Lessons for resettlement

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Lessons for Resettlement

Coretta Phillips, London School of Economics

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Clinks
59 Carter Lane
London
EC4V 5AQ
0207 248 3538
info@clinks.org
www.clinks.org

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prisoners when they are extremely vulnerable to offending influences.

- Once released, ex-prisoners require practical support, advice, and guidance from their probation officers but there was mixed evidence as to whether this was forthcoming or not.

Processes of Internal Change

- Service provision needs to support and reinforce internal change when individuals have taken responsibility for their offending. This requires:
    - Demonstrating a professional, caring, and respectful stance towards clients who are often in an emotionally fragile state;
    - Ongoing practical resettlement support to find housing, employment, access benefits and so on;
    - Motivational and personal development work to build self-esteem and confidence over the longer-term;
    - In many cases, a professional counselling component; and
    - Intensive and ongoing emotional support in times of anxiety (and for drug users, relapse)
- Demonstrating a commitment to anti-racist and culturally sensitive provision is

vital in encouraging BAME engagement with services.

Barriers to Access and Engagement of BAME ex-prisoners

- Experiences or perceptions of racial discrimination are likely to have affected some BAME ex-prisoners. These may have occurred because of biased judgements about an individual, directly or indirectly disadvantaging them in accessing resettlement services, or not meeting their specific cultural needs.
- Such experiences are likely to negatively influence levels of trust in service providers which will need to be carefully overcome and there may be residual feelings of anger and hurt which must be acknowledged.

The Role of BAME-Focused Organisations and Staff

- BAME-focused provision fulfils a number of roles for BAME ex-prisoners, particularly those who have experienced poor treatment by mainstream organisations.
- Being understood and feeling 'culturally comfortable' and safe provides a basis for clients to be responsive to resettlement support. The quality of provision and the

professionalism of staff are particularly valued.

- It should not be assumed that all BAME clients will wish to receive resettlement advice and services from a BAME-focused organisation as some perceive this to represent unnecessary preferential treatment.
- BAME case workers and managers in such organisations can serve as aspirational role models for ex-prisoners.

Giving Something Back

- Ex-prisoners may be inspired to go into volunteering, peer mentoring, or advice and resettlement work. Such work can provide them with a feeling of 'giving something back to society', help them gain employment experience which is often lacking, as well as their acting as authentic role models for serving prisoners and current offenders.
- This work needs to be carefully managed and supported and enabled through training and formal qualifications, as appropriate.

Introduction

Double Trouble (Jacobson et al, 2010) set out the findings of research into the resettlement needs and experiences of black, Asian and minority ethnic (henceforth BAME) prisoners and ex-prisoners. This is a report on follow-up research to Double Trouble.

The follow-up study sought to examine in detail the scope for statutory and non-statutory services to support and promote successful resettlement, particularly for BAME offenders. An intensive case study approach was adopted - involving close analysis of the experiences of a sample of 15 BAME and white majority ex-prisoners. These individuals were contacted via four voluntary agencies which were supporting them; the study also encompassed an examination of the organisational and service delivery practices of these agencies. The agencies included two which provided some BAME-specific services, of which one, along with another of the providers, worked exclusively

with women. The fourth was a large-scale, national provider.

For the study, all 15 ex-prisoners was interviewed in depth on two occasions about their backgrounds, history of involvement in the criminal justice system, and the process of resettling after release from prison. (Details of the case study participants are provided in the Appendix to this report). Interviews were also conducted with case workers and managers from the four voluntary agencies. The final element of the fieldwork was a focus group conducted with staff, volunteers and service users involved in a BAME-specific resettlement organisation.[1]

Five key themes emerged from the research findings, namely:

- Practical and emotional needs
- Processes of internal change
- Barriers to access and engagement of BAME ex-prisoners

[1] The fieldwork team comprised Andy Aresti, Sylvia Chenery, Jessica Jacobson and the author.

- Role of BAME-focused organisations and staff
- Giving something back

Lessons for resettlement policy and practice relating to each of these themes are presented over the course of this report.

There is a companion document to the report, entitled Stories of Resettlement (Jacobson 2011); this comprises detailed accounts of the backgrounds and experiences of five of the 15 case study participants.

Practical and Emotional Resettlement Needs

"...being out in the big wide open world is actually more scary than being in a cell." (Keira)[2]

Resettlement Support in Prison

In Double Trouble, Jacobson et al. (2010) recognised that for many prisoners, resettlement advice and support in prison was almost non-existent, or at least severely lacking, in meeting the complex challenges of life following release. Many of the case study participants also described the absent or inadequate amount of resettlement support offered in prison. Leila, for example, was angry that the support was both insufficient and untimely to meet most prisoners' resettlement needs on release:

> "my experience is that the resettlement was, it was a load of rubbish. It was about going down, possibly seeing somebody, giving them the 'I need some support with housing.' Or 'I need some support with

[2] Pseudonyms are used throughout this report to maintain anonymity.

rehab.' Something like that and they will give you a bunch of numbers and allow you to make the call, if you can get down there. And if there isn't someone kicking off and therefore everyone has to get locked in the little cubicles and you stay there now I'm sorry you know you can't, you have to come back another time now...You have to wait to be asked to come back you can't just go and go down in there you have to be invited back into resettlement...It's all got to be booked and that takes… That's a process that's weeks and weeks you know... And you know you've got days left for your sentence and you think 'What is the point?'"

Instead, a comprehensive resettlement action plan is required, and this is typically the approach taken by case workers attached to community resettlement organisations who are working directly with prisoners. Two case workers based in Site 3 estimated an eight week lead-in time to organise accommodation for prisoners in readiness for their release from prison. Going further, Leila suggested that resettlement support begin during the induction period so that prisoners are aware of what advice and support is available and this serves as a positive

reminder that making arrangements for release must be made well in advance. This is likely to be even more essential for those serving short prison sentences.

Frustratingly, other case study participants described trying to contact probation officers to help with accommodation before their release dates, but this rarely proved fruitful. Probation was singled out for criticism for offering little during prisoners' sentences, as this extract from an interview with Nadim showed:

"my probation officer, she never came to see me...So I only had communication with her on the phone, but I mean there was jack shit she'd done, nothing, nothing for me. I mean she knew I was going to come out to NFA [no fixed abode] and you know nothing and she didn't come up to visit while I was in there. I don't know if they had a in-house – I think they did have an in-house probation worker and again they didn't do nothing and I kind of asked for assistance many a time and it was always just kind of like it never came, they never kind of done anything."

Community resettlement organisations can play an important part in providing guidance and signposting prisoners to appropriate services. However, such organisations' access to prisons and individual prisoners is variable and often poorly advertised in prisons, and can depend on the goodwill of prison wing staff. Case workers reported instances of prison staff being unhelpful or even obstructive when they came to visit their clients.

Aside from prisoners' need for practical guidance on resettlement, there is often a need for emotional support inside prison. It is difficult to overestimate the pain which has been present in the lives of the case study participants. Sometimes, as in the case of Khaled who had suffered harrowing political violence and family loss, there is deep trauma; the same was true of Nadia who had been sexually abused as a child and raped in an arranged marriage. There are also the difficulties of coming to terms with the destructive elements of their offending and

its impact on others, including family members – and particularly children. Coping and countering emotions such as self-hate, guilt, shame, loss, anger, fear, and humiliation often required the support of counsellors. Steve, for example, had bereavement counselling following the death of his mother, which he believed sorted out his 'mindset'. Nadia's aggression and depression, associated with her abusive past, was reduced following counselling in prison, and she was more accepting of the two daughters born within her abusive marriage.

Karen described the importance of counselling for those moving out of addiction and concerned to avoid relapse:

> "When somebody is on drugs and is all stripped back, all the issues come to haunt them again. So that is the time they need help. Because they come back out, it's all fresh in their head, they feel gloomy and they're going to take drugs to suppress it again. And so it all starts again...So I think if they had counselling at the time where they are working, hopefully, in jail...when they're feeling positive."

Work undertaken by CARAT staff in prison can be insufficient to meet acute needs for one-to-one therapeutic work. Leila recalled how CARAT workers would follow up requests for help by coming to her hatch; but in a shared cell it was not possible to talk openly. What was required was a safe space for addicted prisoners away from the often stigmatising gaze of those prison officers and healthcare staff who treated addicts as 'lepers'. Chanya, who did not use drugs, was immensely frustrated by her lack of quality, private time with another individual; so for her the most useful help provided by her case worker was being given the space to cry, to be listened to, to be reassured that 'being in prison is not the end of the world. There's a life beyond that.'

Managing the Transition From Prison to the Community

Inadequate support for resettlement of highly vulnerable ex-prisoners has significant individual and societal costs, as it increases

the likelihood of re-offending. The case study participants were emphatic in describing the need for immediate resettlement support on release. Although many prisoners have scheduled appointments with the probation service, it was felt that the key foundations for successful resettlement - particularly drug treatment programmes, but also accommodation - needed to be organised quickly before individuals are tempted back into offending lifestyles. Some participants talked of people they knew who had deliberately committed offences in order to be returned to prison as they could not survive outside without accommodation or money.

Khaled, having been refused a crisis loan, found himself homeless on release. He slept on buses and in parks, and received food donations from homelessness charities. He could not claim benefits until he started using a friends' address. Unsurprisingly, he re-offended and was imprisoned again. Leila talked about prison-based rehabilitation groups which provided an opportunity to

discuss future goals and plans, which in her case included working on relationships with family members and staying drug-free. However, 'there wasn't nobody there that would...help me with that thought and with that goal'. Keira also discussed the importance of arranging employment and training before leaving prison in order that ex-prisoners can get accustomed to demands of life outside prison. On a practical note, Steve believed that the prison service should make photo ID available for prisoners on their release to enable them to claim benefits: 'they know inmates are going to have these obstacles. Why is that so hard for you to just have that in place for all the inmates coming out?'

At the heart of managing the transition for prison to the community is the need for a dedicated case worker to establish a rapport and a trusting relationship with each prisoner. Through the Gate workers provide such services in some areas and where available, their services appear to be enormously appreciated by prisoners and ex-

prisoners. As Leila mentioned, this worker should operate as a mentor, a guide, someone 'dedicated to you...until you're in a position where you can actually stand on your own two feet and no longer need it.' Nadim too talked of a 'sponsor' or support worker who could steer someone through 'getting accommodation, staying off drugs, getting on to groups'.

A One-Stop Resettlement Service in Prison

John proposed that comprehensive resettlement action plans should be drawn up for all prisoners, to address their complex needs. In each prison, this would ideally be undertaken within a resettlement unit managed by someone outside the prison service. Focus group participants argued for fortnightly meetings to liaise with outside services.

A resettlement one-stop shop in prison – that is, a specific place within the prison which can be accessed consistently and regularly as the need arises - seems the best model to meet the multiple resettlement needs of prisoners. At present, prisoners must make separate applications to access the key elements of resettlement: housing, benefits, employment, and family relationship support. Keira felt that these services should be organised in a holistic rather than disparate manner, and favoured a 'regime' which would provide this support to all prisoners rather than rely on self-referral.

A holistic, one-stop shop approach to resettlement would ensure that prisoners have a fixed abode on their date of release. Planned resettlement could also begin the time-consuming process of applying for benefits, and establish arrangements for the constructive use of time through education, training or employment. For drug or alcohol dependent prisoners, the organisation of a

treatment programme immediately following release is imperative.

There, is of course, further work to do when prisoners are released. The input of community resettlement organisations was particularly valued for the provision of ongoing support. Nadim has needed counselling, medical help, drug rehabilitation treatment, support in rebuilding his relationship with his mother, and mental health treatment. Nadia had struggled with finding employment when she disclosed her criminal record to potential employers, and greatly valued the help her case worker had provided with job and grant applications. Likewise, for Natalie, the housing support was valued, and the emotional support was reassuring in negotiating with social services to get access to her daughter. Many other case study participants like Simon, John, and Colin had received both practical and emotional support from case workers in relation to training, employment, benefits and family issues.

The probation service was frequently criticised for its tendency to prioritise its enforcement role over guidance and support. Karen suspected that probation officers were just 'looking for you to mess up for them to send you back'. For Karl, the lack of response from his probation officer after he sought clarification about whether he could work with children was frustrating in the extreme. Nadia had felt that little assistance was provided by her probation officer in relation to finding employment and she worried that their negativity was leading her to lose hope and faith in herself.

Other case study participants, in contrast, talked of probation officers who had helped them. Khaled, for example, had been assisted by his probation officer to stay drug-free. She had gained Khaled's trust when she offered help with accessing educational courses and other constructive activities. Steve's probation officer had supported his request not to go into a hostel but to return to the family home where support mechanisms

were in place. Chanya also talked positively about her probation officer:

> "she is very professional... she is very encouraging, she is supportive basically... most of the time I would be crying and she would spend her time calming me down. 'You can call me any time; you can come to see me any time if you need to talk. You don't have to book an appointment, just walk in if I am in.'"

BAME-specific issues

Most case study participants felt that the key resettlement needs are generic rather than ethnically specific. Nadim said that 'it is equally hard for white people and black people and it affects many people when they come out of prison... We are all asking for the same thing out of the same pot.' Steve too felt that ethnicity did not influence individual's resettlement needs, saying, 'my needs weren't no different to a white person's or an Indian's or a Chinese...I'm

coming out of jail and money's tight, and everyone's under pressure.'

Karl suggested that in his black Caribbean culture, alcoholism was not fully recognised, and therefore that a counselling or addiction service tended to be heavily stigmatised. For Chanya, the taboo of female imprisonment in her culture profoundly affected her self-esteem. She felt that she was viewed as 'being less of a woman, - you are not normal basically'. She described meeting white prisoners who were not as deeply concerned about the impact of their imprisonment on the wider community, whereas for Chanya, 'where I come from, yes it's my life but there's other people's lives who are involved in my life too. So not only I should consider my life but I should consider their life as well'. Such a view was well-recognised by a case worker in Site 1 who believed that within black communities there was less willingness to support family members who had been to prison because of the shame it invoked. In this sense, it must be

acknowledged that for some individuals, their culture will influence their resettlement needs, and may have an impact on how they engage with advice and services.

Lessons for Policy and Practice

- Current resettlement support provided by the prison and probation services is frequently described as inadequate and not timely enough.
- Practical resettlement advice in prison needs to be offered throughout a prisoner's sentence from induction onwards.
- A one-stop shop inside prison which provides advice needs to be established. Furthermore,
  - This service must be easily accessible through the application process.
  - At a minimum it should ensure each released prisoner has accommodation organised for the day of release.
  - Provision needs to recognise specific cultural needs and that particular kinds of support may be needed by BAME prisoners to ensure successful resettlement.

Lessons for Policy and Practice cont.

- Individual counselling should be more readily available in prison to meet prisoners' complex emotional needs.
- Prisons should advertise community resettlement services in their in-house magazines.
- Managing the critical transition between prison and community can be enabled through the use of Through the Gate case workers. This support is essential for prisoners when they are extremely vulnerable to offending influences.
- Once released, ex-prisoners require practical support, advice, and guidance from their probation officers but there was mixed evidence as to whether this was forthcoming or not.

Processes of Internal Change

As well as focusing on practical and emotional needs, it was also apparent from the interviews with ex-prisoners that successful resettlement depends on personal motivation and a wish for an offending-free lifestyle. For Natalie, it was reflecting on the 'emotional abuse' of her daughter who didn't 'know if her mum is coming back to her or not' and then not being able to regain immediate custody which 'hit home' and prompted her efforts to stop using drugs. In a powerful account, Leila described the start of her personal journey:

> "...the first part of my using was, it was fun and it was exciting and it was getting off your head and stuff like that. But when it came to having a physical addiction to it all and then having to now support it and the things that I would've done to support it. And then the things that had happened around my family and stuff like that I then really hated the person I'd become and I couldn't sit with who I was then. So I would use, I would take the drugs, I would just take them and take them and take them just to completely obliterate myself so I wouldn't

have to think about it. And that was a massive, massive cycle and it wasn't until I got to a point in my life where I said 'I can't do this anymore' that I was able to start that process of beginning to understand how…I had a long spell in prison and I just used to kind sit there and think 'You know what, I really can't do this anymore. I cannot, I cannot keep coming back here.'... I was so bad that it was a case of I do it or I die because I'd just had enough... I'd reached my rock bottom...and I made the decision or I say that a light bulb switched on and I believe that to be something quite spiritual had kind of turned on."

Processes of internal change do not necessarily entail one-off 'light bulb moments' as for Leila, but can instead involve a series of such moments interspersed with periods of re-offending. During the course of this study, for instance, Colin was rearrested, even though his case workers had claimed he was tackling his alcohol abuse and finding constructive ways of using his time. Making progress along this zigzag path of desistance often depends on engagement with influential, supportive individuals. Such individuals, by demonstrating kindness and

having faith in the offender, can plant seeds that are later sown after the offender has reached 'rock bottom', to use Leila's words.

In Khaled's case it was a drug worker who cared about him and believed in him, to the extent of visiting him in hospital. Having lost his family in political violence in his home country, he found the experience of being cared for overwhelming, and he opened up - 'telling her everything... and she believed me, she never like doubted me or looked at me wrongly so, so from there yes, my journey started.' For Leila, a vicar provided comfort and reassurance in prison, and a drugs rehabilitation case worker offered intense and respectful treatment which was enormously valued. Colin had been impressed by the commitment shown to him by his case workers, who had helped him to set up a bank account. As his case worker in Site 3 recalled, he 'shook my hand, hugged Julie [a volunteer] and he was actually stood there with tears because nobody had give him this sort of time [before]'.

Given the shortcomings in resettlement advice and support in prison, the case study participants' stories indicate that their largely successful, but ongoing, resettlement into the community, has occurred in spite of rather than because of support from the prison and probation services. Like many others, Karen recognised the enormously significant role of community resettlement organisations:

> "The Prison Service was just useless. I'd say the Prison Service and Probation, just the whole – anything, and the licence as well. I just think that it's all just pointless... And then luckily when I come out and decided I did, there was [community resettlement organisation] to support me to do that. But the rest of it was useless."

To overcome this gap in provision, case study participants recognised that they had to be proactive in accessing support and advice. This requires self-motivation which can easily dissolve when challenges present themselves, as an ex-offender in the focus group noted:

> "... when you feel rejected, when you feel disappointed, when you feel hopeless – .... I'm feeling denied, what I feel I want to do – that can be very, very dangerous to you, and it's easy for you to say: you know what, I've given up, and just derail..."

On receiving a 12 year sentence, Steve realised that he could use his past experiences in working as a mentor and counsellor; but this required him to be proactive - 'phoning places like the one I'm working for now and writing people - jobs agency, letting them know what I'm doing [studying addiction counselling]'. For those who lack that kind of motivation, it may be that some agencies can help to provide a spark of hope that individuals can then build on when they have taken responsibility for changing their behaviour:

> "If you don't have a service to support the people that need supporting then there's no hope for that person... Bottom line is that services provide hope more than anything. They will provide hope, right, and hope might sound like a small emotion that doesn't warrant a massive amount of money being given so that we can give people hope...But I believe that it

does. Hope's a tiny little word and funding a service is a massive task but you've got to give them something for them to ultimately make the decision that they want to change." (Leila)

This chimed with the view of the case worker in Site 2 who felt that once the individual has made up their mind to change, it is her job to keep 'pushing them in the right direction'. She acknowledged that this can be an ambivalent process with both 'can do' and 'can't do' moments, and discussed the importance of motivational work with clients to help them weigh up the consequences of both change and of not changing. Personal development and building self-confidence are also crucial to these processes:

" ...when you first meet clients and they've got no confidence they don't want to talk. They don't want to talk about what's happened, they are undecided whether to trust you...So once you've spoken to them about what you do, about you've what experienced, what you've seen and then they start to get used to you...Then you start to see them smile which is a big thing. When you go in there everyone is so down, you don't get smiley people come in, you maybe just get tears.

> A lot of clients start crying and half of them are ready to break down... As their confidence and trust in you increases, they start to ask you things, do you think I could go on to this course?"

Karl, similarly, recognised that it was the community resettlement organisation that helped build his confidence because they had faith in him and demonstrated their professional interest in assisting him. It was the knowledge that community-based advice and support could be accessed at any time or an ongoing basis that most reassured case study participants. Case study participants described the positive feelings when they knew their case workers were working on their behalf or were looking to meet their needs and interests. As a focus group participant noted, 'the moment you give time to someone, the message that you're sending is – you're worth it'. This sense of being valued builds confidence and creates a climate where client want to prove themselves.

It was also clear to case study participants that resettlement is a long-term process beyond meeting immediate practical needs such those relating to accommodation, finances and employment. Keira, for example, was aware that that many women prisoners came out of prison with depression and other mental health issues which could best be tackled through an anonymous service for ex-prisoners in the community. A case worker in Site 2 suggested that, over the long term, it was low self-esteem that was often associated with continued offending and frequent spells in prison. Building self-esteem, cultural pride and supporting a stable racial identity were believed to be particularly important among some mixed race ex-prisoners who were struggling with 'what it means to be a young black person'.

The tricky renegotiation and rebuilding of family relationships was also an area where ex-prisoners need ongoing assistance. Nadia's relationship with her children who were in foster care was disrupted as she wanted to see them only once she had a job

and could provide gifts for them. The pain of the separation and the feelings of failure all contributed to her low mood, particularly when combined with the difficulties of finding employment. It is here that case workers, according to one of the focus group participants, can try to 'tap into someone's hopes and aspirations – [which] might just be to get on better with their family, or see their children'. All those things – not just career – are really important because they help to rebuild [a] sense of worth again.' Likewise, for Nadim, his case worker was encouraging him to re-establish contact with his mother. Significantly then, resettlement has a short-term component relating to subsistence, but for a permanent offending-free lifestyle, there are ongoing support and advice needs centred around emotional and mental health issues.

Lessons for Policy and Practice

- Service provision needs to support and reinforce internal change when individuals have taken responsibility for their offending. This requires:
  - Demonstrating a professional, caring, and respectful stance towards clients who are often in an emotionally fragile state;
  - Ongoing practice resettlement support to find housing, employment, access benefits, and so on;
  - Motivational and personal development work to build self-esteem and confidence over the longer-term;
  - In many cases, a professional counselling component; and
  - Intensive and ongoing emotional support in times of anxiety (and for drug users, relapse)

Barriers to access and engagement for BAME ex-offenders

The massive reforms of the criminal justice system, following the Macpherson Report (1999) and the CRE (2003) investigation into the Prison Service, have led to concerted efforts to deal with direct racial discrimination in the criminal justice system. Whilst most would accept that there have been improvements it is still generally acknowledged that racism remains an enduring problem. In this case study research, case workers from community resettlement organisations reported instances where they suspected racial discrimination may have played a part in BAME ex-offenders' limited access to resettlement services. Ex-prisoners also provided examples of obstacles in their path to resettlement which they believed were influenced by racism - albeit sometimes in more subtle or covert forms. Nadim, for example, described how he had been released from prison late on a Friday without any suitable accommodation to go to. Initially

the city council housing advice centre had been unable to find him suitable accommodation. He had wondered whether, as an Asian man, he had been (wrongly) assumed to have family who would take care of him:

> "It was like just the people were being judgemental or presumptuous. I don't know how much of racism came into it. There might have been a bit of racism in there, as well. You know? 'They all stick together and so he will be looked after. He is not going to sleep on the streets.'"

At the time of our interview, Karl was living in a dry house where his key worker told him he was a BNP voter. Karl perceived himself (as did other BAME residents) to be more harshly treated than white residents when it came to receiving warnings for breaking house rules. He also felt he had been inadequately assisted by his key worker in negotiating the benefits systems. Karl and his case worker also had concerns about his treatment by his probation officer which appeared to be overly intrusive into his private life, including contacting his current

partner to confirm she was aware of his offending history. Such experiences are hardly conducive to managing the already difficult resettlement process.

On being released from previous custodial sentences, Nadim had been homeless but unwilling to go to night shelters and hostels where both residents and staff were 'mainly white people' - believing them to be unwelcoming to BAME ex-offenders. Similarly, he felt much more comfortable engaging in group work around his drug use in the multi-ethnic setting of a community drugs project than in a city-wide programme where members were predominantly white. Many of the white participants, according to Nadim, had parents who had been drug users, while for Nadim his estrangement from his siblings (and initially his mother) had been prompted by his drug use. He found it hard to 'relate to any of them' and 'it was hard expressing, even though it sound and it looked like I am from this country - the values and the way I was brought up [was] totally different.'

Racial discrimination had also affected Nadim in attempting to resettle successfully. Following his release from prison, and after staying in a hostel, he had been offered a studio flat in a predominantly white area of the city. Arriving at the property before the housing officer, confirming his fears about racism in the area, Nadim had noticed that:'...over the door, over the windows was 'black this', 'Paki this, 'Somalian this', written in marker pen over the whole of the front window.' Unhelpfully, the housing officer had shown Nadim that the racist graffiti could be wiped off relatively easily. Nadim, who was being threatened with eviction from the temporary hostel he was in felt he had no choice but to accept the accommodation. His experience was predictable:

> "I was there for six weeks and I suffered so much racism. Like I can stand up for myself, but it was just the kids. You know you got eight, nine year olds swearing at you and throwing things at you, what can you do? You can't do nothing and I wrote to the council...and basically they then offered me the place I'm in now."

Case workers in Site 3 had also worked with BAME ex-prisoners who were extremely fearful of working and travelling in particular parts of town because they feared racist abuse.

Many of the case study participants felt that their resettlement had not been influenced by their ethnicity. Leila had undertaken her drug rehabilitation in a Home County suburb which was almost exclusively white. Her immediate and urgent need for rehabilitation outweighed any concerns about her ethnicity:

> "You know my growing up there was lots of racial kind of racial elements to it and also within the prison…But in this rehab it didn't matter about your colour and I generally would take on board that walking around and knowing that you know hey you're the only black person in here but you're getting looks and stuff like that. But I didn't have a chip on my shoulder about it. I shrugged it off you know I'm here for me I'm not here for you."

To sum up, this manager from a community resettlement agency in Site 2 clearly states

how resettlement may be harder for BAME ex-offenders:

> "I think that the difference is that there is endemic racism across all the services and so that puts [the BAME] group at a disadvantage. So all the services that they access there are issues around how those services are delivered, issues around getting treated properly, with respect and understanding and all that sort of thing. I think that's the main difference...although it's difficult for everyone generally, the services aren't brilliant for anybody, I think that extra component makes a big difference to the outcomes for these people."

Lessons for Policy and Practice

- Experiences of, or perceptions of racial discrimination, are likely to have affected some BAME ex-prisoners. These may have occurred because of biased judgements about an individual, directly or indirectly disadvantaging them in accessing resettlement services, or not meeting their specific cultural needs.
- Such experiences are likely to negatively influence levels of trust in service providers which will need to be carefully overcome and there may be residual feelings of anger and hurt which must be acknowledged.
- Demonstrating a commitment to anti-racist and culturally sensitive provision is vital in encouraging BAME engagement with services.

The role of BAME-focused organisations and staff

BAME-focused organisations appear to fulfil a number of roles in delivering resettlement advice and support to BAME ex-offenders. Firstly, they may act as mediators for BAME clients who are distrustful of statutory services such as probation or social services. A second role for BAME-focused organisations is to work with BAME clients who have a lack of faith in mainstream services and organisations deemed to be culturally insensitive or unable to meet their particular cultural or linguistic needs. Nadim's case worker, for example, described her work with him which recognised his specific needs relating to his Muslim faith. In identifying the type of drug rehabilitation treatment that he required, it was accepted that the 'twelve step tradition, which is around a higher power' would complement his faith and 'link that into the way the treatment is delivered'.

BAME staff can provide an easy and safe space of cultural interaction which supports positive engagement. Thus, for Karl, a BAME-focused organisation was described as a 'saviour' in understanding his experiences and needs 'on a different level'. Workers from the same 'ethnic background' did not negatively stereotype him as he had found with his key worker in the dry house and his probation officer. Such understanding may be directly related to successful resettlement as Karl indicates:

> "... you get the sense of being understood so in that respect it's a big obstacle being taken out of the equation, so you then understood… You're then likely to open more towards the advice you're given, you know what I mean?"

This can be understood as providing an easy way of knowing and understanding life experiences and cultural behaviours which are usually taken-for-granted within social groups. So, for Chanya, the taboo of going to prison in her culture, particularly as a woman, required in her mind, workers who

were trained to help minority ethnic groups and who understood the particular difficulties associated with the shame of imprisonment which might be less apparent in white majority cultures. Chanya's belief was that 'me talking to someone who does not share my culture will never understand how I feel', although she later conceded that it simply required culturally sensitive and non-judgemental treatment. Her case worker too felt the particular ostracism from their families which black ex-prisoners could face was all the more powerful than that felt by white families. She explained:

> "...for a black person to be ousted by their family is a very big deal, it's massive deal, it's like once their family's gone, who have they really got? Cos what I find is that black people stick together, they tend to stick together very very closely, so without that they won't resettle properly. A white person may not understand that they may just see it as you came out of prison, it doesn't matter, you can move on. A black person will more understand what they're feeling if your family is similar."

Likewise, a case worker for a BAME resettlement organisation described in the focus group the value of his ethnic identity in working in prisons:

> "I walk through the prisons, and I don't have to talk to anybody – honestly, they see me, I'm black, got locks – and they say – oi, he's got keys – and they will talk to me and they'll come and speak to me and say, 'Who are you?' So I say who I am, what I do, what I'm in there for, and they're like, 'oh, tell me more about your service' - but it's because ... I'm not a threat to them in that sense. The fact is that in the prison, there's a lot of racism going on in there. So when they see someone such as myself – they're like – oh yes, I can identify with him, I can speak to him."

The case worker engaged with Steve also felt that their shared Afro-Caribbean backgrounds, steeped in family life and responsibilities, helped in understanding Steve's feelings about what would be expected of him when released from prison. This is not a kind of 'lip service' being paid to both case worker and client being black, it is about 'speaking the same language...and not

having to explain too much'. Steve echoed this, highlighting how his case worker had 'cut out the crap' and insisted on being forthright when Steve was 'talking shit' which he respected. A Site 1-based case worker similarly believed that that this cultural affinity was important when she observed that some of her older clients had the same origins as her grandparents, and that drawing on this to make them 'feel homely' and might help them to 'express their feelings just that bit more'. However, she also noted that this was not assured in the case of all BAME clients:

> "What I've found with a lot of clients is sometimes they have issues explaining themselves to someone who isn't black and sometimes they have issues explaining themselves to a black person, so it kind of ranges in between. A lot of my clients sat first are a bit embarrassed to explain their situation as soon as they see me, they're like 'oh she's black, do I explain myself to her, how much do I tell her?'...I think they perceive it as if they was on the outside, how they would be seen within their community so they are very cautious on what they tell you, and

other times if they see someone who isn't black, they think, does this person actually understand me, do they know where I'm coming from?"

Making BAME ex-offenders aware of the impact of racist stereotyping is another way in which BAME-focused organisations can assist BAME ex-offenders as this example aptly illustrates:

"I've just had a client...he's on licence and he's seeing me weekly, and he was telling me just now that he has to sign on at the hostel three times a day. So he's five o clock signing, but he's working full time. He had to go and do a job for his boss. He went to the hostel at ten to five and said "Can I sign now because I've got the truck outside and I've got to go and pick up a car?" and they said "No, you have to wait until five." So he started to argue with them. So I said "Look, if this occurs again you need to just accept it, because if you start waving your arms around and arguing, you're a big six foot black man, the next thing you're going to hear is that you are being threatening. You may not perceive it as that, but that's what's going to happen, because I've seen it happen."

BAME-focused organisations who took part in this research were also aware of their significance as role models for BAME ex-offenders. For mixed race ex-offenders, such as Karen, finding strong black professional women was inspirational and spurred her on to achieve successful and meaningful employment in a caring role. Leila's experiences as a mixed race woman not fitting easily in to white or black communities, contrasted with her being embraced by the BAME-focused resettlement organisation, and ultimately seeing their work as empowering for BAME individuals. As the manager of the organisation in Site 2 also recognised, this could be reinforced by their BAME clients understanding that the workers too lived in the community and 'may have experienced some of the problems that they've gone through and who have moved beyond that.'

Awareness of the subtleties of wider societal discrimination may not always be at the forefront of those delivering generic resettlement services. This may even be the

case where there are BAME workers within mainstream organisations, particularly if the dominant ethos of the organisation does not have diversity and equality issues as integral to service delivery. As the manager of the community resettlement organisation in Site 2 acknowledged, this requires a commitment from the top of an organisation which is communicated through all layers. This can be challenging for organisations who need to be open to constructive criticism. Here there is a further role for BAME-focused organisations which can provide input and training in these areas.

More generally it is recognised that it is both the inclusive nature and the quality of service provision which is crucial in meeting the needs of BAME and other ex-offenders. A one-to-one, unrushed, flexible, empathic, and respectful approach is certainly favoured by ex-offenders who typically have multiple and complex resettlement needs. These are undoubtedly very human, rather than ethnic-specific needs. For Chanya, a first-time

offender, the shock of being imprisoned was traumatic and overwhelming and she needed intensive support to regain her confidence:

> "Well the most useful help was talking to [community resettlement organisation], crying and them being there listening and reassuring me that being in prison is not the end of the world. There's a life beyond that. So that was a great help for me because being there I was thinking "This is it. I'm a criminal. I can't do anything." But seeing them, talking to them, made me realise that it is only the beginning."

There are, of course, concerns of bias and preferential treatment which emerge in discussions of BAME-focused service provision. In the Site 1 community resettlement organisation, it had been recognised by the manager that a BAME project had floundered because both prisons and prisoners had been resistant to the idea of a service which only catered for those of BAME origin. It was resolved that having specialist BAME workers within a mainstream service was a better model. This meant that BAME prisoners could choose to work with

any number of project workers around specific resettlement issues, such as employment, education, or childcare, or they could work with the BAME focused workers if required. The former project workers were also accessible to non-BAME origin prisoners.

The case study participants too were fully aware of these challenges and were largely accepting of the need for an inclusive service which meets the resettlement needs of both BAME and white ex-offenders. Otherwise there was the danger of self-segregation as Karl observed, or of minority ethnic ex-prisoners receiving 'special treatment' or unequal treatment as Nadia, Khaled and Steve noted. For Leila, Nadim, Karen, Chanya, and Karl, a multicultural rehabilitation service was what was required, but one in which cultural sensitivity and commitment to meeting the diverse cultural needs of ex-offenders was at the forefront. Leila, for example, favoured a multicultural one stop shop for resettlement in which BAME and white workers were trained to understand cultural difference. This could meet the

needs of BAME ex-offenders who specifically required focused help for a worker of the same ethnicity as them. This recognised that many cultures are distinctively different from 'Westernised cultures', but also that because of poor prior experiences, some BAME ex-offenders may be unwilling to access mainstream provision. The same service would need to run alongside for white majority ex-offenders to avoid resentment and division.

Lessons for Policy and Practice

- BAME-focused provision fulfils a number of roles for BAME ex-prisoners, particularly those who have experienced poor treatment by mainstream organisations.
- Being understood and feeling culturally comfortable and safe provides a basis for clients to be responsive to resettlement support. The quality of provision and the professionalism of staff are particularly valued.
- It should not be assumed that all BAME clients will wish to receive resettlement advice and services from a BAME-focused organisation, as some perceive this to represent unnecessary preferential treatment.
- BAME case workers and managers in such organisations can serve as aspirational role models for ex-prisoners.

'Giving Something Back'

On the path to successful resettlement, it is not uncommon for ex-prisoners to want to give something back to society to make amends for their offending behaviour. Volunteering can meet this need, as well as providing employment experience to help ex-prisoners back into the job market. Karen, for example, volunteered for an organisation that worked with drug-using female sex workers. Having taken two counselling skills courses, she was also studying Health and Social Care as a means to move into advice and resettlement work. Both Chanya and Leila volunteered for the community resettlement organisation from which they had received support. In Leila's case, she carried out assessments of new clients and felt strongly that her own history could help clients 'to know that..I've been exactly where you're sitting and I'm here now on the other side and it's really possible'. John was involved with an agency that works with young offenders, showing them films about

the consequences of offending, from the perspective of ex-offenders like himself.

Similarly, Karl was focused on gaining qualifications to move back into working with young people as he had done before his prison sentence. He was specifically interested in becoming a counsellor, and working primarily with young black men. Often, and this was true in Karl's case, there was an urge to engage with similarly placed individuals who need to be steered away from offending lifestyles or who need to be encouraged into drug rehabilitation or more generally into constructive activities. In Keira's case this was profit-making as through social enterprise funding she had established a means for training women who been the victims of domestic violence, but also working with substance misusers and those involved in the criminal justice system. Leila hoped she would be able to go back into prisons to 'give people hope and inspiration' as a mentor or alternatively to provide some kind of supportive service provision for any group of vulnerable people. Natalie wanted

her daughter to look up to her 'to feel proud that her mum has done something different' in helping 'dysfunctional kids'. She wanted to 'give them some place they can call their little comfort zone, feel safe', a feeling that she herself had not experienced as a child, having been introduced to using crack by her father.

As a Site 2 case worker observed, many previously addicted ex-prisoners are attracted to counselling work, perceiving their own personal insight and difficult experiences as a useful means with which to engage and emphasise with prisoners and other offenders. Steve, for instance, made a concerted effort after serving a long prison term to engage in mentoring. His motivation was that' even if I stop two people in my lifetime of taking drugs or help someone in their lifetime in my career of counselling, I feel like I've done something and given something back.' For the individual involved, volunteering can be enormously rewarding, providing a sense of importance, a 'feel-good factor', which creates assertiveness and a

permanent move away from offending lifestyles.

Lessons for Policy and Practice

- Ex-prisoners may be inspired to go into volunteering, peer mentoring, or advice and resettlement work. Such work can provide them with a feeling of 'giving something back to society', help them gain employment experience which is often lacking, as well as their acting as authentic role models for serving prisoners and current offenders.
- This work needs to be carefully managed and supported and enabled through training and formal qualifications, as appropriate.

APPENDIX: CASE STUDY EX-PRISONERS

[NB: all names have been changed to preserve the anonymity of participants]

Andrew: Male, Black African origin, 27 years old, Father, Studying (Site 3)

- Custodial and community sentences for fraud, driving offences and passing false information
- Several community and custodial sentences for violence, burglary and thefts, currently on licence

Chanya: Female, Black African origin, 36 yrs old, Christian, Mother, Volunteer Work (Site 1)

- One custodial sentence for GBH without intent

Colin: Male, White origin, 21 yrs old, Christian, Volunteer Work (Site 3)

- Several custodial and community sentences for violence and drug supply, currently on licence and bail

APPENDIX: CASE STUDY EX-PRISONERS cont.

[NB: all names have been changed to preserve the anonymity of participants]

John: Male, White British origin, 33 yrs old, Spiritualist, Father (estranged from children), Volunteer work, Mentoring, Counselling training (Site 3)

- Several custodial sentences for violence, thefts, robbery, currently on licence

Karen: Female, Mixed Race origin, 26 yrs old, Mother, Studying, Volunteer Work (Site 2)

- One custodial sentence for robbery and common assault

Karl: Male, Black Caribbean origin, 40 yrs old, Studying, Looking for Employment (Site 2)

- One custodial sentence for drug importation

Keira: Female, White British origin, 39 yrs old, Mother, Self-employed (Site 1)

- One custodial sentence for thefts

Khaled: Male, North African origin, 30 yrs old, Muslim, Father (estranged from children), In training and education, Volunteer Work (Site 2)

APPENDIX: CASE STUDY EX-PRISONERS cont.

[NB: all names have been changed to preserve the anonymity of participants]

Leila: Female, Mixed Race origin, 41 yrs old, Christian, Mother (one child adopted), Volunteer, Part-time work, (Site 2)

- Several custodial sentences for shoplifting

Nadia: Female, British Asian origin, 29 yrs old, Mother (all children in foster care), Unemployed (Site 1)

- One custodial sentence for drug supply

Nadim: Male, Pakistani origin, 38 yrs old, Muslim (Site 2)

- Several custodial sentences for theft, fraud, drug supply, currently on probation

Natalie: Female, Mixed Heritage origin, Mother, (Site 1)

- Several custodial and community sentences for thefts and fraud

APPENDIX: CASE STUDY EX-PRISONERS cont.

[NB: all names have been changed to preserve the anonymity of participants]

Qadir: Male, British Pakistani, Muslim, Unemployed (Site 3)

- One custodial sentence for dangerous driving, selling drugs

Simon: White origin, Male, 47 yrs old, Christian, Training (Site 3)

- One custodial sentence for sexual offences, currently on licence

Steve: Male, Black British origin, 43 yrs old, Christian, Father, Studying, Volunteer, Mentor (Site 2)

- Several custodial sentences for violence and robbery, currently on licence