CLiNKS

supporting voluntary organisations that work with offenders and their families

good practice guide

# Good practice in service user involvement

## from the voluntary sector working in criminal justice

**£12** where sold

Photo: © DaveBolton / iStockphoto.com | Library image posed by models

# Contents

1 **Introduction** 4

2 **Service user councils:** *User Voice* 6

3 **Prisoner engagement project:** *Healthwatch Peterborough* 10

4 **Liaison and diversion lived experience team:** *Revolving Doors Agency* 14

5 **Prisons healthcare procurement:** *WY-FI and NHS England Health and Justice* 18

6 **Changing the world together:** *Women's Community Matters* 22

7 **Older prisoner forums:** *RECOOP* 26

8 **Further information** 31

**Acknowledgements**
Researched and written by Laura Thorne | laura@confluence-partnerships.co.uk / www.confluence-partnerships.co.uk

Published by Clinks © 2016. All rights reserved.

Unless otherwise indicated, no part of this publication may be stored in a retrievable system or reproduced in any form without prior written permission from Clinks. Clinks will give sympathetic consideration to requests from small organisations for permission to reproduce this publication in whole or in part but the terms upon which such reproduction may be permitted will remain at Clinks' discretion. Clinks and the author are not legally trained or qualified. Any information or guidance given in this publication should not be taken as a substitute for professional legal advice. Clinks is unable to accept liability for any loss or damage or inconvenience arising as a consequence of the use of any information provided in this guide.

Clinks is a registered charity no. 1074546 and a company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales no. 3562176.

Front cover photo: © Rawpixel / Shutterstock.com | Library image posed by models

# 1 Introduction

For more information and resources, see: www.clinks.org/criminal-justice/service-user-involvement

Anawim, Birmingham | © Ian Cuthbert / cuthbertdesign.com

# Introduction

The people and families who have direct experience of the Criminal Justice System are a vital source of intelligence about how to make services work best. Involving service users is key to the difference we can make in the lives of offenders; which is why Clinks is committed to promoting and supporting effective service user involvement to inform criminal justice policy and practice.

The voluntary sector has a long history of pioneering service user involvement in the Criminal Justice System. Clinks' members, such as Revolving Doors Agency and User Voice, have been at the forefront of the drive to recognise the value of service users' voices and draw on their experiences to shape the services they use.

This report showcases six current examples of best practice in service user involvement from the sector. The case studies have been selected to represent a range of different approaches, models, voluntary sector organisations and aspects of criminal justice; with the aim of providing as broad a range of examples as possible, elements of which could be replicated elsewhere. The selection presented here is in no way exhaustive; and in many cases we could have drawn on multiple examples of similar models from different organisations or establishments.

This report is intended to inform voluntary sector organisations and criminal justice partners about different models of service user involvement in use, and what has made them effective and successful. Our aim is that you will be able to learn from these examples and put this good practice into action in your own organisation or context.

Each case study identifies key project outcomes, elements considered to be essential requirements for setting up and sustaining the project, and some of the main challenges experienced along the way.

## Criteria

The best practice examples were selected on the basis of a number of considerations including:

- How representative and involved are the service users?
- Are there good quality procedures? For example, are minutes published and action points carried forward?
- Is there top level support from senior management?
- Is there a clear strategy for the project?
- What are the perceptions of the service users involved?
- Is there confidence and mutual trust between service users and staff involved?
- Do service users (and staff where relevant) receive support, guidance or specific training for the role?
- Are diversity and equality issues monitored?

Most projects were considered a work-in-progress and have acknowledged where they would benefit from further development. All of the projects meet in full some or most areas of the criteria above.

## Methods

Having compiled a long list of twelve projects that were potential examples of best practice, the researcher conducted telephone interviews and developed 'pen pictures', a short description of each initiative and its main strengths and challenges, from which the final six projects for inclusion were selected. The researcher then visited the projects and conducted semi-structured interviews and focus groups with service users, volunteers, staff and other key partners.

2 User Voice

# Service user council

© Image Point Fr / Shutterstock.com | Library image posed by models

> ***The more time you spend with service users, the clearer your understanding of the problems becomes. User Voice has given me the platform to contextualise and present it in a way that can make a difference and lead to change.***
>
> Council member

## Background

User Voice exists to enable and promote productive collaboration between service users, commissioners, policy makers and service providers. With over 85% of staff having an offending background, work is led and delivered almost entirely by people with lived experience. This gives a special ability to access, gain the trust of, and gather insight from people within the Criminal Justice System.

User Voice works to achieve its aims via service user consultations and research; and through councils which provide a platform for service users to have a voice, both within prisons and in the community for Community Rehabilitation Companies, Youth Offending Teams, and other services. Both prison and community council models share common approaches and principles, though the different environments require slightly different delivery methods.

## Community council model

User Voice is working in two-thirds of the Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) to establish its service user councils. Anyone that has been on a community order within the past two years is eligible to become a council member. All council representatives (reps) receive accredited training, developed and delivered by User Voice. Once qualified, council reps engage with current service users in probation reception areas and other community services to identify issues and recruit new reps. Feedback from this process is collated by the reps and discussed at regular proposal hub meetings. Members collectively develop a proposal or proposals to present at the subsequent council meetings in the community, chaired by senior staff within the CRC, usually the chief executive.

A number of principles underpin the council model:

- The councils are 100% user led.
- They are independent. User Voice does not deliver services in the traditional sense so there is no inherent bias or conflict of interest.
- The council model is democratic. The community in which the council operates selects its members. This minimises the risk of 'professional service users' being recruited by services.
- Discussions are issue-based, not personal, making sure they are representative of wider community issues.
- The model is solution-focused which validates it in many organisations' minds.

> *"Our proposals have been taken seriously and have led to change. We see the results of our proposals which makes the whole process credible."*
>
> Council member

# Outcomes

User Voice promotes a clear theory of change to identify and measure outcomes both for the individuals involved, and on services. The impact on individuals is in the areas of personal and skills development, defined as 'active citizenship'; and the impact on services is that by listening to service users, they become more responsive and consequently cost effective.

> *"This is different from most consultation. I felt valued and was taken seriously at the council meeting. We go straight to the top, to the decision makers. In fact it is not consultation, it is proper engagement."*
>
> Council member

> *"This process leads to change which in itself increases belief in the process on both sides."*
>
> User Voice staff member

> *"Positive changes are happening in probation and my job is to try and speed up the positive changes."*
>
> Council member

Becoming a council rep, engaging in the decision making process and identifying as someone with expertise in the field has a positive effect on confidence and self-esteem.

> *"What this gives you is acceptance. I have to report everywhere, it makes you feel vulnerable but here everyone is of value. We are the experts about criminal justice and they are listening to us."*
>
> Council member

> *"Being on the council gives you employability skills. Even if we don't get a job with User Voice we are learning many transferable skills."*
>
> Council member

> *"I do this because I want to help other people in the system and not go back to it myself. It's a platform to do that from."*
>
> Council member

The scale and reach of the User Voice council model is seen as instrumental in bringing about a cultural shift within the Criminal Justice System and was described by one member as a 'movement.'

> *"It's never been done before. We've turned the culture of the service [probation] on its head and at the same time proved the doubters wrong."*
>
> Council member

> *"User Voice is a barrier-remover and service users are vital to that. It wouldn't have the validity without us and nothing would change there [probation service]."*
>
> User Voice staff member

The opportunity to be involved in discussions and influence the shape of the new probation services is seen as a positive outcome.

> *"We worked closely with probation in the past and achieved things there. But in the past year or so the focus has been on the CRCs and the Transforming Rehabilitation change process to try and ease the transition for service users."*
>
> User Voice staff member

*"The seniors are invested in listening to what we have to say. Everyone has to do more for less so it makes sense for them to get it right. I can see a willingness to learn and that's phenomenal."*

Council member

## Essential requirements

The structure and relative formality of the standardised council model and process is critical to its success and credibility with partners in the Criminal Justice System.

*"Having terms of reference, role profiles and a democratically elected membership professionalises the role and gives it credibility. Council reps receive accredited training so there's a confidence that that brings."*

User Voice staff member

*"The democratic process is vital. It's not one person who decides on our issues, it is a collective and it's open and transparent."*

Council member

*"We have developed a platform from which to present our views and be heard so it's a responsibility to use it properly. How you present information is vital."*

User Voice staff member

The recruitment process for new council reps is dynamic and membership is constantly added to, refreshed and renewed. This not only avoids councils stagnating but also means that as members move on and/or gain employment, the council and process is sustained.

*"This model means I always have a bank of people round the table to call on. If a service user has specific questions around substance misuse, I know someone who can help, if it's mental health, youth work, whatever, we have the skills and experience to benefit them around the table."*

User Voice staff member

## Challenges

Managing expectations about the speed, likelihood and extent of change that might be brought about as a result of council proposals can be challenging.

*"Sometimes service users expect to see and hear results straight away and there can be problems with communication. Clarity and honesty is key which is why we receive training in how to approach that."*

Council member

*"We need to learn to manage our own expectations. We understand that our proposals will not always come to fruition but there's open dialogue so we expect to be told why."*

Council member

Depending on licence conditions, the extent to which some council members can be involved is limited. This can undermine motivation and frustrate their ability to be fully 'active citizens.'

*"As a lifer I am limited in how I can engage and that's frustrating and challenging because I have a vast amount of experience and skills to share."*

Council member

Raising awareness of User Voice within the wider community and promoting the opportunities it affords is an ongoing challenge.

*"The relationships between probation officers and User Voice are really good but awareness is not always what it could be."*

User Voice staff member

*"It took one year for me to get nominated to User Voice by my probation officer. I don't think she knew anything about it. They need to advertise the opportunities better."*

Council member

3 **Healthwatch Peterborough**

# Prisoner engagement project

Healthwatch Peterborough:
www.healthwatchpeterborough.co.uk

© Monkey Business Images / Shutterstock.com | Library image posed by models

> ***Everyone knows who the Healthwatch rep is. I go to officers on every wing every day and ask if there's anyone who wants to see me. I log each conversation with prisoners and the outcome or if there's an action to follow up. There's a clear trail which avoids confusion.***
>
> Wellbeing representative

## Background

Healthwatch Peterborough is one of 152 local Healthwatch organisations, created in each local authority area across England as part of the health and social care reforms of 2012. Healthwatch aims to ensure that the voices of people who use health and care services are strengthened and heard by those who commission, deliver and regulate them.

With a large and expanding prison in the city and with prisoners known to have significant physical and mental health issues, Healthwatch Peterborough recognised the need to try to engage with and hear the voices of this vulnerable and underserved group.

## Prisoner engagement pilot

From the outset, this pilot project was a collaborative development between the nursing leads at HMP Peterborough and the chief officer at Healthwatch Peterborough. They devised, developed and delivered bespoke training to two male and two female serving prisoners (identified by the prison as trusted and able to fulfil the role) to equip them with the skills and knowledge required to act as wellbeing representatives (reps) through peer to peer working. Resources, promotional material and engagement practices were co-produced to enable the wellbeing reps to support other prisoners, capture good practice, highlight areas for improvement and promote health campaigns.

Wellbeing reps engage with prisoners on the wings, gather and collate information about issues that are of concern and highlight key themes. Issues are then managed in a number of ways: wellbeing reps support prisoners to raise them directly with staff; wellbeing reps discuss issues with a staff member identified as the wellbeing champion in healthcare;

or wellbeing reps discuss issues with Healthwatch Peterborough staff who escalate them higher within the prison or seek external support as appropriate.

An additional element of the role, devised and developed entirely by one of the wellbeing reps, is to meet newly arrived prisoners immediately after they have seen healthcare staff to ease their transition into prison life.

> *"They open up more to me than they might to staff. I think it's especially important for guys who haven't been inside before and don't know what to expect. It works well and could be included in future training."*
>
> Wellbeing rep

## Outcomes

The prisoner engagement pilot has provided an opportunity for national organisations to directly reach prisoners with key health awareness messages.

> *"Healthwatch Peterborough gave Bowel Cancer UK the unique opportunity to deliver an awareness talk within a prison setting, something the charity has been looking to do for some time now."*
>
> Bowel cancer UK

> *"The idea is to mirror what's going on in the community so it was great that they came in to speak. Some of the men had no idea about these health issues and now they are more informed."*
>
> Prison staff member

The prison has seen a reduction in complaints as a direct result of the prisoner engagement pilot and the prisoners themselves have more confidence in the system.

> *"Since the development of the Healthwatch Peterborough wellbeing reps, one of the major achievements has been the reduction in complaints received regarding medication on arrival at the prison."*
>
> Prison staff member

> *"Sometimes things used to kick off with the doctor but I can help with those issues. Some people had not engaged with a meds review and as wellbeing rep I helped them sort it out, as they trust me more than a GP who they didn't know."*
>
> Wellbeing rep

> *"There have been far fewer complaints and when complaints are logged, they make more sense."*
>
> Healthwatch Peterborough

Operating in a supportive environment has contributed to the success of the prisoner engagement pilot in a relatively short space of time (initially a one-year pilot).

> *"We didn't know initially how we'd engage people but because I can get round every wing, walking round the wings is enough, word gets round. In the future we'll look at focus groups, suggestion boxes, posters etc. but for now that has worked."*
>
> Wellbeing rep

> *"The signposting element has been very successful. One of the reps created the posters himself so they are relevant to the prisoners. He was able to make copies, display and distribute them so they reached a lot of people."*
>
> Healthwatch Peterborough

The prison held a wellbeing day for staff at which the wellbeing reps had a stand, gave out information about the pilot and were therefore able to cascade their learning and knowledge to staff as well as prisoners. Involvement in the project has had a positive impact on confidence and self image.

> *"I have learned a lot, and helped others which I haven't always done. It has changed me a lot. I now think before I speak and want to help others after I am released."*
>
> Wellbeing rep

The project won a national outstanding achievement award for engaging with people who are hard to reach/at risk and is now established as best practice for engagement and evidence gathering, with requests for joint working from both NICE and the Care Quality Commission to support their intelligence on prisoner health provision and delivery.

Healthwatch England has shown a great interest in developing the programme for the whole Healthwatch network meaning that a far greater number of vulnerable people could benefit from a greater awareness of health issues and can have their voices heard in relation to their health needs.

## Essential requirements

Buy in from the top level down is crucial to the success of a prison-based project such as this. Peterborough prison has been supportive of the whole project.

> *"Support goes right up to the Director and the Board, who are aware of the project. We have felt well supported but success does rely on there being a champion in the prison. Our champion in healthcare sat through all the training and took part in it all. She has been an essential component."*
>
> Healthwatch Peterborough

Continuity in the process is important for both staff and reps. It takes time to build trusting relationships and there needs to be an understanding on both sides that there is commitment to and stability within the project.

> *"We needed to know that the reps we trained would be here for a while. We knew they were not near the end of their sentences but they can get transferred. You do need the support of the Board to put prisoners on hold while they are participating. In one case the Director made it possible for the rep to remain at this site when there was a risk they were to be moved."*
>
> Healthwatch Peterborough

> *"Supervision for the reps is built in to monthly meetings with us. It is important that reps know where to go for support in between times."*
>
> Healthwatch Peterborough

## Challenges

Recognising the needs of the wellbeing reps themselves and ensuring they remain within the parameters of the role and do not become overwhelmed is a balancing act.

> *"You mustn't forget the vulnerability of the reps themselves. They are not case workers so need to know when they cannot manage something themselves and get help in."*
>
> Healthwatch Peterborough

Since the prisoner engagement project was a pilot, the number of wellbeing reps initially trained was low and, as a consequence, sustainability beyond the pilot phase has been an issue. Going forward it will be a challenge to strike the balance between providing the intensive, ongoing support needed to reps while also identifying and involving new recruits.

> *"We are looking to re-train and we want the existing reps involved in that. We also want to develop our training manual so that it can be delivered easily and effectively, but we're a long way from being self-sustaining."*
>
> Healthwatch Peterborough

> *"Sustainability is the focus for us now. We had hoped to get the last remaining rep involved in training the new wave of reps but it hasn't been possible. Ideally there would be a cross-over period with replacements shadowing existing reps. However, as we look to retain the next candidate, we are offering an opportunity to be shadowed so that other local Healthwatches (or other organisations) can also deliver this project."*
>
> Healthwatch Peterborough

3 **Revolving Doors Agency**

# Liaison and diversion lived experience team

Revolving Doors Agency:
www.revolving-doors.org.uk

© Iakov Filimonov / Shutterstock.com | Library image posed by models

> ***You'd never put us together as a unified group but the task, and help of Revolving Doors and the Offender Health Collaborative, has meant that we've created a pretty service user friendly service.***
>
> Lived Experience Team member

# Background

Revolving Doors is a charity working across England to change systems and improve services for people with multiple problems, including poor mental health, who are in contact with the Criminal Justice System.

Revolving Doors is part of the Offender Health Collaborative, supporting the national roll out of liaison and diversion services, which came about as a response to the 2009 Bradley Report into people with mental health problems or learning disabilities in the Criminal Justice System. Liaison and diversion places support into police custody and courts, meaning that people coming into contact with the Criminal Justice System who have mental health problems and other social care needs will be better identified and referred to the support they need.

Using funding from NHS England to support its input, Revolving Doors is involving service users in the development of the national operating model for liaison and diversion and is supporting local schemes to embed service user involvement.

### Liaison and Diversion Lived Experience Team

The Lived Experience Team (LET) comprises seven people with multiple needs and direct experience of the Criminal Justice System. The team forms an Advisory Board to the Liaison and Diversion Programme Board at NHS England.

Revolving Doors developed and delivered bespoke training to members of the LET, covering issues such as governance, commissioning, leading consultations and presenting findings. Supported by Revolving Doors, the LET continues to meet on a monthly basis to discuss issues outlined in the programme board papers which members receive in advance. If requested by the team, a civil servant will also attend this meeting.

Following this, two members of the team routinely attend the programme board as equal partners. One of the two places is filled each time by the same LET member and the second is filled by other LET members on a rotational basis.

## Outcomes

Revolving Doors and the LET have helped adapt the liaison and diversion operating model by feeding directly into its development issues raised at consultations with people with lived experience. In addition they held a series of workshops around the country with service users with multiple and complex needs and experience of the Criminal Justice System to test the operating model.

> ***"We've been involved in every level of designing and building the liaison and diversion model. Previously there wasn't a role for service users on the programme board, just a mental health nurse, so we outlined what it should look like. Originally the aim was just to divert people to mental health services but all feedback from service users was that there needs to be holistic support. We have pushed for that and we have broadened the horizons of the project."***
>
> LET member

> ***"What drew me was the chance to get involved in shaping a service. I now work full time and I use annual leave or build time-off-in-lieu to enable me to attend the meetings. The same goes for other members of LET. Everyone is fully committed because it is important. We have shaped the liaison and diversion service that will be rolled out nationally."***
>
> LET member

Members of the LET were interviewed as part of a Cabinet Office Gateway review which found the LET to be an effective model.

> ***"Although the review was looking to reduce the overall number of people on the programme board, they decided after speaking with us that it was essential to keep the two places for service users."***
>
> LET member

NHS England also considers the model to be an effective one.

> ***"I have had the pleasure of working to support many examples of patient engagement and involvement but in the last two years I have been greatly impressed with the Lived Experience Team and what a good name. A model of not only involvement but recommendations with action ... [that] has enabled partnership bodies in both health and justice to truly understand the needs of patients with health inequalities. This is an excellent example of a good grassroots project that really gets it!"***
>
> Head of Public Health, Armed Forces and their Families, and Health and Justice, NHS England

The LET is now spearheading the embedding of peer support into the operational element of liaison and diversion schemes. Following the LET's findings and recommendations, NHS England is working with the team to explore and test how different models of peer support can be incorporated into liaison and diversion schemes, so that people experiencing vulnerabilities while in police custody or at court can speak to someone who has lived experience of similar issues.

## Essential requirements

Critically, the LET is built into the Programme Board's governance structure, giving the team a genuine foothold in decision making. Receiving Programme Board papers in advance ensures that the LET is fully informed and equipped to contribute to and challenge effectively at Programme Board meetings.

> ***"For something like this to work, you must be open minded on both sides. We see the world in a completely different way to them. But we are built into the governance structure. We get papers in advance which means we can engage meaningfully. Service user involvement can be tokenistic but they've taken on board everything we've suggested and made us feel really comfortable. I challenge them all the time and they take it on board. They act on it there and then, engage with us as full members of the board and think about how to respond to our input. We are on an equal footing."***
>
> LET member

The initial training and the ongoing support from Revolving Doors, which they continue to receive even when the LET is well established and experienced, is considered essential.

> *"Revolving Doors are brilliant. They support us and make sure everything runs smoothly. We wouldn't be where we are without all the training they've provided in things like facilitation, commissioning, governance, events, presentation skills, and presenting findings."*
>
> LET member

> *"For this to work you have to put the funding in. We do it voluntarily, apart from expenses, but there has to be money to pay for events, the research elements, all the training Revolving Doors has given us and to cover their time in continuing to support us in our role."*
>
> LET member

> *"Revolving Doors supports the highly skilled team that has developed a deep understanding of NHS commissioning in relation to liaison and diversion. This seems a good model for other government departments to look at and learn from."*
>
> Revolving Doors staff member

## Challenges

The importance of patience and allowing the necessary time for issues to become resolved cannot be underestimated.

> *"Initially they [the Programme Board] didn't get the difference between peer support and peer mentoring. They had not done anything involving proper peer support before so didn't know what to expect. It took a while to help them understand and we had to keep bringing the conversation back to the importance of a peer support role in liaison and diversion because that's what feedback from users had consistently highlighted."*
>
> LET member

Striking a balance between ensuring continuity within the process by engaging the highly skilled and experienced LET and opening up the opportunity to new members and thinking about succession planning is challenging.

> *"Over time members will become further and further away from their own lived experience. However, with this in mind, we are about to refresh membership, to ensure the team includes people with very recent experience of criminal justice and multiple needs. Longer-standing members will act as coaches to new people."*
>
> Revolving Doors staff member

**4** **WY-FI and NHS England Health and Justice**

# Prisons healthcare procurement

West Yorkshire – Finding Independence: www.wy-fi.org.uk

North of England Commissioning Support: www.necsu.nhs.uk

© Monkey Business Images / Dreamstime.com | Library image posed by models

> ***What mattered most was having open mindedness from the people around the table. They told us what we brought to the process was invaluable, that they possibly wouldn't have thought of all the issues we did.***
>
> Expert peer evaluator

# Background

West Yorkshire – Finding Independence (WY-FI) is a partnership of organisations funded by the Big Lottery, led by DISC and overseen by a board made up of experts by experience, representatives from the voluntary sector, delivery partners and statutory organisations. WY-FI aims to improve the lives and wellbeing of people with entrenched multiple needs who do not, or cannot, access services.

NHS England has direct commissioning responsibility for healthcare for people in prisons and prescribed places of detention, those being in this case a high security prison, two adult male prisons, two female prisons and a young offenders' institution and a secure children's home.

With contracts due to end in March 2016, NHS England's Health and Justice commissioning team saw an opportunity to improve patient engagement, locate patient voice centrally within the procurement process and deliver against the NHS England Patient and Public Participation Policy (2015).

Prisons healthcare procurement project
The Health and Justice commissioning team forged a partnership with WY-FI, who had the expertise in involving experts by experience to advise the team about effectively accessing the patient voice in prisons and in the community after release from prison.

Based on feedback from service user workshops held in each of the seven establishments, the Health and Justice commissioning team expanded its bid evaluation team to include an expert with lived experience (expert) for each procurement lot, i.e. two from the male prisons, two from the female prisons and two from the young person's estate.

WY-FI identified the experts, and in partnership with the Health and Justice commissioning team and North of England Commissioning Support (NECS), supported and prepared them to contribute to the bid evaluation process. Each expert evaluated and scored specific questions prior to attending consensus meetings as equal partners with other field experts such as prison governors, GPs, pharmacists, mental health and substance misuse professionals.

> *Ideally, for a truly co-produced project, experts would have been drawn from the group of prisoners consulted during the prison workshops. However, as serving prisoners, having them involved in the provider selection process would have presented a conflict of interest. So that's where the expertise of WY-FI came in. We were identified as being able to secure the expert voice.*

WY-FI

## Outcomes

A positive outcome is the way in which the process appears to have challenged preconceptions on all sides.

> *I was very surprised by how well it worked. I didn't know if they [experts] would have the necessary skills. Feedback from the procurement team was that the quality of their bid evaluation was excellent. They were able to reality check the bids and add a richness of analysis and consideration. They were dedicated, really good and we were pleased with it. It was successful and worth doing.*

Health and Justice commissioning team

> *You could see the prison governors listening and taking on board what the service users were saying. They brought out things that no one else had.*

NECS

> *It's so important that the service user voice is heard and I knew I had something to give. The trusting relationship [with WY-FI] gave me the confidence at the consensus meeting to say what I really thought and I couldn't believe it was being listened to and heard.*

Expert

The project's success has given the Health and Justice team the confidence to be even bolder next time.

> *As a result of the success of this process, we will be bringing our experts in to more elements of procurement, for example when we go through the process again we would also want them involved in the presentations that shortlisted bidders give, so the experts can critique and debate with other professionals. We are now thinking, "Is there anything the experts can't do?", as opposed to how can we involve them?*

Health and Justice commissioning team

Engaging experts in the process in such a meaningful and supported way was also seen as important in terms of building confidence, reminding them of their skills and abilities and using their lived experience in a positive, self-affirming way.

> *Confidence was an issue for me and this has really helped. Being involved gave me the confidence to go with my gut instinct at the consensus meeting and be honest. The support we'd received and the briefing about our role meant we were clear about why we were there. I feel valued and trusted to have contributed to how services will be delivered in prisons.*

Expert

Feedback from the process, including training and support jointly developed and provided to the experts by the project partners, has been collated and developed by NECS into a toolkit to share with other areas interested in the model.

## Essential requirements

From a commissioning perspective, most of the elements considered to be essential focused on mitigating risk within the procurement process and being clear about the value of including patients in the process in a way which was more than just tokenistic.

*"You have to really understand risk management and have a robust business case of what outcome and benefits you are looking for and be able to articulate them as project objectives. Procurement like this is lots of hard work and you can't take short cuts but getting that third party perspective, involving patients/ end users, helps ensure the blueprint is the right one. That is the value added bit."*

Health and Justice commissioning team

*"Having regular project board meetings at which patient engagement is a standing agenda item is important. This meant we had regular and frequent debates about the value of involving service users. We dealt with the challenges as they arose."*

Health and Justice commissioning team

Establishing an honest and open relationship between the Health and Justice commissioning team and WY-FI with clearly articulated roles and responsibilities was seen as critical.

*"The relationship with WY-FI and the fact that they are impartial was key. Even as someone who is a real advocate of service user involvement, they really pushed me out of my comfort zone. I didn't realise that I brought preconceptions with me, we all do. WY-FI pushed me to think differently."*

Health and Justice commissioning team

*"You need the right links to ensure you can identify the right experts to be involved. Their experience needs to be pretty current for them to have the credibility as equal partners with expertise."*

WY-FI

# Challenges

Many of the perceived challenges were fears that largely did not come to pass and seem to stem from the anxieties and preconceptions that all parties experienced.

*"Procurement is complex, evaluating bids is complex. It is a technical and professional job. Unsuccessful bidders can complain if they feel the process has not been properly conducted. It has to be watertight. There were concerns about whether the experts would have the right skills, where would they be drawn from? Would the process be tokenistic? We linked with WY-FI who identified the experts."*

Health and Justice commissioning team

*"There was fear that with prison governors and commissioners round the table, the service users might not feel confident to speak at the consensus meetings. But it didn't come to that and they were genuinely equal partners. That doesn't just happen though, you have to put the ground work in beforehand."*

WY-FI

*"I thought that getting over the stereotype of what a prisoner is would be a challenge but I was never made to feel like a stupid person, you are capable and intelligent."*

Expert

There are a number of situations that might result in experts having to disengage from the process before completion. Striking a balance between identifying enough experts and having the resources to support them properly to enable a successful process is a challenge.

*"The people with lived experience cannot be connected in any way to potential bidders and that poses a challenge in selecting experts to be involved. We don't know in advance who is going to submit a bid and if a provider turns out to be supporting one of the experts they wouldn't be able to continue in the process. That's where having a bank of experts to draw from would be a benefit."*

WY-FI

*"Balancing experts' time is a challenge. There are a limited number of people we can approach to be involved in something like this and inevitably, they will move on at some point. The procurement process runs over 18 months and that is a long time to commit. It can have a negative effect on the experts. We need to think about having a big enough bank of experts who we can actively support and who feel supported."*

WY-FI

**5** **Women's Community Matters**

# Changing the world together

Women's Community Matters:
www.womenscommunitymatters.org

© Photographee.eu / Shutterstock.com | Library image posed by models

**"There's nothing we do that hasn't come from the women themselves. I find it hard to highlight specific examples because service user involvement is a fundamental part of everything we do."**

Centre manager

# Background

Women's Community Matters in Barrow-in-Furness exists to make a positive difference to the lives of women aged 16 and above in the Barrow area. Women who access and benefit from the centre play a key role in shaping Women's Community Matters by participating in its operation as volunteers, trustees and members, creating an atmosphere of empowerment and self-development for all.

Volunteers at Women's Community Matters are all women who have been, or still are, users at the centre. Women new to the centre meet with a volunteer or member of staff for a Gateway appointment at which they can find out about the range of services available and different ways of becoming involved that best suit their needs and circumstances. These include a life skills course to support women with experience of the Criminal Justice System; personal and social development courses; and informal, educative talks on a wide range of topics, delivered by guest speakers, including service users.

Following completion of a suite of courses, participants take the lead on planning a graduation event. Women decide on every element of the event, including invitees and how they will present their journeys. Attendees have included the local mayor, the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), local housing providers and the local MP.

***"After you've done all your courses you have a graduation event. We manage the budget, organise the party, the certificates, attendees, everything. We got the PCC to come, housing and the mayor who gave us our certificates. We made videos of everyone speaking about what they got out of it."***

Centre user and mentor

# Changing the world together

'Changing the world together' is an evolving, co-produced approach designed by women and staff at Women's Community Matters to promote the message that women can influence the world around them and facilitate change. Initially with a focus on domestic violence, women received training in listening skills and activities. They then consulted with over two hundred people in the local community via one-to-one interviews on what makes a positive relationship. The findings from the consultation were developed into a positive relationships charter that was launched at a local community event attended by over one hundred and fifty people. The women presented four possible options for the focus of the next phase of work, which were voted on by attendees.

Following the success of the event, women from the centre formed a reference group to lead on developing further ways of making a difference to their world and sharing their learning with others.

Working with an external researcher, they explored what constitutes a good service and developed an offer of support for other local organisations looking to develop their responses to women, including providing them with feedback and acting as a reference group.

The third element of 'Changing the world together' is currently in development and focuses on forming a research group to collect stories and experiences from women who have used the centre. The women are hoping to produce a series of short films and a book of poetry and stories of survival, aimed at encouraging more women to access the service and become involved in every aspect of its life.

Learning from the whole programme will be disseminated at an event where women will also share and consult on plans in development to influence change at service, local and national level.

# Outcomes

Service user involvement runs like a seam through Women's Community Matters. The women who attend and volunteer at the centre are integral to its existence. Their input is not confined to particular aspects of the service; rather, they are the service.

> ***"Without the volunteers we simply wouldn't be here. It's that simple."***
>
> Centre manager

> ***"The community payback volunteers are great. They have come here through their criminal justice experience but most of them stay on after that compulsory involvement is over."***
>
> Centre manager

The most important outcome from the women's perspective is the confidence they have gained through accessing the centre initially and then through remaining involved as volunteers.

> ***"Sharing my experiences with other women has made me more confident. You form a bond that really supports you to grow."***
>
> Centre user and volunteer

> ***"One lady had been coming here for four years and didn't ever speak publicly. She attended the course for eight weeks and she started sharing."***
>
> Centre user and volunteer

> ***"My daughter says she knows when I've been to the women's centre because I have a smile on my face when she comes home from school."***
>
> Centre user and volunteer

> ***"I've self harmed less and overdosed less since coming here. It's given me the confidence to open up and share with everyone. Now I'd like to set up a self harm support group."***
>
> Centre user and volunteer

The 'Changing the world together' programme has seen some specific outcomes including securing a small amount of seed funding (£5,000) from the PCC to support the growth and development of the programme. In addition to this, the reference group is engaging successfully with and supporting the police to develop a solution-focused approach to better meeting the needs of local women with whom they come into contact.

# Essential requirements

According to the women who use and support Women's Community Matters, the genuine and non-judgemental nature of the service is key to its success.

> *Compassion, empathy, safety, trust, openness, honesty and genuineness are all essential and it wouldn't be what it is without them.*

Centre user and volunteer

> *It's home. It feels like a second home because we're not judged and never classed as a failure or better than someone else.*

Centre user and volunteer

The organisational culture is such that their views and input are considered instrumental, not tokenistic, and that is considered to be different from most other services previously encountered by the women.

> *Having women involved is a completely essential part of the service. It wouldn't exist without us, certainly not as it does now.*

Centre user and volunteer

> *In February we had nearly 900 women coming through that door. That was up over 200 from the previous month. They are lonely, isolated and vulnerable. They come here because there's something for everyone and we know it works because it's what we want to engage with too.*

Centre user and volunteer

> *Everything is collective. If someone has an idea, it's aired and shared. Everyone gets behind you to try it.*

Centre user and volunteer

The level of training, ongoing support and encouragement provided is also considered essential.

> *Volunteers are trained and we can recognise people's reactions and triggers. We get training and 1:1 supervision if we need it every Friday afternoon.*

Centre user and volunteer

> *You get stretched here. They encourage you to try things. You get asked if you'd like to do something and if you have an idea you get encouraged to develop it. I love photography and I've just done a pilot and am meeting [the centre manager] next week to develop it further.*

Centre user and volunteer

> *My experience wasn't wasted. I know I'm helping others. It's OK to have a bad day, someone will pick you up and tomorrow you may be helping them.*

Centre user and volunteer

# Challenges

Women are instrumental in the day to day operational running of the centre and recognise the responsibility that comes with that. Volunteers need to feel capable and resilient enough to support others, and staff need to provide adequate support to large numbers of women to enable this process.

> *You don't know what issues will come up. You need to make a judgement call every time and if you need to, you get your supervisor to help out, or another woman if you know she has those skills.*

Centre user and volunteer

> *You are in a supporting role so you don't want anyone to see you weak. We have to be strong enough to encourage them to be strong. You still have your own problems and sometimes it's hard to switch off. But if you are not in a good place, there's flexibility in the way things run for you to take a back seat when you need to.*

Centre user and volunteer

> *You never become stuck because there's always someone who has your back, either staff or volunteers.*

Centre user and volunteer

Raising awareness of Women's Community Matters both as a means of engaging with more women and also to promote involvement and support from the local community is an ongoing challenge.

> *We want to get local businesses to support the centre. I am going to try and sort out a presentation and invite some of them in for a meeting. We have lots of big companies in Barrow and even if they just donate something for raffle prizes, Christmas boxes or whatever, it all helps.*

Centre user and volunteer

> *You want to help people who've been in the same situation. I want to give back so I volunteer. You want as many women to benefit from it as possible so you want them to know there are lots of different ways to get involved, positions like support volunteer, mentor, general all-rounder, sports coach, clothes bank or fundraising volunteer.*

Centre user and volunteer

6 RECOOP

# Older prisoner forums

RECOOP:
www.recoop.org.uk

© Kristo-Gothard Hunor / Shutterstock.com | Library image posed by models

> ***Any part of society speaks most effectively when it speaks with one voice. The over 50s group is just such a mouthpiece.***
>
> Forum member

# Background

RECOOP promotes the care, resettlement and rehabilitation of older prisoners, offenders and ex-offenders, especially those over the age of 50.

Older prisoners experience a range of issues that are not always relevant to the wider prison population. In recognition of this, and in response to a quote from a prison officer highlighted in an HMIP inspection report, describing an older prisoner as 'no problem, old and quiet,' RECOOP began developing its model for older prisoner forums.

> ***Why Over 50s forums in prison? For the same reason that Age UK support forums through their 'Speaking up for our age' campaign – many older people have difficulty in drawing attention to problems as they 'don't want to be a burden' and this applies to prisoners and ex-offenders too. Older people often don't embrace change as readily as younger people do and it may take longer for older people to adjust to life in the community after prison. They may need higher levels of support to achieve successful reintegration and resettlement. We continue to support prisoners and prison leavers in the community and to raise awareness of the needs of this growing cohort.***
>
> RECOOP

> ***Inmates experiencing age-related symptoms may suffer from a sense of isolation, especially if their conditions include symptoms that are considered taboo.***
>
> Forum member

> ***The masses go to the normal prison council meetings and older prisoners feel intimidated in that environment. It is right that they have an equivalent space where they feel they can say what they want, what is relevant to them.***
>
> Prison Officer

### Older prisoner forum at HMP Dartmoor

The forum at HMP Dartmoor was set up over seven years ago. The original model was designed by ACOOP (Age Concern Older Offenders Project) – now renamed RECOOP – to be entirely prisoner led and run, with a democratically elected committee comprising of chair, vice chair and secretary. Members take their own minutes and the issues raised, along with potential solutions, are fed directly up to the governing governor via a one-to-one monthly meeting with the forum chair.

> *"Having originally been set up and developed with the invaluable support of RECOOP, the over 50s project is now organised, staffed and run entirely by prisoners on a voluntary basis. At a time of continually diminishing funding resources, the importance of this voluntary endeavour cannot be overstated."*
>
> Forum member

Issues are raised by the forum as an entity and no individuals are identified. The only issues taken forward are those considered by the group to be valid and representative of the needs of the over 50s.

> *"We don't pursue personal grouses or beat our heads against brick walls. What we do is follow up problems specific to being in an older age group and less self reliant. We do it responsibly and are gratified that Dartmoor has over a long time now been supportive and energetic in addressing the issues we've raised."*
>
> Forum member

> *"Many of these men have never talked about their problems before, they tend to be quiet. The forum lets them see others are in the same position and they feel safe to share their problems."*
>
> Prison officer

The model promotes ongoing recruitment to the older prisoner forum via wing representatives (reps). This is seen by prisoners as an essential element of keeping the forum fresh and ensuring that the future of the forum is not at risk when key members leave.

> *"Members never allow the forum to wither and die. When wing reps leave there's an ongoing wing rep recruitment process and a constant membership renewal. The structure and approach is greater than any one of its members."*
>
> Forum member

## Outcomes

The successes of the older prisoner forum are varied. An overarching success is that the over 50s in prison have a voice and are able to raise issues they are concerned about in the knowledge that they will be listened to and their needs addressed if possible.

> *"The forum's success has resulted in the over 50s cohort having a higher profile with the governor. We are a voice that has to be taken notice of and we are always there to champion the cause. There have been physical successes such as fleeces, chairs in corridors, stair lifts etc. as well, but this is the defining example of success."*
>
> Forum member

> *"We are taken seriously as a group. That is a major success and RECOOP's input and ongoing support is key to that success."*
>
> Forum member

Another positive outcome has been the development of a standardised approach to supporting all older prisoners entering HMP Dartmoor.

> *"We have helped standardise the process and experience of all over 50s coming into prison. All wing reps have an action plan to follow which was developed by a previous chair and other members. We use this when engaging with all new prisoners over 50 and it means we cover the same issues for all which diminishes their sense of loneliness and isolation and helps them understand how prison works if it is their first time."*
>
> Forum member

Being involved in the forum alleviates members' sense of isolation and loneliness and improves confidence and self esteem.

*"Many older prisoners have a real sense of being not needed and this encompasses family, social and prison life. Adopting the responsibilities of a wing rep for the over 50s so often creates a real lift to an individual's morale."*

Forum member

*"The prison system is set up for young, fit men who can go out to work. Older prisoners cannot always experience a meaningful retirement. The forum offers them companionship and a space to discuss things they would like to see done differently."*

Prison officer

Over the years the forum has also achieved a number of tangible and practical outcomes for older prisoners:

*"So many issues have been successfully raised in the past. Anything from library access for wheelchairs, pension rights, getting a buddy to help you with essential tasks, no longer getting pushed around in the medication queue, getting more and better healthcare ... the list is as diverse as we are."*

Forum member

*"Something that has grown out of the over 50s forum is a sort of sub-committee for people interested in specific issues, for example an external speaker from Prostate Cancer UK and also the Parkinson's Society came in to speak. They talked to the group as they would a patient's extended family in the community."*

Prison officer

## Essential requirements

Certain elements of the forum model are considered to be critical to its success. These include the formal structure, the democratically elected committee and the solution focused approach to issues raised.

*"Creating an over 50s group with a proper constitution and fully elected committee ensures a very helpful level of respect from prison staff and prisoners themselves and prevents the group from degenerating into a disorganised and ineffective talking shop."*

Prison officer

*"The forum structure, with a democratically elected chair, vice chair and secretary is important and elevates the status of the forum. Issues are brought to governors' attention by the forum as an entity not by individuals, and members aim to propose potential solutions so it is not just considered moaning."*

RECOOP

Also critical to success is the level of support and respect for the forum shown by the prison within which it exists, underpinned by the positive and trusting relationship between the prison and RECOOP.

*"The forum's success, now and historically, is due to the space within which we are allowed to operate. It is a benign environment. Seconding a governor to the over 50s has helped promote a close alliance and the governor's office has always been prepared to listen."*

Forum member

*"It does need a champion, someone to take an active interest, who is prepared to keep involved themselves, go onto the wings and check out with the older guys how things are with them."*

Prison officer

## Challenges

The length of time between issues being raised by the forum and having them resolved can be challenging and may result in the process being undermined.

*"Sometimes the timescale is so long people get impatient and seek other avenues through which to pursue an issue. Maybe the meetings should be more frequent or there should be a quicker mechanism for follow up. Failure to respond can be a major disincentive."*

Forum member

Remaining faithful to the model when resources are stretched is a major challenge. RECOOP is no longer funded to regularly support the forum and this, coupled with competing demands

within the prison system, can mean that even when the forum is well established it can be difficult to support as originally intended.

> ***"It needs a watchful eye and a guiding hand. It can't be so structured that they lose their voice, but the wheels can come off if no-one's got oversight."***
>
> Member of prison staff

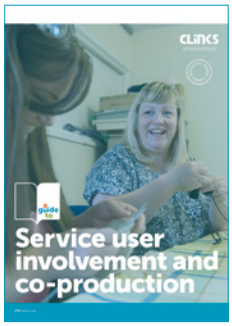
More recently the model has altered somewhat with meetings now being attended by a governor accompanied by a prison officer who takes minutes. While there are some benefits to this approach, forum members are keen to regain control and return to the prisoner led model. HMP Dartmoor intends to try and facilitate this.

> ***"The men should be able to do their own minutes and have access to a laptop to type them up. Sometimes having a governor present might inhibit discussions and take the focus away from the group's ethos."***
>
> Governing governor

# Further information

This report is one of a number of resources Clinks have produced to support better service user involvement:

### Guide to service user involvement and co-production (2016)




The guide is designed to give you the practical tools you need to develop an involvement programme and approach which places your service users at the heart of your organisation. Edited with help from members of Revolving Doors Agency's national service user forum and staff, it provides a structured and accessible introduction to involving people with lived experience of criminal justice in your work, including examples of good practice, checklists, top tips and signposting to further information and support.

Guide to service user involvement and co-production

### Sample service user involvement policies

On the Clinks website you can also download sample policies and templates for service user involvement activities (as referred to throughout the guide), to adapt for use at your organisation or service.

Sample service user involvement policies

For more information and to see all our resources, please see:

www.clinks.org/serviceuserinvolvement

Tavis House
1-6 Tavistock Square
London WC1H 9NA
020 7383 0966
info@clinks.org
@Clinks_Tweets
**www.clinks.org**