



Why we collaborate

**Voluntary organisations talk about how they collaborate,
what makes it work, and why it sometimes fails**

About the Centre for Justice Innovation

The Centre for Justice Innovation works to reform the justice system through research, policy and practice development. They seek to build a justice system that is and feels fair, that holds people accountable and which addresses the underlying problems which bring people into contact with it. Their three areas of focus are court reform, youth justice and supporting frontline practitioners to make change. The Centre was launched in 2011 as an initiative of the Center for Court Innovation, a New York not-for-profit that has been at the vanguard of justice reform in the USA since 1995. In May 2013, the Centre was registered as a charity in England and Wales.

About Clinks

Clinks is the national infrastructure organisation supporting voluntary sector organisations that work with offenders and their families. Our aim is to ensure the sector, and those with whom it works, are informed and engaged in order to transform the lives of offenders and their communities. We do this by providing specialist information and support, with a particular focus on smaller voluntary sector organisations, to inform them about changes in policy and commissioning, to help them build effective partnerships and provide innovative services that respond directly to the needs of their users.

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Executive summary

At a time of austerity in public finances and radical shake-ups in prison and probation, the voluntary sector has continued to deliver a huge variety of services for people within the Criminal Justice System. While much around them has changed drastically, voluntary sector organisations have continued to deliver some of the most remarkable results in turning around the lives of offenders and keeping communities safe.

And yet, with demand likely to increase by 70% and funding to be reduced by 30%,¹ experts wonder whether the independent operating models favoured by a lot of voluntary sector organisations can continue, regardless of their effectiveness. According to PricewaterhouseCoopers, small charities are under pressure to collaborate because commissioners and funders are more likely to fund partnerships and large organisations.² In short, this view of the future suggests that basic survival for many voluntary organisations requires scale, and scale requires collaboration.

However, the four cases studies that we present in this paper demonstrate that collaboration is about much more than simple survival. Rather, collaboration has its roots in the voluntary sector's deep-seated commitment to improving outcomes for people in the justice system, their families, and the wider community.

This report, and the case studies presented here, illustrate the power of collaboration to help charities provide an improved service and find new ways of working. For example, a collaboration between Fine Cell Work and RECOOP at HMP Leyhill has provided better ways of supporting prisoners to partake in purposeful activity and, in working together, the two charities have created a service which neither would have been able to manage alone. The partnership of Pact, POPS and Nepacs in delivering a model of family engagement has enabled them to scale up their service to meet rising demand.

And yet the report also demonstrates that there are challenges ahead. For example, new commissioning arrangements in Brighton have disrupted the existing collaboration between partners involved in the Inspire Women's Project, which was providing a wrap-around approach to women offenders.

Similarly, there is evidence from the final case study on Golden Key, an eight-year Big Lottery-funded project in Bristol that aims to redesign the support for people with multiple needs, that austerity in public finances has undermined efforts to get service providers to focus on long-term changes.

Finally, our analysis of the case studies offers some simple lessons for the sector and others in recognising the importance of collaboration to drive innovation.

When working in partnership, voluntary sector organisations should:

- Establish good relationships at every level of the partnership
- Ensure collaboration extends to communication and practice sharing between the frontline workforces
- Standardise and minimise monitoring systems where possible
- Continually assess partner engagement, especially buy-in from the statutory agency
- Not be afraid to start small and experiment.

In order to support collaboration, commissioners should:

- Understand what is already in place before commissioning
- Provide long-term funding and policy commitment, which allows partners to invest time in nurturing relationships
- Acknowledge the flexible nature of partnerships by being responsive to requests to re-organise partnership arrangements within funding periods.



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Introduction

This report explores the role of collaboration in the work of voluntary sector organisations in the Criminal Justice System through four case studies. It seeks to draw conclusions about the motivation for collaboration, the impact which it can have and the factors which underpin successful collaboration.

Within the four case studies we explore the following questions:

- Why do charities collaborate?
- What makes a collaboration successful?
- How can the sector encourage better collaboration?

The case studies – Fine Cell Work in HMP Leyhill, the Inspire Project in Brighton, the Prison Family Support Alliance which works across England and the Golden Key project in Bristol – have been chosen to represent a diverse cross-section of partnerships. They vary widely in their size, in the number of partners, and in their setting – custody or community. Their funding models vary from large grants and statutory contracts to volunteer-led, resource-light experiments. Perhaps most interestingly, they vary in the aims of the collaboration: while some are expanding established models to new settings, others seek to create new services or even transform the way that services are commissioned.

Across the four case studies, we hope to present a comprehensive and illuminating picture of the importance of collaboration in the work of the voluntary sector in the Criminal Justice System.

The report is based on site visits and interviews with voluntary sector staff, clients and other stakeholders conducted in May, June and July 2016. All service user contributions have been fully anonymised.

Defining collaboration

Collaboration between organisations can take a vast array of forms, from quasi-mergers to shared sets of principles. It can focus on a range of areas, from frontline operation to high level strategy. Collaborations between two or more organisations can include significant joint commitment of

resources or simply be based on the premise of simple information and data sharing. In the public and private sectors, partnerships can often be directed at involving citizens or consumers in the co-production of new policies or services while many other collaborations do not involve individuals directly at all. For this report, we have found the Charity Commission's definition of collaboration to be the most practical:

“Joint working by two or more organisations in order to better fulfil their purposes while remaining as separate organisations.”³

This is a useful definition as it refers specifically to working together on a shared goal or project and it involves multiple organisations. Explicitly, collaboration is joint working between different organisations and not between projects within the same organisation. It is also agnostic about both the differing forms of relationships that a collaboration may take and the nature of power relations between organisations.

The role of the voluntary sector in the Criminal Justice System

The voluntary sector – which includes both registered charities and other types of non-profit organisations – plays a major role in the justice system. It provides a wide range of services which support rehabilitation, reduce re-offending and improve community safety and community cohesion. Voluntary sector organisations work with victims, offenders, their families and the wider community, and deliver services in both custody and community settings.

There are an estimated 1,800 voluntary sector organisations who describe their primary beneficiaries as offenders and a further 4,900 who say that criminal justice is one of their areas of work, the vast majority of whom are small, local organisations which rely on volunteers.⁴ In addition, other charities who work with vulnerable people may find that many of their clients are involved in the justice system, as there is a high prevalence of issues such as addiction, mental

illness and homelessness amongst people in the justice system. Other organisations undertake campaigning or seek to influence policy, rather than working directly with service users.

2010-2015: A period of change

The years since the election of the Coalition Government in 2010 have been challenging ones for the Criminal Justice System and the voluntary sector organisations working within it. Over the last five years there has been a 15% cut in government expenditure. Court, prison and probation services have experienced the greatest squeeze with a 29% decrease in spending since 2010/11. In England and Wales, reductions in spending have been far greater in the Ministry of Justice than in the Home Office, with cuts of 30% since 2010/11, compared to the Home Office's ten per cent.

The same period has also seen a major re-organisation in the structure of probation through the Transforming Rehabilitation (TR) reforms. TR, which re-organised probation into a public sector National Probation Service and 21 privately-managed Community Rehabilitation Companies, was intended to "bring in the best of the public, private and voluntary sectors".⁵ However, the TrackTR initiative (organised by Clinks, NCVO and the Third Sector Research Centre) has noted that the restructure has been disruptive to voluntary sector agencies, with smaller organisations being the worst hit. It has also noted that there has been less involvement by voluntary sector organisations in delivering services to people under probation supervision than anticipated, and any involvement is mostly just a continuation of services that existed prior to the introduction of TR.⁶

Now we have a new prison reform agenda, with plenty of change ahead for the prison system and the organisations that work alongside it to support the men, women, families and communities that it impacts upon.

The tightening of the fiscal environment has coincided with worsening conditions in the justice system and in prisons. Prisoners are spending more

time locked in their cells, less time undertaking work or education, there has been a large rise in the number of violent incidents⁷ in prison and the levels of purposeful activity are the lowest ever recorded. The impact of austerity on the voluntary sector in prisons has been complex. In some places, prisons are relying more heavily on volunteers than in the past. But for many organisations, these changes mean that prison staff have far less time to build relationships with voluntary sector personnel and less time to supervise activities, leading to some programmes regularly rescheduled or postponed. A recent Clinks report found that many voluntary sector organisations are finding it difficult to send volunteers into prisons, leading to a negative impact on organisations' service delivery and volunteer retention.⁸

The importance of collaboration

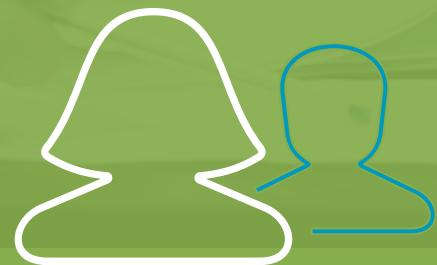
Collaboration is becoming increasingly important to voluntary sector organisations as they seek to respond to the changing environment. For some, it means opportunity: a recent survey by Clinks found that 43% of criminal justice voluntary sector organisations reported increased opportunities to work in partnership, compared to only 18% reporting a decrease.⁹ The same survey noted that the urge to collaborate was in part about creating new, more comprehensive service offers which would respond to the more acute demands of their service users. Organisations also noted that collaboration was increasingly an explicit or implicit condition of funding. Many grants and contracts require that organisations work in partnership, while the large scale of some contracts puts them out of the reach of individual organisations.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that collaboration will become an increasingly vital strategy for voluntary sector organisations working in the justice system.



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Collaboration in the Criminal Justice System





Case study 1

Fine Cell Work and RECOOP



Fine Cell Work: www.finecellwork.co.uk



RECOOP: www.recoop.org.uk

The Fine Cell Work project at HMP Leyhill provides purposeful activity for prisoners in the form of paid needlework projects. The project is a collaboration between Fine Cell Work, a national charity which runs similar projects in a number of prisons and RECOOP, a national charity which provides services to older prisoners in Leyhill.

The project demonstrates how pooling complementary resources into one central pot can provide services in new contexts and new ways. Bringing the project to life required both Fine Cell Work's national infrastructure and RECOOP's local contacts and resources. It also demonstrates how working in collaboration can help organisations learn from each other in unexpected ways.

Background

Fine Cell Work is a social enterprise established in 1997 which supports prisoners to undertake paid needlework projects. It currently works with 400 prisoners in 29 prisons across England, Scotland and Wales. Fine Cell Work groups are overseen by volunteers who lead regular stitching sessions and provide clients with training and materials. A qualitative evaluation has suggested that the project can offer improved mental health, resilience and self-esteem.¹⁰

In 2013, Fine Cell Work received a number of requests from former clients who had been transferred to HMP Leyhill – a category D adult male resettlement prison in Gloucestershire with an

operational capacity of around 500. Clients asked if a group could be established there so they could continue their involvement. However, although they had a local volunteer, Fine Cell Work found it difficult to establish a group at Leyhill. They lacked contacts in the prison, and had no previous experience of working in category D institutions.

The turning point came when a staff member suggested that Fine Cell Work groups could take place in the Lobster Pot, an over 50s social space within the prison operated by RECOOP – a charity that promotes the care, resettlement and rehabilitation of older prisoners, offenders and ex-offenders. Although Fine Cell Work groups are mixed age, RECOOP recognised the value of the project and agreed to use its local contacts and resources to support the introduction of Fine Cell Work at the prison.

Operating model

The Fine Cell Work group at Leyhill has met weekly since 2014 to deliver support in a social environment. Although they are an all-ages group, they meet in RECOOP's Lobster Pot social space which is otherwise restricted to older prisoners. The sessions are facilitated by a local volunteer who provides training and materials to service users who continue the work in their cells.

However, while the Leyhill group relies on Fine Cell Work's national infrastructure, the national Fine Cell Work office has little direct involvement in its day-to-day working. Local RECOOP staff are responsible for supporting Fine Cell Work volunteers and the associated risk assessments. The collaboration is underpinned by a joint agreement that has been signed off by the prison. The agreement details assigned responsibilities. In general, the RECOOP staff are responsible for receiving needlework kits, monitoring attendance and entry into the group and also monitoring the group and volunteers. The group is jointly overseen by Fine Cell Work and RECOOP staff who speak regularly to review progress and agree a response to any strategic issues.

The impact of collaboration

Collaboration between the two organisations has brought a range of benefits. Most obviously, if

the two organisations had not collaborated, the service at HMP Leyhill simply would not have been possible. Fine Cell Work have the know-how to run purposeful activities but didn't have the contacts, local knowledge or the facilities within Leyhill. RECOOP knew how to work with this client group but were looking for a structured programme of purposeful activity. Successfully establishing the service required the resources of both organisations.

Secondly, collaboration has allowed Fine Cell Work to develop its understanding of how to support its projects. In other prisons, their volunteers run groups unsupported and do not always have a clear point of contact in the prison staff. RECOOP offers more structured and consistent support. Fine Cell Works volunteers suggest that volunteering at Leyhill may be more rewarding than at other sites due to the stronger local infrastructure. RECOOP's role in administrating volunteers at the prison has also reduced some of the administrative costs that would otherwise have been incurred by Fine Cell Work.

Fine Cell Work has absorbed the lessons from HMP Leyhill and is now actively seeking to partner with embedded support organisations in other prisons in order to improve the service they provide to their volunteers.

In short, collaboration not only enabled the organisations to deliver a new service with a benefit to their service users, it also enabled mutual learning which has the potential to enhance the way that they deliver other services in the future.



Case study 2

The Inspire project, Sussex



The Inspire project, led by Brighton Women's Centre together with six partner charities, offered women in contact with the Criminal Justice System a cohesive and comprehensive rehabilitation service including mental health, domestic abuse, and drug and alcohol support with a gender-specific approach.

The service progressed through a number of stages, from inter-agency referral to a one-stop-shop with co-located services. It was funded by a joint probation, community safety and health funding stream. However, changes in funding following the Transforming Rehabilitation reforms made it difficult for the partnership to continue and effectively ended the collaboration.

Background

The Inspire project, which officially opened its doors in 2009, was one of a group of services funded by the Ministry of Justice, in partnership

with a coalition of independent funders. The funding followed Baroness Corston's 2007 review of women with particular vulnerabilities in the justice system which identified women's community services as a promising alternative to custody.

The partnership initially included five organisations, each specialising in supporting women with a particular need. Brighton Women's Centre led a partnership of Rise, Survivors Network, Oasis and Threshold BHT – specialising in domestic violence, sexual abuse, substance and alcohol use, self-esteem and life skills, and mental health and psychological wellbeing respectively.

Operating model

Inspire was established to work with female service users who had offended or were at risk of offending. Service users were primarily referred to Inspire by the courts, via a specified activity requirement as part

of a community or suspended sentence order. For these service users, attendance at the centre was compulsory. Service users could also be referred to the service on a voluntary basis by the police and other agencies if they were seen as at risk.

The core of the service was a case work and therapeutic offer provided directly by Brighton Women's Centre. This was extended by a tailored package of support provided by the other partner charities which could include specialist support around domestic abuse, mental health, drug and alcohol support, support for sex workers and for some women more intensive outreach.¹¹ Services were delivered in a co-ordinated manner and, where possible, in a women-only environment.

The way in which services were integrated was developed over time. When Inspire began in 2009, although partners had dedicated staff funded by the partnership, they were based at their organisations' sites. This meant that service users were required to attend different locations to receive different elements of their support.

However, in 2012 Brighton Women's Centre took on a second building which enabled them to host partners' Inspire-funded staff. This facilitated closer relationships between the different staff members. It also made referrals significantly easier as staff members could informally introduce service users to other relevant specialists directly rather than simply booking appointments for them.

Throughout the life of the project, all Inspire-funded staff involved in service delivery attended regular team meetings, received clinical supervision from Brighton Women's Centre supervisors and joined reflective practice meetings. This meant that information was easily shared and a sense of team spirit and collegiality was fostered.

The impact of collaboration

Inspire staff reported that the collaboration made them more effective at working with service users. Sarah, a Brighton Women's Centre caseworker, said:

“Advantages from collaborative working are that you’re sharing the expertise, and that’s enabled me to feel far more confident in supporting a woman who has, for example, disclosed sexual violence.”

An evaluation published in 2011 suggested that, of the 40 Inspire service users who had completed a community or suspended sentence order to date, only three had been breached. It also showed early signs of a promising impact on reoffending, although the sample size was too small for a robust measure.¹² The service was also part of an analysis into the impact of 39 National Offender Management Service (NOMS)-funded women's centres which was conducted by the Justice Data Lab in 2015. The evaluation concluded that women's centres do reduce reoffending, with an average reduction of between one and nine percentage points.¹³

The impact of the changing commissioning environment

In autumn 2015, the restructuring of probation meant that Brighton Women's Centre had to renew Inspire's funding. Lisa Dando, the director of the Centre recalls that there was a feeling of cautious optimism based on positive messages from the Ministry of Justice about recommissioning services with a positive track record of reducing offending.

However, rather than continuing existing funding arrangements, the new Community Rehabilitation Company took the opportunity of the transition to test the market for women's services with a new commissioning process. This resulted in a tension within the Inspire project, with some partners opting to develop a competing bid outside of the existing partnership. This caused damage to the relationships inherent in the collaboration at the centre of the Inspire partnership.

At the end of the commissioning process, Inspire was awarded a contract whose value was only half of that previously received. This meant that the multi-partner format was no longer viable and Inspire-funded staff at partner agencies were either made redundant or reassigned. Inspire is now delivered by only two agencies: Brighton Women's Centre and CGL. The comprehensive, multi-disciplinary, co-located support that the partnership offered is no longer available for women in this area.



Case study 3

The Prison Family Support Alliance



Photo courtesy of Pact, not to be reproduced

The Prison Family Support Alliance provides family engagement workers in 90% of women's prisons in England. These workers focus on relationships between female prisoners and their families in order to sustain relationships whilst the prisoner is in custody and to better prepare them for release.

The alliance is composed of The Prison Advice and Care Trust (Pact), The North East Prison After Care Society (Nepacs) and Partners of Prisoners (POPS). The alliance receives funding from NOMS with Pact acting as the lead partner and the other organisations subcontracted to deliver support in their local areas.

Working in partnership has allowed the four charities to provide a comprehensive service across England and take on a contract which would have been too large for any of them acting alone. However, there is potential for them to deepen their collaboration by sharing learning across the organisations to improve practice.

Background

Pact is a national charity which supports people affected by imprisonment. Formed in 2001 through a merger of the Catholic Prisoners' Aid Society and the Prisoners' Wives and Family Society, today the trust provides practical and emotional support to

prisoners' children and families, and to prisoners themselves. It provides a range of contracted services in prisons, including visitors' centres, parenting courses and supervised play schemes.

Pact has been developing its family engagement worker model since 2006, exploring its potential in custodial settings for adult men, adult women and under-18s. The work has consistently been supported by NOMS funding. In 2009 the model was rolled out to almost every women's prison in England. To support the roll out, Pact formed the Prison Family Support Alliance with two other charities who provided similar contracted services in prisons – POPS and Nepacs – in order to ensure that workers would be managed by organisations with existing infrastructure in the prisons.

Operating model

Family Engagement Workers work directly with prisoners and their families to help them access support and develop relationship skills. They seek to enable prisoners to build and enhance their family relationships, reduce the likelihood of them reoffending and address the risk of intergenerational patterns of offending.

Under the current contracting arrangements Pact is the lead partner in the alliance with the other members having the formal status of sub-contractors. Pact employs five workers, POPS three and Nepacs one. All the workers use the same case management system, Ecins, which enables them to share information when a prisoner is transferred.

When the alliance was first established, workers were given induction training together which offered an opportunity to make connections. However, there has not been any subsequent joint training. Workers from all partner organisations provide quarterly monitoring reports to Pact.

The impact of collaboration

A 2009 evaluation testifies to the importance of the family engagement worker model. As the report puts, "the presence of a support service such as these Family Support Workers was vital in maintaining and strengthening family links and promoting resettlement."¹⁴

By working in partnership, the alliance has successfully rolled out the family engagement worker model more widely than would have been possible for any one of the organisations working alone. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the workers is enhanced by their ability to draw on the existing infrastructures of the different agencies. The workers are supported by their own organisations and embedded in the local network. They work closely with colleagues who staff the prison visitor centre and liaise with social services. Having a good knowledge of the local context across the region, not only of justice issues, is very important.

By establishing common modes of working and information standards, the alliance provides continuity of care across the 90% of the women's estate in which they work. This can be both reassuring and save time when prisoners are transferred.

With a standardised approach to working with women in prison, there is a major opportunity to evaluate the project and draw important lessons, but there is not yet any publicly available data on the impact of the alliance.

However, there are also some missed opportunities in the operations of the alliance. Workers report disappointment that there have not been further opportunities for training and practice sharing across the alliance. They perceive that the project is missing an opportunity to share best practice, compare situations and provide opportunities for workers to draw support from peers.

The Prison Family Support Alliance demonstrates how collaboration can enable voluntary sector organisations to deliver services at a national scale, while still tying them to local networks. However, it also suggests that for organisations to realise the full potential of collaboration, they should ensure that co-operation takes place at the operational as well as the strategic levels.



Case study 4

Golden Key, Bristol



Photo courtesy of Golden Key | © Mark Simmons Photography / marksimmonsphotography.com

In operation since 2014, Golden Key is an eight-year, Big Lottery-funded project in Bristol which aims to redesign the support for people who experience several problems at the same time, such as mental ill health, homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse, offending and family breakdown. It seeks to reduce the barriers that these people face in accessing services. It is led by Second Step, a Bristol-based housing association, who are delivering the project alongside 16 other partners drawn from the voluntary and statutory sectors.

The project provides direct support for service users as they seek to access a range of support services and a process of learning which draws

on their experiences to re-design services. It also places an emphasis on involving service users directly in the redesign of services through its Independent Futures group.

Golden Key demonstrates the potential for large scale partnerships to take aim at system change in a way which is outside the capacity of individual partners, but also the challenge of achieving buy-in across such a wide group.

Background

The Golden Key Project is funded through the Big Lottery Fund's Fulfilling Lives initiative which is investing £112m in 12 areas in England to support

partnerships of local organisations to work together to improve services for people with multiple needs.¹⁵ The Fund identified a shortlist of areas to be supported using existing data about the extent of multiple needs, as well as considering the strength of existing organisations and quality of service delivery, and the involvement level of local authorities and Primary Care Trusts. The fund then worked with local agencies to select local service providers in each area and invited them to develop multi-agency bids.

The process for selecting a lead partner in Bristol was coordinated by Voscur (a charity that provides direct support services and specialist advice to voluntary organisations and social enterprises across Bristol) and Bristol City Council. There was significant enthusiasm for the project from both statutory and voluntary sector agencies. Second Step was selected as the lead partner by the coalition of organisations who went on to become the partnership board.

Operating model

The project is composed of two elements. The first is direct work with service users. Service users receive support from both a professional service co-ordinator and a peer volunteer mentor who has experience relevant to the service user's personal situation. This support is intended to help service users access the services they need for recovery. The second element is a process of learning and system re-design. Support co-ordinators and peer mentors feedback observations on the factors that block or facilitate access to services in order to inform re-design of the work of individual agencies and the relationships between them.

As well as learning through support work, service users are also directly embedded in the project via the Independent Futures group which brings together citizens with experience of homelessness, substance misuse, mental health issues and offending behaviour to share their understanding.

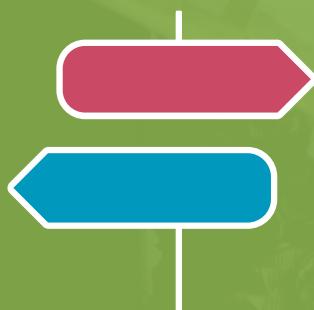
The project is overseen by a partnership board which includes 11 voluntary sector organisations who are predominantly service providers, as well as representatives from the relevant police force, local authority, Community Rehabilitation Company, clinical commissioning group and NHS trust.¹⁶

There are multiple working groups which collect and analyse information from the support work. These groups, which exist both at managerial and operational levels, feed insight to the partnership board for decision-making and direction.

The impact of collaboration

To date, the project has focussed on establishing the support offer and beginning to gather learning about service user experiences, with the bulk of work on practice change still to begin. However, a recent evaluation of the project found early progress to be encouraging.¹⁷ Despite the barriers of vested interests and competition within the current system, the project has managed to bring partners together and by building relationships with each other and increasing investment in the project, they have overcome these issues and are orienting the whole project towards a vision of a different system. Service users are embedded in the project, and the structures set up for communication and consultation with them are leading to insights and understandings not previously communicated to the partner organisations.

However, the evaluators also noted some barriers to engagement with partners which were echoed by the stakeholders we interviewed. In particular, they noted that austerity negatively impacted the capacity of the partner organisations to adopt the lessons of the Golden Key project due to both resource shortage and the time invested in restructuring and streamlining to adapt to the changed climate. They indicated that short-term commissioning arrangements made it more difficult for organisations to undertake the kind of long-term changes that Golden Key envisaged. Evaluators also suggested that the planning phase of the project had been facilitated by a number of opportunities for informal discussions and relationship-building which had mostly not been carried over into the delivery phase. They suggested that this had made it harder to keep partners engaged in the project.



Conclusions

In studying these collaborations, we noted that many of the partnerships we were looking at had faced considerable change in their operating environments over the past few years, with reductions in spending, operational challenges and radical policy changes making for a disturbed and fluid situation.

This instability is likely to persist for the foreseeable future. The recently announced reform prison pilots¹⁸ will give governors in six prisons the freedom to commission new providers for education, prison work and rehabilitation services and, if successful, the model is likely to be extended further.

While the experience of the Transforming Rehabilitation reforms of probation services demonstrates that it is far from automatic that the voluntary sector will be able to take advantage of this opportunity, it clearly disrupts the way that services in prisons are delivered. Alongside this, other changes – including the devolution of a greater range of powers to a number of major metropolitan areas such as Greater Manchester and an extension of the role of Police and Crime Commissioners – also have the potential to offer new opportunities for voluntary sector organisations to become involved in the Criminal Justice System.

In order to seize the opportunities of the future, this study attempts to assist voluntary sector organisations and commissioners in identifying the value of collaboration and the lessons that can be learnt.

The value of collaboration

Collaboration offers a number of advantages for voluntary sector organisations. Firstly, when organisations pool their resources, they can develop a combined service which offers an enhanced experience to service users. This can be seen in the way that the Fine Cell Work group at HMP Leyhill is strengthened by drawing on RECOOP's physical and organisational infrastructure, or in how combining the expertise of a range of providers allowed Inspire to offer a joined up experience which allows service users to access support for their full range of needs in a single setting.

Collaboration also enables organisations to work together to take on commissions which would have been difficult for them to do effectively alone. This can be seen in both the Prison Family Support Alliance and the Golden Key project, which require the resources of many different agencies to meet effectively.

Finally, collaboration also allows organisations to work together to create systemic change. Golden Key, and the other Fulfilling Lives projects, seek to create change in a way that would not be possible for any single organisation working alone. The work of the Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) coalition has also demonstrated the considerable benefit of collaboration when supporting people with multiple needs.¹⁹

Lessons for voluntary sector organisations

“I think the thing that has made it work, is that there are a couple of good strong relationships between individuals at the heart of it.”

While collaboration may have value for voluntary sector organisations, collaboration is not in itself enough to deliver meaningful change. It has also to be done well. The case studies we have looked at suggest the following lessons for successful collaboration:

- **Establish good relationships at every level of your partnership.** Crucial to the success of the project is the strength of the relationships, a fact highlighted in a number of the case studies. In the Fine Cell Work case study, one senior manager commented that “I think the thing that has made it work, is that there are a couple of good strong relationships between individuals at the heart of it.” This kind of comment was repeated time and again in our interviews.
- **Ensure collaboration extends to communication and practice sharing between the frontline workforces.** Everyone we interviewed agreed that good relationships and communication between staff at every level of a partnership is very important.

However, in some case studies, some of those we interviewed felt that while this happened at a managerial level, it did not happen with operational staff. By several interviewees' agreement, collaborating organisations may be missing opportunities to share best practice, compare situations and provide opportunities for frontline staff to draw support from peers.

- **Standardise and minimise monitoring systems where possible.** Collaborating partners need to think carefully about collecting data, and producing records of activity. Monitoring reports and statistics are often set by commissioners and/or lead bidders, but partners also often have their own different monitoring requirements. This can mean that people within the same collaboration are frequently recording and submitting different statistics and metrics, both increasing the amount of administration that has to be done while also missing chances for organisations to compare data across their partnerships. Failing to tackle data issues at the start can lead to unnecessary waste and frustration. For example, one Inspire project team member was regularly submitting two different sets of monitoring reports.
- **Continually assess partner engagement, especially buy-in from the statutory agency.** Working with a wide range of partners requires continuous work on engagement and developing a shared vision. Regular meetings with partners in smaller groups could be a means of identifying their misgivings and addressing them whilst also demonstrating the commitment to have these partners involved. Some of those we interviewed mentioned that the engagement from statutory agencies is variable; some frequently miss meetings or send representatives that do not have the decision-making power or strategic understanding to fully engage. A number of interviewees mentioned that they wish they had involved statutory bodies earlier in the design process, to share their perspectives on what was necessary for the collaborations to achieve.
- **Don't be afraid to start small and experiment:** Some of the collaborations in this study are relatively small but no less creative for it. In these scenarios, embrace the advantages of being small. For example, the Leyhill Fine Cell Work group cost

very little to start up and has no specific funding (for either organisation) tied to it, meaning that they have the flexibility to try things out. This has the added benefit of giving staff a relatively large amount of autonomy to pursue initiatives.

Lessons for commissioners

While not all collaboration is a product of commissioning – Fine Cell Work at HMP Leyhill, for example, does not have dedicated funding – the case studies clearly show the importance of commissioning in developing and maintaining effective collaborations. Commissioners should recognise the added value of collaboration and seek to support it through flexible funding and commissioning structures which encourage organisations to work in partnership. These case studies suggest the following lessons for commissioners.

- **Before commissioning, understand what you have.** It can be easy for commissioners, who often operate across large geographic and organisational distances, to miss the value of what smaller, innovative collaborations are achieving. When beginning new commissioning processes, commissioners should be mindful of the arrangements already in place and take time to examine them to avoid undermining existing partnerships. In both our work on this report, and our wider experience, commissioners can often fail to take advantage of the existing collective knowledge and understanding of service users, pre-existing relationships and service contexts that exist, which has a negative impact further down the line.
- **If commissioners want system change, they need to provide long-term funding and policy commitment, which allows partners to invest time in nurturing relationships.** Establishing partnerships takes both time and effort on the part of the voluntary sector organisations who are involved. The two most complex collaborations that we looked at – Inspire and Golden Key – both report spending months building relationships between partners and developing the required formal agreements. They also both stressed that the partnerships took some time to

reach their full potential. In order for voluntary sector organisations to be incentivised to invest the time in developing partnerships, and for commissioners to get the most out of them, it will require long and stable funding periods and commitments to maintaining successful projects.

- **Acknowledging the flexible nature of partnerships by being responsive to requests to re-organise partnership arrangements within funding periods.**

As highlighted by the Golden Key example, complex partnerships can grow and develop over time. Evaluators noted how this growth was facilitated by the flexible approach of the Big Lottery Fund which gave its blessing to changes in the make-up of the partnership. Other funders and commissioners can learn from this approach, supporting rather than restraining the development of collaborations.

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- 19 For more on Making Every Adult Matter visit: www.themeamapproach.org.uk

Why we collaborate

Voluntary organisations talk about how they collaborate, what makes it work, and why it sometimes fails





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