



**Reducing Reoffending**  
Third Sector Advisory Group

**Minutes from the Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group (RR3) Special Interest Group on Effective Mentoring Through the Gate.**

**9<sup>th</sup> December 2016**

**RR3 member sponsor – Matt Wall, Community Chaplaincy Association**

**Attending:**

Nathan Dick	Clinks (Secretariat)
Anne Fox	Clinks (Chair)
Matt Wall	Community Chaplaincy Association (RR3 sponsor)
Marie-Claire O'Brian	New Leaf Initiative CIC
Alice Dawnay	Switchback
Zahida Parveen	Mosaic
Lauren Benham	Prison Advice & Care Trust (Pact)
Sophie Wilson	Sova
Justin Coleman	2 <sup>nd</sup> chance group
Baillie Aaron	Spark Inside
Emma Wells	Futures Unlocked
Dee Spurdle	Langley House Trust & Kainos Community
Nathan Roberts	A Band of Brothers
Avril Gibson	Northern Learning Trust
Sharon Smith	Caritas Care/ACE Project
Debb Grantham	YSS
Paula Rogers	Trailblazers

**Apologies:**

Baillie Aaron	Spark Inside (provided comments)
Nicky Park	St Giles Trust (provided comments)

**Summary of the special interest group**

This RR3 special interest group was brought together to discuss voluntary sector delivery of through the gate mentoring services. Sponsored by Matt Wall of the Community Chaplaincy Association (a member of the RR3 advisory group), and chaired by Anne Fox of Clinks (RR3 Chair), the meeting set out to gather intelligence on the nature of current mentoring practices, good practice, and any issues facing the sector in prison and in the community.

# **1. A summary of the evidence gathered from through the gate mentoring providers**

The special interest group started the first session looking at the factor of effective through the gate mentoring services, in order to pin-point what was seen as good practice in this area from the perspective of the service providers. They then discussed barriers to delivering that effective practice and gaps in services or the unmet needs of their service users.

## **1.1. What are the essential factors of effective through the gate mentoring?**

### **a. Common language and description of mentoring**

It was felt necessary for there to be a commonality of language when describing mentoring services. It was felt that the term 'mentoring' was being used to describe services which were fundamentally not providing mentoring services. Participants proposed engaging the views of NCVO's Mentoring and Befriending Foundation to support a sector-wide description of what mentoring services could entail and what they are not. This should include pro-active engagement with commissioners in the Ministry of Justice, prisons, Community Rehabilitation Companies and the National Probation Service, and funders in the charitable sector.

### **b. Culture and relationships with prison and probation staff**

In order to deliver effective through the gate mentioning services several organisations mentioned the need to have a good relationship with prison and probation staff. This requires all staff to understand the roles of paid and volunteer mentors. It is important for prison and probation staff to clearly understand what the service delivers and what it does not. This includes work being undertaken by peer mentors, who may be serving prisoners, or people with previous convictions. For a service to function all staff need to operate in a culture of mutual understanding and co-operation.

### **c. Good data and access to systems**

Mentoring providers were clear that an essential factor of effective practice was to collect robust and meaningful data of their interventions and measures of their effectiveness. In addition they required access to data from other systems through data-sharing protocols in order to understand need and risk assessments, as well as adding their own data to better understand the service user's needs and progress. This should include both quantitative and qualitative data.

### **d. Quality of staff and volunteers**

The workforce, whether employees or volunteers, need to be skilled and trained. A good service also provides supervision and support to the workforce. Where possible services should provide accredited training or relevant qualifications. The service often requires staff to be flexible, adaptable and resilient. They must also have a good understanding of

the issues faced by people in prison and their resettlement needs. They must be able to do this in a non-judgemental way.

**e. Key clearance for staff**

Many services noted that staff should be trained and cleared to carry keys.

**f. Tailor services to individual and develop a clear plan**

It was agreed that services should be led and tailored to the needs and aspirations of the service user. This information should be used to develop a clear plan of action, agreed with the service user.

**g. Time to build a relationship and the ability to provide long-term services**

It was stressed that through the gate mentoring services should be provided to people long-term and that services with short interventions could have negative effects on the service user, potentially increasing their likelihood of re-offending. These services should develop constructive relationships with the service user well before release from prison, allowing for a minimum of 3 meetings prior to release. One participant said that services should be available for “as long as it takes” after release and another stated that relationships should ideally last for a minimum of six months. It was recognised that some service users with lower-level needs may not require long-term interventions.

**h. Consistency and building relationships based on trust**

Through the gate mentoring providers were of the opinion that the relationship between mentor and mentee should be developed in custody and that the same mentor should work with them upon release. This was felt to support the development of a trusting and effective relationship between the mentor and mentee in the prison and back in the community. Importance was also given to the quality of ‘matches’, making sure that the mentor and the service user can work together in a constructive and safe way.

**i. Meaningful contact with emotional and behavioural support**

Through the gate mentoring should be based on a robust assessment of need in consultation with service users and other professionals working with them. The service needs to provide purposeful activity that can lead to positive outcomes, delivering a co-produced action plan that is adaptable to changing circumstances but clear and deliverable.

**j. Mentoring support should be empowering**

Support should allow the mentee to express their own needs and aspirations, allowing them to understand their sentence plan and be empowered to change their lives and circumstances and reduce dependency on services. The support should be largely directed by the mentee or service user’s needs and aspirations, not the mentor or service provider.

**k. Mentoring services should be available to all who need it**

The service should not be exclusive and should be available to all who require additional resettlement support and wish to be mentored. The service should only be provided if the service user consents to it, and it should not be mandated. In order to achieve this, services need to have access to service users that may want support. Referrals to services should be made as early as possible and be appropriate to the service on offer.

**l. Links to the local community and available services**

In order to deliver an effective through the gate mentoring service attendees were clear that they needed to develop stable relationships with other services and maintain communication across a wide range of stakeholders. This required supporting partners to understand the services user's sentence plan and support their rehabilitation and resettlement appropriately.

**m. Acknowledge the diversity and identity of service users**

Services need to understand and respond appropriately to the diversity and identity of their service users. This may require specific services and/or approaches for different service users, for example women, older people, young adults, trans people, people from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities, or disabled people.

**1.2. What are the current barriers to delivering effective through the gate mentoring? Are these the same across all Community Rehabilitation Companies?**

**a. Inappropriate specifications for mentoring services**

It was noted that recent Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) specifications for through the gate mentoring services did not reflect the evidence base for quality. It was felt that this should be challenged. Specifications set and incentivise the direction and behaviour of commissioned mentoring services, and it was felt that this could erode the quality and standing of mentoring services. The contracts delivered on the basis of these specifications often led to low levels of support over a short period of time with a low number of contacts. There was also a sense that services were made to focus on volume (the number of service users) above the quality of what was being provided.

Organisations providing mentoring services were concerned about the trend towards low quality services, and stated that they may have to walk away from providing those services. There was a feeling that competition, and a need to provide lowest cost of services rather than the highest quality, has led to a downturn in the quality of mentoring services.

Organisations also mentioned that contracts can bring with them substantial limitations, for example not being able to support people on remand. They also reported difficulties in services either not being purchased by the National Probation Service (NPS) through the

rate card, or their services were purchased without their involvement. In some cases the services being bought were not considered appropriate for people posing a high risk of harm to the public on release from prison.

**b. Evidence of what works**

There was a sense that we need better systems to research the effectiveness of through the gate service, share good practice more often and roll out services that are seen to be effective. There was a consensus that this doesn't happen regularly or systematically.

**c. Management of commissioned services**

There was a reported lack of understanding from CRC contract managers about reality of delivering through the gate mentoring services. This was thought to reflect poor specifications for commissioned services.

It was also reported that many experienced low levels of referrals from CRC, NPS and prison staff, this was thought to be because services were not communicated or promoted to staff. It could also be the case that risk aversion from staff, a lack of knowledge about referral criteria, or a lack of confidence in services could contribute to a lack of referrals. Furthermore, some referrals were felt to be inappropriate, using up valuable staff time.

Another service noted that after a prison was re-rolled, they had to work in a different prison far away from their main office. This required staff to travel long distances, however, the mentoring provider was not compensated for the additional expenditure for longer travel times and staff costs.

**d. Access to data**

Some services were concerned about the lack of information they receive about the service user, from both the CRC and the NPS, after they had been referred to the through the gate mentoring service. They made the case that this lack of data posed an ongoing safeguarding risk to their staff and volunteers. Many did not have the right data on release dates, had trouble accessing OASys, or found that data sharing could not be done in a timely way because systems or emails are not secure or perceived as not being secure. Risk aversion was also thought to be a contributing factor to a lack of access to data. Unreliable IT systems, and services not formally being a part of resettlement plan were also noted as barriers.

**e. Staff and volunteer recruitment, retention and getting the right training**

Services focussed on the need for them to get the best staff to deliver the right support, but found that training for volunteers and staff can be inconsistent across the system and there was a lack of access to training for working with people who pose a high risk of harm to the public. There was also a difficulty in recruiting suitable mentors (both paid and unpaid) and retaining them (especially volunteers).

People with lived experience were recruited by many as volunteers or staff, however many reported that despite being risk assessed by the CRC to be suitable mentors they were often refused access to the prisons.

**f. Lack of services to refer to**

Mentoring services have historically always referred to a range of voluntary and statutory services. Increasingly through the gate mentoring services are finding that there are fewer local services to refer their clients, or that the threshold for accessing the services (the referral criteria) has narrowed, meaning that fewer people can get the services they need. A lack of mental health and suicide prevention support were provided as examples of this.

This lack of other services to refer to can lead to burnout in the mentors because they are having to deal with issues that are beyond their area of expertise, or more time is taken up advocating for clients at other services. Many other services are reported to be stretched too thin, especially housing services which struggle to find people safe and appropriate places to live.

It was also reported that many local services are uncoordinated, leading to difficulties in addressing the complex needs of their clients; who often require housing, mental health, drug and alcohol services as well as support to address why the other reasons why people committing crimes.

**g. Relationships between through the gate mentoring services and prison or probation staff**

Prison safety has had an impact on services. Visits had been cancelled due to issues with prison safety, restricting access to prisoners.

Some prisons were thought to provide a block to voluntary organisations working within them because of a culture that excludes external providers.

It was felt that the link between prison and community lacked coordination and required stronger leadership from the prison, CRC and NPS. A decreasing number of offender managers in the community was thought to contribute to this issue.

There is confusion as to what is being delivered which can lead to inappropriate referrals to through the gate mentoring services. Attendees reported a distrust among some CRC and NPS staff towards some mentoring services, particularly those that were not in the CRC supply chain. This led to the feeling that CRCs and the NPS had a 'we do it all' approach – where the CRC suppliers have priority in prisons and other resettlement services struggle to gain access to prisoners.

The Industry Standard Partnership Agreement was considered less than helpful and a poor mechanism to outline how voluntary organisations work with CRCs.

The rate card approach adopted by the NPS was seen as a barrier to voluntary organisations working with the NPS.

**h. Low levels of service user engagement**

There was a perceived lack of service user engagement and involvement by many services. Too many people were considered to be working 'on' rather than 'with' prisoners ahead of their release. This lack of user voice/input can lead to disengagement from service users, especially from those with more complex needs.

**i. Logistical issues in prison**

The issue of prisoners being moved close to their release date and prisoners being released from other areas far away from their home address, as well as prisons being re-rolled part way through contracts has meant that services can become difficult to deliver. For example, a re-rolled prison might mean that through the gate mentoring services need to operate from another prison which may be further away from the voluntary organisations main office, this increases the cost of the service due to travel requirements, however, contracts remain un-amended on the basis of this significant change.

The release date of service users can be unpredictable and change without notification (both earlier and later release).

Prisons very often can't provide appropriate places to meet people in prison, especially when discussing confidential and personal issue. Some staff are having to talk to service users through the cell door.

**j. Access to funding**

An issue that affected all providers, whether commissioned by CRCs, NPS, funded by the prison or by charitable trusts and foundations was that there is rarely enough funding to deliver a service at a level that can meet the need in a prison.

There are issues being raised about charitable trusts and foundations wanting to minimise the funding of services which have too close a proximity to public services – in order to minimise the chance that they will be funding public service delivery. A lack of clarity around whether through the gate mentoring is being commissioned by probation services can cause confusion amongst grant making trusts and foundations which negatively impacts on traditional funding streams for mentoring.

A focus on volume over quality in commissioning processes has led to inadequate levels of funding.

The funding for services offered by CRCs and the NPS rarely covers the full cost, therefore many services are likely to be unsustainable.

### **1.3. Where is the unmet need in the current system and how should this be addressed?**

#### **a. Minimum standards framework for through the gate mentoring**

Mentoring has been included in many CRCs as a 'nice to do' rather than an essential service. It was also felt that mentoring services were not well understood by some commissioners. The support that has been commissioned is often very light touch and short term.

A minimum standards framework was thought to be necessary to drive up standards in mentoring services. This could include the development of person centred relationships, the need to meet pre and post release, allowing time to build relationships, providing longer term support, or being flexible and needs led. This would need to be backed up by existing research, or new studies where that is necessary.

Staff and volunteers delivering mentoring services require adequate training (a minimum level of understanding and skill) – this could be included in a benchmark or minimum standards framework.

#### **b. Basic assessment**

Assessment was seen as almost a tick-box exercise, with very little work being carried out to address people's needs pre-release. There was a view that CRC and NPS services were meeting targets set in contracts but not the individual needs of prisoners.

It was the view that prison officers sometimes do not have sufficient time and/or skills to complete the BCST1 and subsequent reviews. The BCST2 was thought to be failing for similar reasons in CRC/NPS employed staff/contracted services. Some through the gate mentoring services were keen to do their own assessments and stop relying on the BCST to provide relevant information.

There was a call for a renewed interest in long-term desistance, and a return to some of the academic research around how and why people desist from crime. It was expressed that this might lead to better needs assessments and action plans.

#### **c. Essential resettlement needs are not being met**

Although many services were felt to be lacking, housing/appropriate accommodation was thought especially hard to access for clients of through the gate mentoring services. One service reported that a CRC only provided prisoners with letters asking them to go to the council and ask for housing upon release, this allowed the CRC to meet their accommodation target, but the mentoring provider noted that this had led some people to be street homeless on release.

Community re-integration has seen little focus and is required for successful resettlement post-release.

**d. Multiple needs are not being addressed**

Those with multiple needs aren't getting the right services, often the services are too light touch and not long-term enough to be effective.

A lack of cohesiveness between agencies working in the prison and in the community is affecting the ability of services to address multiple needs. There is a need for localised networks of services that are well co-ordinated – the MEAM approach may be a solution to looking at these issues.

**e. Family support is lacking**

Connections with families is lacking in through the gate services, and it was felt that the needs of the family were not being met. Neither was it felt that they were positively engaged in supporting the resettlement of prisoners.

**f. More referrals received than paid for by CRC or NPS**

Services report that they are working with far more referrals than they are paid to provide formally. One cited a CRC paying for 1 place but then receiving 10 referrals.

## **1.4 What should the relationship be between supply chain services and those not commissioned as part of the supply chain?**

**a. Service users should be the focus**

The people that are accessing support services should be the focus for all services. There was concern that some services are not filling gaps in CRC provision, and a need for all services to be complementary and not duplicating or competing for the same service users.

It was felt that there are gaps in how services identify need and how they address those needs. It was not self-evident that these should be CRC funded services; they could be provided by other organisations outside of the supply chain if they are deemed necessary to meet the needs of service users. It was felt necessary to have clarity about what the CRC/NPS commissioned service actually deliver, so that gaps in user need can be addressed.

Flexibility is required in the funding mechanisms used by CRCs and the NPS to meet emerging needs. This might be possible in contractual funding, but grant funding may be a solution to allow more flexibility and less reliance on meeting the requirements of the contract.

The delivery model is often designed to be generic but it needs to fit the expected cohort – for example, men, women, young adults, people with multiple needs, older people, disabled people, people from black, Asian and ethnic minority communities.

#### **b. Need to work on partnerships - working in and out of supply chains**

There could be improvements in the sharing of knowledge/intelligence, cross referrals and better lines of communication between local providers to avoid duplication and reinvention of services.

It was mentioned that Transforming Rehabilitation had created tension and increased the levels of competition between services. It was accepted that dismantling this is complex and many organisations have competing interests and funders to satisfy so they are all working to slightly different targets. However, the distinction between supply chain providers and others was felt to be unhelpful and possibly to the detriment of service users who don't get access to all the support on offer.

#### **c. Better joint working with NPS**

The relationship between through the gate mentoring services and the NPS needs to be improved. Many organisations reported that they are getting referrals and working with people assessed as high risk of harm to the public, but that they were unable to access training to work with these people appropriately and safely. The 'rate card' was mentioned as a barrier that contributed to a lack of more appropriate engagement between the voluntary sector and the NPS.

In some cases organisations reported that they had received inappropriate referrals from the NPS. Not only does this pose a risk to the public, the service user and the service providers, but it was not seen as sustainable because the services were often not paid for.

The relationship development between the CRCs and the NPS seems to have taken a lot of time to develop, which may have adversely affected the development of partnerships with voluntary sector providers.

Some organisations reported situations where the NPS had not always been supportive of CRC sub-contractors, for instance not allowing these organisations access to NPS offices.

#### **d. Sustainability of TTG services**

There were concerns about the long-term, and in some cases short-term, financial viability of through the gate mentoring services. Voluntary organisations, both inside and outside of the supply chain, reported that there had been little commitment from CRCs or the NPS to support the financial viability of through the gate mentoring services.

There was also a wide-ranging difference in what services are on offer in different prisons, especially for non-resettlement prisons which were still releasing people on some occasions. In some resettlement prisons it was felt that there was a minimal service offer and in others there was significantly more on offer.

Services outside of the supply chain were clear that CRCs and the NPS should be much more aware of the capacity that voluntary organisations have, so as not to stretch their capacity.

There should also be a greater recognition that services are getting funds from a range of sources which may not always be stable. It was requested that CRCs and the NPS take an active interest in the long-term sustainability of the services that they refer to.

**e. Share information better**

There are issues with the sharing of information. Information sharing agreements need to be in place to reduce misunderstandings between services, to address need and manage risk appropriately.

## **2. Group discussion to form recommendations for three specific audiences**

### **2.1. National policy making and oversight bodies**

#### **Recommendations for Prison and Probation Inspectorates**

- a. The quality of commissioned through the gate mentoring services, and the outcomes they are achieving should be closely monitored.
- b. Inspectorates should have a clear view of what through the gate mentoring services are available to prisoners, and whether they are in the CRC supply chain or not. If they are receiving referrals from the CRC and/or the NPS they will form a part of probation services.

#### **Recommendations for the Ministry of Justice**

- a. The Ministry of Justice should work alongside the National Offender Management Service, CRCs, the NPS and specialist mentoring providers to develop minimum standards of through the gate mentoring services to drive up quality of commissioned services, this could form part of a wider 'what works' agenda.
- b. Finance may need to be released or sought to support the sustainability of mentoring services, especially those that are not in the CRC supply chain or being bought by the NPS.
- c. A study should be carried out to assess the contribution made by volunteers and/or use of volunteers in community services, including in through the gate services.

#### **Recommendations for the National Offender Management Service**

- a. The specifications for mentoring services commissioned by CRCs should be reviewed a minimum standard of through the gate mentoring services.

- b. Ensure the revised Release on Temporary License (ROTL) policy stipulates that it can be used to develop mentoring relationships, especially when people in prison are approaching their release date.
- c. NOMS should commission longitudinal research into the effectiveness of mentoring, and link this to the Justice Data Lab and the emerging what works agenda.
- d. NOMS should tackle poor commissioning practice and poor specifications for mentoring services.

## **2.2. Recommendations for operational leaders (CRCs/NPS/Prison Governors)**

### **Recommendations for CRCs**

- a. Specifications for through the gate mentoring services should be revisited and checked against a minimum standard developed by the Ministry of Justice and the National Offender Management Services. Mentoring should not be confused with lighter touch Information, Advice and Guidance services.
- b. Improve communication channels, especially with non-supply chain providers – and develop better ways to share information across organisations delivering services to the same people.
- c. Clarity should be provided, publically, on what services partners in the supply chain provide – this will then allow organisations delivering services outside of the supply chain to assess whether their services would be duplicating or complimenting existing provision.
- d. Support NOMS in the commissioning and undertaking of longitudinal research into the effectiveness of mentoring to build up a more robust evidence base.

### **Recommendations for the NPS**

- a. The NPS should work alongside other partners in the Ministry of Justice, National Offender Management Service, CRCs and specialist providers to address what a minimum standard for mentoring that support people who are high risk of harm to the public should consist of.
- b. Services on the CRC rate card should be assessed to see whether they are suitable for people who pose a high risk of harm to the public.
- c. Where necessary the NPS should support organisations to get the relevant training to work with their clients safely and effectively, or they should make that training available.
- d. Data sharing procedures should be reviewed in order to make sure that all mentoring providers, whether on the rate card or not, have the information and assessments they need to provide an effective service that can be delivered safely.

### **Recommendations for prison governors**

- a. The prison should develop voluntary sector co-ordinating roles to better advertise, integrate, organise and sequence through the gate mentoring services.
- b. More accurate information sharing is needed across all agencies – this could be achieved through the aforementioned voluntary sector co-ordinator role.
- c. Address ambiguity over which organisations have access to what information and work towards a consistent information sharing protocol.

## **2.3. Other funders and commissioners**

### **Recommendations for charitable trusts and foundations**

- a. There should be a recognition that funding is still limited for core resettlement and through the gate services. Many mentoring organisations believe that holistic and long-term mentoring services are being de-valued in newly commissioned through the gate services.
- b. Mentoring providers requested that relevant trusts and foundation collaborate to support the process of assessing what good mentoring looks like, and contribute to the aforementioned recommendation to develop a minimum standard for through the gate mentoring services.
- c. Trusts and foundations should make more funds available to support long-term research into the effectiveness of through the gate mentoring services.
- d. A focus on innovation should be balanced with a desire to develop existing practices and build the evidence base for mentoring interventions.