. Barriers included the concern that policy makers appeared unwilling to resource mentoring appropriately leading to claims they were “merely paying lip service”, and the wariness of Prison Service and some Probation Services around the use of peers due to the ‘risk averse’ nature of the organisations, which also appeared to lead to a reluctance of employers to recruit peer supporters to paid positions.

Some smaller scale studies have interviewed peer mentors and mentees. Kavanagh and Borrill (2013) interviewed eight male ex offenders working with St Giles Trust in London as mentors to offenders with the aim of exploring what they felt they gained from their mentoring experience. Although benefits included the work being rewarding, being mutually beneficial and providing self satisfaction, the negative or more challenging aspects included dealing with failure and frustration as well as managing risk. The participants shared the view that their status as ex offenders positively impacted on their relationships with their clients both due to shared experiences but also as practical examples that change is possible.

Buck 2014 completed ethnographic research interviewing peer mentors and their mentees. She highlighted the *‘tangible barriers to peer mentoring in the criminal justice system’* (p.52) and the difficulties in making the transition from “prisoner” to “member of the public”. This included the barrier of a criminal conviction to both future paid employment but also voluntary work and training. Buck (2014) also introduces the idea of the peer mentor being a *“‘civic expert’ with a unique and privileged knowledge”* (p.56).

In conclusion, despite positive views of mentoring and volunteering at policy level, there are some concerns regarding a limited quantitative evidence base for success at reducing reoffending as well as concerns regarding implementation issues which have emerged from the existing qualitative research.

The aim of my research will be to examine how the implementation of Transforming Rehabilitation has impacted on peer mentoring for my participants, and by exploring the views and experiences of peer mentors and 'hard to reach' service users I hope to contrast the rhetoric of Chris Grayling's quote with the reality of frontline experience in order to contribute to the current thinking and research in this area.

METHODOLOGY

The research involved semi structured interviews with peer mentors, service users and a volunteer co-ordinator. Semi structured interviews were adopted to reflect the exploratory nature of the research, in which I aimed to gain access to the perspectives and understanding of participants.

Recruitment of participants

Research participants were sourced from the area in which I worked as a probation officer and the majority of participants were known to me, the others being put forward by colleagues aware of the nature of my research. The volunteer mentor provider was part of a large national charity with long standing experience of training and providing volunteers to the previous Probation Trust

Nine participants took part in the research, comprising of four volunteer ex-offender or peer mentors, four service users and one interview with a paid volunteer co-ordinator who provided relevant information regarding the current service delivery and a background to the mentors' experiences.

Mentor Selection

The four peer mentors were either current or past volunteers with the volunteer mentor provider, and had a range of mentoring experience; from assisting in an employment and training group, to one to one work, to intensive mentoring, and duration; ranging from six months to six years. Between them they had worked in at least four different office venues within that probation area. Two were male, two female and a range of ethnicities were represented, although all mentors were from a similar age range (25-40). Two of the four had, in addition to their voluntary work, undertaken paid employment for the Probation Trust/Community Rehabilitation Company in additional capacities, which enabled experience of paid mentoring to be discussed.

Service User selection

Three of the four service users were prolific offenders supervised by the Community Rehabilitation Company that I worked for, and all three had been under my supervision in the past, although for ethical reasons I did not interview anyone I was currently working with.

These individuals were selected in part because they had all been mentored by volunteers on a one to one basis, and also taken part in a group paid peer mentoring project run locally for prolific offenders by one of the mentor participants.

Prolific Offenders are an offending group who regularly receive short term prison sentences, either due to the frequency of their offending or lack of compliance with community sentences and as such their views on peer mentors and through the gate services appeared particularly pertinent. It is acknowledged by the very fact I was able to contact, arrange and carry out the interviews, that all three individuals were, at the time of the research being completed, relatively stable which is not representative of the prolific offender caseload in general.

The lack of attrition could be due to the care taken to arrange interviews in convenient times and locations (for example to coincide with their probation appointments or 'signing on' for bail at the police station) but could also be linked to their prior knowledge of me and the strength of feeling they held about the research subject, both of which could have impacted on the overall findings.

The final service user had just come to the end of his supervision by the National Probation Service (NPS) but also had considerable experience as a peer mentor, both in custody and in the community working for a local substance misuse charity, where his role was defined as a peer recovery worker. He was recommended to me due to his interest in working in a paid mentoring capacity. Again, while no claims are made for him being representative of all NPS service users, his perspective provided insight into alternative mentoring schemes both in custody and in the community.

All of the service users interviewed were men, two White British and two Afro-Caribbean. Two were in their twenties, one in his late thirties and one in his fifties. The lack of females and the higher than representative level of ethnic minorities in my sample, along with the high proportion of prolific offenders, prevent any claims that the sample were representative in anyway of the local offending population.

The small sample size and methods used to procure participants can be said to limit any generalizability from my research but provide a snap shot of relevant frontline views on peer mentoring within the current criminal justice context.

Data Collection

Interviews for all service users took place within Probation or Police offices, whilst mentor interviews took place within a mixture of Probation offices and mutually convenient public locations.

Although questions were tailored to whether they were mentors or service users, all participants were asked about topics which were based on the initial aim of the study and refined further based on previous research findings. (A typical interview schedule and consent form being found in Appendix 2). Interviews were transcribed and thematic analysis used to identify emerging patterns within the data.

During the data gathering phase of this research, September to November 2015, contract negotiations were taking place between the volunteer provider and the new Community Rehabilitation Company. As such there had been a break in the service provided, which was referenced by some of the volunteer mentors and co – ordinator in interview.

Ethical considerations

The NOMS Regulatory Ethics Framework for research applications was adhered to, with consideration given to potential ethical implications for participants and all data kept locked away and on password protected devices. In order to protect the anonymity of certain participants, pseudonyms have been used, geographical details are kept to a minimum and organisations are not named.

Insider research issues

This research was undertaken as part of the Graham Smith Research Award 2015, managed by the Probation Institute and permission given by my then employer, a Community Rehabilitation Company. It can be defined as ‘Insider Research’ for the following reasons. The aim of the Graham Smith Award was to provide practitioners with the opportunity to research an area of criminal justice policy that they were interested in.

Asselyn (2003) states that qualitative insider research aims to 'better understand phenomena from the participant's perspective and view of reality'(p.100). Advantages include ease in accessing the field and participants, less time needed to develop a rapport with participants already known to you, as well as an insider already having some knowledge of organizational processes and structures including jargon and language. Disadvantages include the potential for unconscious bias and the possibility that using participants known to you can impact on your findings. It was therefore important to reflect on my own position as a white female probation officer and how this, and my professional relationships with some of the participants, may have impacted on my interpretation of the findings. The use of a reflective journal, coupled with regular discussions with other researchers, were strategies put in place to reduce any unconscious bias.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section has been split into two parts. The first summarises key themes which came up from the research. These included the benefits of peer mentoring, the importance placed on shared experience, a perceived divide from professionals and service users, and barriers to employment for ex-offenders. The second focuses exclusively on the participants' views and experiences of the Transforming Rehabilitation changes and ends with recommendations made by participants. Findings summarised here will be discussed with reference to previous research and criminal justice theory in the Discussion section.

Section 1: The Impact of Peers, Shared Experience, Us and Them

The Impact of using Peer Mentors:

"I wish I'd have had a peer mentor when I was going through what I was going through.

(Mary, volunteer)

"I wanted someone that had experienced it, even if it wasn't a mentor, I just wanted to speak to someone that had been there and changed their life". (Martin, service user)

All participants believed using peer mentors improved engagement. Service users spoke about believing that *"offenders would open up to people with an offender past "* and that they would be *"more likely to listen to (peers)"*. One mentor, referred to as Tom, stated : *"in the last six years ... I do find if you're sitting down with someone, so an offender, and you come from an offending background, you would definitely get more engagement."* Other mentors expressed similar statements.

The importance of Shared Experience

A number of factors appear to be behind the attraction of and improved engagement from peer mentors. There was an overarching theme around the importance of shared experience. Participants spoke about the shared experience providing an element of understanding;

"... not that a person who hasn't got a criminal background doesn't understand, they do understand, but on a different level."(Nick, mentor)

"A peer mentor will understand fear of change and the thought process people have when coming out of prison" (Paul, service user)

"To know how hard it is, what they're feeling, how hard it is to do something when someone that hasn't had that background might struggle to understand why they're doing these things, why can't they just stop this" (Tom, mentor)

" he knows how to word things, he'll say it to me in a way that I know what he means" (Sam, service user)

There was also the idea that peers held 'specialist knowledge' based on their experience

“yeah, you can sort of see when someone’s sort of slipping and they’re not meeting you like they did in the first place and stuff like that... And when you look back, you think, well when I was in that position,.. this is probably what I’m doing and that’s why I’m not answering my phone and ...So yeah, you can sort of see where it’s going. “(Tom, mentor)

“He will know that I know what he’s up to/lying to me. Professionals don’t know when they’re being lied to. If someone really wants to deceive me they will but I’d what to look for (if I was a mentor)” (Paul , service user)

Finally, there was the respect for the individual in turning their life around which provided a big pull to engagement

*“I’m (a) visible inspiration...proof that you can do stuff”
(Anthony, peer recovery worker)*

*“To be a volunteer is a big thing. To go from a drug user/criminal to getting rid of drugs and crime and having nothing to being a volunteer takes a lot”.
(Sam, service user)*

*“I think obviously coming from the background that I do, so from a criminal background, being on drugs and everything else, that did give me an extra sort of thing with the guys that ... he’s been there, he’s done it and now he’s trying to help me sort of thing. So I would say I have maybe a bit more of an engagement with the probably harder to reach offenders”.
(Tom, mentor)*

‘Special Individuals’

In interviews certain participants spoke passionately about the specialness of a particular mentor to them: in one case it was a peer mentor working with the service users being

interviewed, in other cases it was the volunteer co ordinator who had supported them, in another it was someone who had undertaken their training.

“the guy who does the training is , how can I put it, he’s very inspirational, very meticulous in how he delivers his training, he’s very, he’s just, he’s a really good tutor, he’s a good co ordinator, he knows his stuff, he’s an ex user himself, he’s just got a passion about him this, you know...”(Anthony ex service user and peer recovery worker)

“I’ve taken 45 minutes out of my time today and I couldn’t be doing anything better right now – if no one ever gave feedback about him (Tom) everyone would just think he’s a normal person and he’s really not he’s definitely different” (Sam, Service user)

*“the process was rigorous. But they made it a lot better each step of the way....what I got from them continually was not an assurance that you will get this position but an assurance that you’ve got our support and we’ ll try everything to get you started.”
(Carol, mentor)*

‘Them and Us’

Another theme identified a perceived barrier between professionals and service users leading to a “them and us” divide.

“they tell us things they’re not going to tell you...Because they think we’re normal, they don’t consider you as normal ... They think we’re normal.” (Mary, volunteer)

“It’s alright someone from the outside looking in, but ..because they’ve never experienced it theirselves. ...Like for example people with addiction, someone that’s never had an addiction isn’t going to be able to tell someone with an addiction to quit.” (Martin, service user)

“I definitely remember (when I was a service user) having this feeling of she just doesn’t get me, we are from two different worlds, she’s read this in a book...I needed somebody who could have at least said, you know that I’ve been there or I know somebody that’s been there, not just I’ve read this in a book .. a lot of the clients I’ve worked with are very much on that page.” (Carol, mentor)

These impressions of probation staff would appear to have real implications for engagement, and rehabilitation. Carol continues her above point saying *“And that put my back up, so I would miss, you know, miss appointments. I think I went on holiday and I wasn’t meant to go on holiday”*.

Nick, a mentor, spoke about working in the ‘job club’ (employment and training group) and how he felt that as there was no clear distinction between him and the probation staff it *“probably made engaging with (service users) a bit more challenging”*. Another mentor Tom, stated *“(service users) don’t feel that (mentors) are trying to slip them up and catch them out and stuff like that.”*

When this divide was unpicked further, there appeared to be a belief that there was judgement from probation staff that was not there from the mentors, Sam stated *“ it was easy to work with someone who had a past. Rather than judge you he knows, he’s been there and done it”* . Paul also believed that ex offenders can’t judge service users due to having had similar experiences. This was contrasted with his view that

“Most professionals in the criminal justice system look down their nose at you. Because I mean they’re in a job where they think they’re there to punish you or whatever, yeah. So obviously they’ve got to ... you are doing something wrong,... But there’s a difference between thinking you’re better than me and being in authority over me” (Paul, service user)

Other participants appeared to corroborate this view that professionals could be judgemental:

“it’s better, even for the offender managers, not necessarily to know that that volunteer is an ex offender because we’ve had experiences in the past where certain peer mentors have been judged because they’re peer mentors by members of staff” (Sabrina co-ordinator)

“you will get sort of probation, police, that almost don’t look at the clients as, I would say people, more as they’re offenders. And so a lot of labelling and judging” (Tom, mentor)

There was also an idea from service users that Probation officers were not interested in rehabilitation in the same way that mentors were.

“Because you know they’re doing it because they want to.

Like Probation, for example, they do it because they get paid for it really don’t they?” (Martin service user)

Voluntary vs Paid

“There’s something as well about them knowing that you’re not getting paid for it, they actually feel, wow, you really are here for me, this isn’t, you’re not getting paid for this, you actually, you care, so I’m going to care about me for a moment too. And I think not getting paid really highlights that, not that it should, but it does” (Carol, mentor)

This concept of the voluntary aspect of the role being important, with people mentoring because they felt passionate about it rather than being financially remunerated, was further unpicked when the concept of paid mentoring was discussed.

A range of views were received; advantages included the way mentoring could provide employment but also motivation to change for ex-offenders. Paul spoke about how paid mentoring would be attractive for people who had been in and out of prison and would struggle to fit into society and access employment:

“So maybe if you could get a job doing that, it would make you feel much better, wouldn’t it? .., because you’d be working with people that you know, you know you could do something in this job. I mean like I’d feel much more confident mentoring somebody than you. But I wouldn’t like ... feel more confident ... If we both worked

like say in Marks & Spencers “ (Paul, service user)

Anthony, who had experience of being an unpaid recovery worker for a substance misuse charity believed it was important to prevent volunteers being taken advantage of: *“Because your work is no less important than anyone else in that building..So why aren’t you getting paid for it? Why are you only getting paid your lunch?”*

However, there were also real concerns it could dilute the intentions of those mentoring

“if money is involved, people are going to start doing it for the wrong reasons. If I start doing it now then I’ll get paid in six months. Working with people that they actually don’t really want to help.” (Carol mentor)

“Most of the people in jail who are doing it(supporting other prisoners), are doing it because

it gets them out of their cell and they’re getting a bit of money on their canteen sheet!” (Martin service user)

There was a unanimous consensus from service users that paid mentoring should be a reward for volunteers who had proved themselves, and that there should be safeguards put in place to prevent attracting people for the wrong reasons

“people who volunteer they re coming here because they want to help people i think if they’ve proven themselves, after a year we could pay them.” (Sam)

“I believe that a volunteer should volunteer for a period and if he’s good enough or she’s good enough, she should after a probationary period get paid, or be offered the chance to be paid or continue as a volunteer.” (Anthony)

“not if you put it in the Jobcentre and say, oh peer mentoring, £8 an hour, do you know what I mean? ...anyone can say, yeah, I’ll do that, it’s work. Whereas if someone has volunteered for it, they’ve volunteered because they want to change someone’s life, then turn round and say, well you know what we’ll offer you a contract or something” (Martin)

Benefits for Professionals working with Peer Mentors

Benefits for professionals appeared to fall under two main streams: the first being around the volunteer improving engagement and honesty; both mentors and service users spoke about how service users were “*more open*” with mentors than with probation staff, because if “*you’ve got someone that’s been there and done it, you can communicate automatically,*

you slightly can click with that person” (Sam, service user) and this meant that probation officers “get to know things that they wouldn’t” (Mary, Mentor)

*“..Because most people, most people look at Probation and say, you work alongside the police, you’re a Government agency, I’m not telling you nothing. „But then if you put someone else in front of you that said, oh well I’ve been in the same position you have but I’ve changed my life and now I work for Probation kind of, or on behalf of Probation, you’re then more like to open that person, open up to that person”
(Martin, service user)*

Mentors spoke about having a ‘huge responsibility’ and the need to be open about disclosing what was said to probation staff. Service users appeared to accept the need for this, discussing issues around the need to disclose issues around risk (for example being in possession of a gun) and even suggesting ways to make this work:

“Only way round it is to sign a disclosure agreement -if you sign that piece of paper, yeah, and that puts you that if you say anything to me, I’m going to disclose it, I’m telling you that at the start – and then review it every 2-3 months so you can’t pretend you’ve forgotten” (Sam, service user)

The second main benefit for probation was the fact that volunteers were able to ‘take some of the workload off’;” *If a mentor is helping certain people in the community, it gives probation the chance to focus on more serious stuff” (Sam, service user).* Mentors were seen by both sets of participants as a resource for probation and appeared to accept it as part of today’s criminal justice system.

“Professionals especially in this organization are pulled from pillar to post...they are stretched with an abundance of caseloads and a double abundance of work on top of that. So having a mentor can only alleviate some of the pressure and stress, and what I presume it does is allows the probation office to focus on things they’re meant to be focusing on and not the little dribble drabbles that come up, like my housing benefit form and this and that form....so I think if they’ve got a mentor at least everything gets looked at rather than I’m really sorry but I’ve only got ten minutes

and we've got to deal with why you were ten minutes late to your drug test and why weren't you here on Wednesday? – (Carol, mentor)

How Mentoring can benefit Peers

“the peer mentor is getting a buzz out of it and he's getting self-empowerment out of it, he's doing stuff in the community. He's feeling like a member of society. And at the same time he's helping himself by keeping himself, keeping others on the straight and narrow, so it's a win win situation” (Anthony, peer recovery worker and ex offender)

‘Feeling privileged for the trust being put in you’ , “self gratitude that you get from helping someone”, as in Kavanagh and Borrill (2013) research, the rewarding aspects of undertaking mentoring were discussed by mentors, as well as the impact it had on their self identity and confidence.

“seeing someone grow..often peer mentors will arrive and are terrified because ..they don't know whether they're going to be accepted...to see the growth in self esteem is lovely, its wonderful.” (Sabrina, co ordinator)

“the voluntary mentoring, that was my foot in the door, that gave me the confidence and everything else, and the skills, to be able to say, look, I could maybe do this as a business, be able to pay the bills and be able to do something I enjoy doing” (Tom, mentor)

A number of the mentor participants spoke about how they hadn't believed that they would be able to volunteer due to their previous convictions, and that to some extent they had internalised what they perceived as the stigma of their conviction.

“It led to acceptance, that's what it led to, them two being in that room, giving me that application form, and the first thing I said was, oh no, but I've got a criminal record, I can't fill out stuff like that kind of thing. And they said, no don't be silly .And that was the very first time that that door started to open, and I started to believe in myself again, because before I just saw it as me, I'm bad and there's nothing I can do about that” (Carol)

Nick and Carol also spoke in a more practical way about the benefits of their voluntary work to their later employment prospects, i.e. *‘having something on my CV that isn’t just, I left school in 1996 and here are my offences’*.

Barriers for Ex Offenders

5 of the participants (the four mentors and the peer recovery worker) all recounted experiences of how their criminal background had impeded them in employment.

Sometimes it was an internal barrier

“because of my criminal record, I couldn’t do it. I was worried, I waited years before I did it, I’d waited about ten years. I waited because I was scared that they were going to say no. And up until my training with (volunteer provider), I was still scared they were going to say no” (Maria,)

Other times it was organizational or structural: criminal record checks preventing them from even getting a volunteering job (Nick) or their current status on probation failing to allow them to progress with recovery working (Anthony); *“I couldn’t access this particular training whilst I was on probation. That’s what stopped me from accessing the training that would allow me to progress to become a key worker”*.

Some service users genuinely believed that peer mentoring could be a real pathway into employment and desistance from offending;

“if you live a life in prison, in and out, in and out, in and out, yeah, you ain’t ... when you’re thirty, forty, you ain’t going to come and fit into the kind of society and jobs and that lot, you’re not just going to fit in like that..but you could get a job doing this..”.(Paul service user)

Which leads us to the discussion around Transforming Rehabilitation.

Section 2: Awareness and views on Transforming Rehabilitation, Payment by Results, Through the Gate and Recommendations

“We always had a good 20% of the pool had always been peers. Obviously because

of recent changes, that's dropped dramatically over the last year because we haven't been able to recruit because we've been three month extension, stopping, five month extension, stopping. So we haven't been able to actively recruit anybody, let alone peers." (Sabrina, co-ordinator)

Awareness and impact of Transforming Rehabilitation changes

At the time of the research the service users appeared to have only a limited knowledge of the wider implemented changes:

'Yeah, apparently the Govt are taking all the probation workers away or something innit? All cuts and money' (Sam, service user)

'No, I haven't noticed anything. ...I'm still going to my appointments... I know it went private or something but that's about it'.(Martin, service user)

However, mentors and staff spoke about uncertainty and poor morale within the Probation offices they visited, staff losing their jobs as well as the issues around the contract negotiations, in general relating this back to the impact they thought this could have on service users and reoffending

'so I got an e-mail, we cannot see service users from the end of, was it August or September? .. so imagine that you've created a rapport with an individual and they used to come and see you every Wednesday,..... And for some of them probably that was the structure they needed, just to come there on a Wednesday, talk to someone you know, give them a different perspective on life...So yeah, I think there was that something lost due to that disruption' (Nick, mentor)

"at the moment there just seems like there's a gap where everyone's trying to find their feet, and it seems like it's been going on for a long, long time now... , and I understand it's going to take time, but ultimately it's the offender that is going to suffer, and reoffending, and that's what this was all supposed to be changed to help" (Tom, mentor)

“I think the lack of clarity and the uncertainty has gone on for so long. And because we’ve always worked in such close proximity to our colleagues at Probation, it does have a massively negative effect, what they’ve been going through, on our team and our team of volunteers.”(Sabrina, coordinator)

Views on privatisation and payment by results

For some participants there was a concern that local needs would be lost within the large package areas, and that privatisation would impact negatively on what was a public service:

“It feels that this is something that’s meant to, you know, something that’s meant to be in place for society and now it’s been taken over, like Tesco’s.” (Carol, mentor)

“what does Sodexo know about what is going on, you know ... Because having a couple of prisons in whatever area is not going to be the same as it is here is it? Northampton, Birmingham, whatever, isn’t going to be the same, you know, the sort of crime we get here isn’t going to be the same as what we get in London ... Isn’t it going to be like, what we do there is going to fit, one size fits all, no, it doesn’t work like that” (Mary mentor)

Other participants were concerned about the payments by results element to the changes, describing it as *“cherry picking”* and how this would work in practice with hard to reach offenders or if the interventions were not appropriately resourced:

“... alright, you’re going to get your dedicated workers who are going to work with hard, challenging clients because they’re there for that, .. you know they’re old school. But then you’re going to get the ones who are going to say, hold on, if I’m only getting paid (by results), then I’ll choose ones that I can work with and get results with and leave the hard ones ...”

(Anthony, ex service user and peer recovery worker)

“it feels that this isn’t the type of dynamic relationship or organisation that can work on pay by results because we’re working with client groups that are angry, that are resistant, that are repetitive in behaviours.. you know, if it was packing toothpaste into a box and having to get a certain amount in

that box, then yeah, you can pay by results. But it's very difficult to have that in this kind of set-up." (Carol mentor)

The incompatibility of payment by results when working with non compliant cases was well summarised by Sam: "... it doesn't matter what anyone changes in the Govt, yeah, or in the community, yeah, if someone doesn't want to .. change.. they ain't going to do it"

Reaction of Participants to quote by Chris Grayling (2012)

When someone leaves prison I want them to already have a mentor in place...often it will be the former offender gone straight who is best placed to steer the young prisoner back onto the straight and narrow'...

All participants were optimistic about the opportunities set out within this quote, albeit with some caveats. Sam suggested that if service users agreed to engage it should be enforced as part of their licence conditions stating "*i know from experience I'll say anything in jail if it gets me out quicker*"

"I mean in principle that's a really, really good, a really good idea. But in theory, I don't know if it would work. I don't know how the mechanics of it would work. I mean there would have to be a lot of work ... a lot of work put into that, which would mean a lot more work for probation officers" (Mary mentor)

"I'm really pleased that (peer mentoring) came higher on the agenda. However, I think what's happened and why we've seen it tail off a little bit over the last two years is the practicalities, like prison clearance...Because it can't, it doesn't, you know operationally it doesn't work. We said this two years ago. Are all the prisons going to change the, you know, the clearances (security access for individuals with criminal backgrounds)? ... this is the only way it would work "(Sabrina, project co-ordinator)

Austerity and funding issues

Some participants directly related the changes in probation with the wider austerity movement and the need to cut public spending.

“I think it’s really because the Government are so broke now and they can’t afford to keep doing what they’ve been doing, well they’re going to have to start reaching for other things now. I mean come on, Government thinking five years ago, they would have never ever let another criminal go talk to another criminal, you’d have to be out of trouble for at least ten, fifteen years. That was Government thinking. They’re going to change it now.... maybe they’re looking at it because of their financial restraint but they might get it now.” (Paul, service user)

There was also concern about funding and resources going forward

“With the work I do, with regards to sort of what the Government wanted and everything else

and clients ... you would have thought there would have been more funding out there for organisations that are doing work with offenders, but it doesn’t seem ... like there’s no extra pots of money to continue the work, they just want this work done and no one’s really thought

through what’s going on, ...” (Tom, mentor)

“the goal is to reduce reoffending isn’t it?! But if you’re not giving these people enough resources, then you’re not going to get a positive outcome. So you know you’re more likely to see people reoffending because they’re not getting the support they should be getting.” (Nick mentor)

The role of prison in Through the Gate services:

A number of participants spoke about the importance of rehabilitation occurring in a custodial environment :

“I went to the (community drug support) places and all that ,I’ve been there and done it, it did help me but I walked out of there and carried on using. It weren’t until that day when i went to prison and said do you know what I’ve had enough of drugs..” (Sam, service user)

"They need to rehabilitate people in prison. If you rehabilitate somebody in prison, when

they come out, they ain't really a threat. If you bang the door and keep somebody there, you're just making them more wilder, and then you release, open the cage door and let them out, what do they normally do?!"(Paul, service user)

Martin spoke of the importance of mentors developing relationships before service users left custody:

"I think you should try and build a connection while they're still inside...Even if it's just one meeting, so they can meet each other. Because then they have that, oh well that's a familiar face when they get out, do you know what I mean? ...Because most people nowadays, they're institutionalised, they go to prison and because they like the way prisons are run inside, they get comfy, so they think, ooh, I'll come out, I'll go make a bit of money and then I'll come back to jail."(Martin, service user)

which contrasted with the reality for practitioners; who identified barriers linked to difficulties in implementation, security clearances and prison attitude to peer mentors going in:

"it was a bit awkward trying to e-mail and get hold of the probation officer inside (the prison) at the time. And then, I think there was three names that were given to me, two or three names. And then by the time we had actually arranged to meet them, she said that she was sorry but they'd been released early. They were released early on tag" (Tom, mentor)

"an ex-offender going into prison, it's always going to cause alarm bells ...To prison staff.....My experience of being in prison is, ... is that once something outside of prison service comes into the prison establishment, you've got that barrier, it's not ours, like when we done the recovery champions, there was an issue with me going from one wing to another wing....To give someone some support. Because in the eyes of the prison guard, he doesn't care what I'm about because as far as he's concerned, people use churches to deal with

this, why would they use recovery champions ?” (Anthony, ex offender and peer recovery worker)

Various workarounds to the problem were discussed by Sabrina the co-ordinator, for example getting specialised mentors to go into the prison, or the fact that other organisations were getting prison peer mentors to complete the assessments, because prison clearance was such an issue. As such it appears extremely unlikely that the prisoners would meet their peer mentor before they left custody, which appears contrary from what the service users appeared to like about the scheme.

Recommendations

All participants, as representatives from the frontline of the 2015 criminal justice system were invited to provide their recommendations to decision makers and policy holders. Some focused on ways to improve peer mentoring but others spoke about wider issues that they believed to be important:

Carol: *“So a lot of the clients are finding it difficult to get into work anyway, so maybe if it was made a compulsory part of the end of the probation sentence is that they volunteer. So that it’s a full circle. Or at least have a pathway that if they wanted toSo that it is, it’s an option that’s right at the end of their probationary period. Having it kind of in-built into the structure”*

and

“I think there need to be short courses that somebody who is mentoring for the right reasons can still do their day to day job around and be able to achieve new skills to enhance the mentoring that they do for free”

Anthony:

“I think that in order to get prison managers and staff on board they should have joint training sessions with through the gate staff”

“and have service users in the community acting as signposters, for example as health champions, because it works”

Nick:

"I would increase the resources to help people get into employment. I think the most thing that I found that was a barrier to positive results was that there was no adequate support, no funding for qualifications like CSCS card(construction qualification). I think that has a massive impact on the outcomes you know for volunteers, mentors, all the Probation staff, you know. Because if you're not given the resources to provide then some people I guess you know they might find themselves falling back and going into offending behaviour because they've hit the barrier "

Martin:

"They should do a pilot run of paying volunteer mentors. The ones that you believe are actually making a difference, they then turn around and for example say, look here's a 30 hours a week contract if you want it, do you know what I mean? But you might offer someone payment for what they're doing and they might turn round and say, I don't want it, I'm doing it because I want to"

And

"So they should run a six week training course,.... teaching them things like, to deal with certain people's attitudes, how to read body language and know whether that persons just making you believe what they want to hear, an ability to sense when something's not right. And I think they should drug and alcohol test mentors too"

Mary:

"They need to invest money in the mentor training...Because it has a knock-on effect, if you get a good mentor that has a good relationship with a service user that could then not reoffend. Because our ultimate thing is re-offending."

And

" They need more resources in order to train them, it can't just be two people that run the whole of that office, come on. ...They do too much, bless 'em, they have so much to deal with...keep the quality control, expand it, better service"

Sam:

"For service users, to get benefit from a mentor you need to be abstinent from drugs so you can take in what the mentor tells you"

"For mentors there should be some progression like a contract period, you do everything up to standard for a year, then we will reconsider your contract at a payable rate, I'd say a year because six months I could do it just for the money but a year is long enough you've got to be dedicated it's enough time to prove themselves"

And

"(for organisations) they should put it as a condition on their (custodial)licence if this person says yeah I want help..Because these people they're dedicating their time and their lives to everyone"

Tom:

" if we're talking with regards to reoffending and everything else then housing is going to be one of the big key areas ...because there's not the housing anyway, whether you're an offender or not, there's not the housingSo without having that stable background, you can't change, so put some resources into that for offenders"

"also working together, so partnership working and everything else. There seems to be a lot of partnership working going on, but there's always been some gaps in certain areas where people are not sort of necessarily telling the other person what's going on... and so there should be more face to face meetings to discuss whats going on regards the work, I know it takes time out of someone's day but it is the best way to work together"

Paul:

"Need for training for mentors – there's a real emotional impact to the job , it's not an easy job not something you want to jump straight into."

and

“But why do you have to be off licence in order to mentor people? You can see by their behaviour that they’ve made a change and are going straight so they should be given a chance”

Sabrina:

“our chief operation officer always says that volunteers are not free, they’re invaluable. And I think that there needs to be a recognition that you need good, solid, safe recruitment processes, training and support for mentors in this world because otherwise it’s far too dangerous, not just peer mentors, all mentors. And it concerns me that maybe that’s not recognised as clearly as it should be. I think there needs to be a recognition that they’re not free, there is a cost involved. And also, they’re not professionals and they should never, ever replace professionals. This is a value added, not a replacement for a professional.

DISCUSSION

Due to space and time constraints it was not possible to report fully here on areas such as motivation to change, barriers to mentoring, relationships with professionals or qualities, skills and training also identified by the participants. However, mentors' comments appeared to tally with previous qualitative research, for example Kavanagh and Borrill (2013)'s findings around the frustration experienced by mentors due to reoffending, and the challenging aspects of addressing risk, safeguarding and confidentiality.

It is perhaps unsurprising that peer mentors recruited via the co-ordinator would see peer mentoring in such a positive light. It is further acknowledged that in the selection of this group of service users, who were keen to speak about their positive experience of peer mentoring, there may well be positive bias that would not be the case if a wider selection of service users were surveyed. Future research may also wish to approach individuals who applied to become peer mentors and then decided against it, or specifically target those who had negative experiences.

However, all participants especially the service users, made intelligent points about the needs for safeguards, adequate training and potential flaws in the 'common sense' idea of *'the former offender gone straight who is best placed to steer the young prisoner back onto the straight and narrow'*, as well as reasons why mentoring would not suit all ex offenders.

The views of participants regarding the perceived divide with probation staff does in my opinion demonstrate the need for probation to acknowledge how probation workers are now perceived by some service users. The decades of focusing on risk, public protection and the repositioning by the New Labour government of Probation as a 'law enforcement agency', mean that probation workers are, in the eyes of service users, linked more to authority and punishment than rehabilitation. Findings in this study were also shown in User Voice's recent survey of Service Users (2015) where although 54% of respondents felt that probation service should be a supportive agency less than 23% of respondents thought that this was the case in practice.

The perception from participants of the lack of time probation staff have due to deal with the practical and emotional issues of service users, resonated with me as a practitioner, along

with the inevitability that, as the role is being hollowed out to focusing solely on enforcement and public protection, the most rewarding parts of the job will inevitably be signposted to and performed by someone else. However, from an unselfish point of view, the impact ex offenders can have for engagement, providing inspiration and a specialist viewpoint that most probation staff can't, can only be seen as a positive thing.

The voluntary aspect of the role outlined as important by Carol, as well as other participants can perhaps be linked to Donati's theory of relational sociology and the idea of reciprocity.(Donati, cited in Weaver 2013). Because the mentor is giving their time freely, the service user wants to engage and is more willing to consider altering their behaviour. As Sam puts it; *"he's put so much work and effort into helping you and then you feel like you've let him down."*

However, there is perhaps a danger that unchecked, the use of volunteers as a resource by private companies in a non mentoring capacity could lead to the abuse of the goodwill and efforts of volunteers, such as the experiences of Anthony who described answering phones, running groups and, with the exception of completing computer based records systems, effectively undertaking the role of a paid member of staff for the substance misuse charity he worked with. The danger of the "dark side" of volunteering, as outlined by Corcoran and Grotz (2016), would benefit from further research into the experiences of peer mentors in other organisations to examine this view further.

This is another reason why some form of progression from volunteer to paid staff is important, in order to retain exceptional volunteers who are likely to become disillusioned by perceptions they are being taken advantage of, as Anthony eventually did.

Even if payment is discounted, having a pathway for service users at the end of their sentences to become volunteers, should they wish to, appears to have numerous positives. The experiences of all the mentors who participated in the research indicated that they had all been affected by the considerable barriers in society for ex offenders to 'transition to members of the public' (Buck 2014). For them, volunteering was invaluable in leading to them to gain meaningful paid employment, either as a way of boosting confidence or providing practical experience of their skills and pro social attitudes. Furthermore, new contracts with the Community Rehabilitation Company in this geographical area now include targets for

recruitment for peer mentors; which appears to indicate that recruiting peers is seen as advantageous by the commissioning organisations also.

Looking at the experiences of the participants around TR implementation; although at the time of data collection not much had changed for the service users, this can be seen as an example of how slowly the reforms appear to be being implemented. The experiences of the participants of this research appear to tally with the wider experience of service users surveyed by User Voice (2016) and voluntary organisations surveyed by Clinks (2015), referenced in the introduction.

However, the comments made by mentors and the co-ordinator about the negative impact of TR on probation staff echoes recent surveys (Kirton and Guillaume 2015) as well as indicating the potential knock on effect to both volunteers, and realistically, eventually service users.

The concerns outlined in both the New Philanthropy Council account and the Clinks August 2015 survey, about how wider funding is being affected by the TR changes, were seen in the difficulties Tom was having in accessing funding for his paid peer mentoring project. Tom, as an award winning ex offender turned mentor is surely the type of individual that Chris Grayling was speaking of in his 2012 speech and his experience can be seen as how the rhetoric is not matched in reality. It is noted that in recent years the initial enthusiasm outlined by the Minister for Justice for peer mentors has been muted, perhaps because of the difficulties in implementation, especially around prison security clearance widely commented on by academics and practitioners (Fletcher and Barry 2012, Hucklesby and Wincup 2013) and also present in this small scale research .

The other practical issues with Through the Gate identified here add to the wider picture of issues with implementation (National Audit Office 2016, Allen 2016, Clinks 2015) and can perhaps be linked to comments made by Nick and Tom about the need for wider resources, especially around housing and employment. Simply put, mentors cannot signpost or support service users with housing and employment and training if there is no accommodation or funding for training. Without these basic needs being met, it is difficult to motivate service users to desist from offending. As Martin puts it; *“Free bed, three meals a day, free gym membership”* sounds pretty good if you don’t have anything out in the community. As Brown

and Ross (2010) study also showed, lack of an '*accommodation lifestyle*' will inevitably impact on engagement, and not all service users will be motivated to engage anyway, especially amongst an offending population with "*chaotic post release lifestyles*".

However, as shown in wider surveys of community groups and prison inspectorate reports (Recovery Partnership 2015, Allen 2016) access to housing and other resettlement services appears to be worsening and in the current climate of spending cuts and austerity this is unlikely to change anytime soon.

In conclusion, a number of academic commentators have identified real concerns for the voluntary sector due to the disparity between government rhetoric and the actual implementation of the Transforming Rehabilitation. This research can be said to form part of a growing body of evidence that on the ground these reforms are yet, two years in, to improve situations for those most at risk of reoffending.

However, the recommendations from many of the participants for a pathway from end of sentence to volunteering has the potential, if implemented with care and appropriate resources, to increase the possibility for desistance for service users, and potentially reduce the internal and external barriers for ex offenders to be reintegrated into society.

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APPENDIX 1:

Demographic data indicating number of peer mentors:

I have had sight of demographic data from SOVA covering registered volunteers to their projects during the financial year of 2014-2015. The figures cover new volunteers registered in the previous financial year (including leavers) and as such can be seen as the pool of volunteers being used during the current financial year, although would not include previously registered volunteers and does include registered volunteers who may have subsequently left.

This includes national data for all of their projects (which includes projects working with young people vulnerable children and families). SOVA have indicated that 63% of their volunteers work within their criminal justice “resettlement and rehabilitation” work stream. Data recorded included demographic data such as age and employment status and also included whether volunteers had disclosed a criminal conviction. (It is possible for some volunteers with a criminal background not to have disclosed and as such this figures are only representative of reported convictions)

Area	No of total new registered volunteers	No who disclosed a criminal conviction	Percentage of total
SOVA North	125	8	6%
SOVA Midlands	115	12	10%
SOVA South	192	19	10%
SOVA Wales	24	4	17%
SOVA (my area)	37	3	8%

This table indicates that the proportion of volunteers with a disclosed criminal conviction in my area is broadly in line with those in other parts of the country and that the proportion of volunteers with a criminal background that work with SOVA, one of the larger voluntary organisations, is around 10%, or 1 in 10 volunteers. (I have discounted the higher percentage figure arising from the Wales data as the smaller sample size appears to have skewed their percentage figure)

It may be that figures for SOVA are not representative of volunteers to other voluntary organisations and that smaller voluntary organisations or those who exclusively work within criminal justice have higher figures

APPENDIX 2:

- **SAMPLE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR MENTORS**

- **INFORMATION SHEET FOR SERVICE USERS**
- **CONSENT FORM FOR SERVICE USERS**

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE MENTORS :

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed by me – previously seen info sheet and consent forms – aware I am interested in peer mentors their experiences views on mentoring and TR agenda.

-brief notes but tape recording so don't miss anything important – can stop interview at any time – further support afterwards.

4 main areas of questions:

1)Background information:

How long have you been mentoring?/Roughly how many cases have you had?/ Amount of sessions generally have with people?

WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO MENTOR OTHERS?

What does mentoring mean to you? definition

CAN YOU TELL ME HOW YOU CAME TO VOLUNTEER AS A MENTOR?

Process of applying – forms interviews waiting periods etc

Training or support had

View on training

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL MENTORING SESSIONS CONSIST OF?

Type of things do in a session / What kind of needs to they have

What type of service users do you support / What paperwork do you have to do

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY YOUR EXPERIENCE AS A MENTOR HAS BEEN LIKE?

Would you say typical of others?

Best/most pos experiences? / Any negative experiences?

WHAT HAS YOUR BEEN YOUR EXPERIENCE BEEN LIKE OF WORKING WITH CJ PROFESSIONALS?

Any specific examples?

Do you think this is different to other mentors? Why?

2:I now want to ask you a little about your previous experiences as a service user and how you think that may be relevant to your role as a mentor (or not)

CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT YOUR PREVIOUS EXPERIENCES OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM?

What type of sentence / Were you mentored?

WHAT WAS THE TRANSITION FROM OFFENDING TO EX OFFENDER TO MENTOR LIKE FOR YOU?

Process / How long /Hoops/barriers?

DO YOU THINK YOUR PAST EXPERIENCES HAVE IMPACTED ON YOUR VOLUNTEER ROLE/EXPERIENCE?

If so how? / Different experience to mentors from non offending background?

Do you define yourself as mentor or peer mentor?

DO YOU THINK THERE ARE SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PEER MENTORS AND THOSE FROM NON OFFENDING BACKGROUND?

Aware of other peer mentors ?

Why do you think people volunteer?

What do peer mentors get out of it that others might not

Barriers for peers?

Benefits/drawbacks for specific groups from using peers?

WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS ON MENTORING QUALIFICATIONS?

Do you have any? Where from? What was training like?

WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS ON PAID MENTORING?

Something done? Something interested in?

Does it differ in any way?

Finally I'd like to look wider at CJ policy:

ARE YOU AWARE OF THE CHANGES TO THE WAY PROBATION IN PARTICULAR IS BEING DELIVERED?

Nps/crc, ttg, diff sentences

HAVE THEY IMPACTED ON THE WORK YOU DO AT ALL? If so how?

IF YOU COULD MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS TO CJ POLICY MAKERS FROM A PEER MENTOR PERSPECTIVE, ABOUT THE CHANGES OR IN GENERAL, WHAT WOULD THEY BE AND WHY?

IS THERE ANYTHING ON THIS TOPIC THAT I HAVEN'T ASKED OR YOU WANT TO MENTION?

Thanks for your time today

POST INT THOUGHTS:

INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM FOR SERVICE USERS

My name is Francesca Marco. I am a Probation Officer undertaking an independent small scale research project under the Sir Graham Smith Award.

You can find out further information about the Sir Graham Smith award here:

<http://probation-institute.org/probation-institute-launches-sir-graham-smith-award-2015/>

My research is focusing on Peer Mentoring and recent changes to the Criminal Justice System under the Transforming Rehabilitation agenda.

I am interested in:

- both service users' and peer mentor's experiences,
- their views on the journey from ex-offender to mentor, and
- what recommendations they would make to people in power.

Methods used in this research will be mainly interviews.

Your name has been put forward as someone who might be interested in sharing your experience of being mentored. If you are interested in taking part in an interview please sign the consent form below.

This research is independent of the Probation Service and is NOT part of any Order or Licence you happen to be on. You have the right to withdraw at anytime.

Ethical approval has been sought to protect your safety, rights and wellbeing.

- All information collected will be kept strictly confidential and not disclosed without permission.
- Personal information will be kept to a minimum and any interview recordings or notes will be stored securely and only used for the purpose of the research.
- Whilst complete anonymity can't be completely guaranteed, every possible effort will be taken to protect your identity in any published results.
- If the interview brings up any negative feelings arrangements can be made for you to speak to someone afterwards. Let me know if you want me to arrange this
- If you are interested in becoming a Peer Mentor yourself I can refer you to relevant organisations – let me know if you want more information about this

If you prefer not to be interviewed, that is fine and wont affect your current Order/Licence or any Mentoring you are currently having.

If you have any questions about this, please contact me Monday-Friday 9.30-5.00pm
on XXXXX XXX390.

Francesca Marco

CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEW

Title of Project:

What can we learn from the experience of Peer Mentors within a Criminal Justice setting

Researcher: Francesca Marco

1. I confirm that the purpose of the interview has been explained to me and that I have had the opportunity to ask any necessary questions that I may have about the process and what will happen with this information.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.
3. I understand that the interview will be recorded, but that all records will be locked away/stored electronically in password protected software and destroyed within 12 months of the project completing. Any quotes published from my interview will be made anonymous and care will be taken not to identify me via a direct quotation.
4. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant:

Signature of Participant:

Date: