

The logo for St Giles, featuring the words "St Giles" in a bold, dark blue sans-serif font. The letter "i" in "Giles" is yellow.

Turning a past into a future



St Giles' Peer Advisor Model:

Delivering positive impacts
in the criminal justice system and beyond

PEER ADVISOR

Introduction

The St Giles Trust (SGT) Peer Advisor programme is delivered in over 30 prisons and youth offending institutions across England and Wales. The Bell Foundation, through its Language for Change initiative, part funds the programme in 3 prisons in London and the South East of England.

This jointly commissioned review is intended to provide an analysis of the Peer Advisor programme in custodial settings focusing on:

- the difference that the Peer Advisor model makes – for prisoners, prison staff, the prison environment and wider communities;
- the challenges in developing, delivering and embedding the model in the prison estate, and
- the potential for, and benefits of further development and wider adoption of the model in the prison estate.

The report begins with an executive summary with key findings and recommendations, followed by:

- St Giles Trust Peer Advisor programme: brief background (pages 7-8)
- The prison environment and prisoners (page 9-12)
- What difference does the Peer Advisor programme make?
 - Impact for clients (pages 14-16)
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- Challenges in delivering the Peer Advisor model in prisons (page 27-28)
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Direct quotes are shown in speech marks and italics but are not attributed to individuals to protect confidentiality. Where names are used, they have been changed to protect confidentiality. Many thanks to all those who contributed so generously to this review.

Summary

The St Giles Trust (SGT) Peer Advisor programme enables prisoners to achieve Level 3 or 4 qualifications in Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG), and to gain the skills, knowledge and experience to become a Peer Advisor. Trained Peer Advisors provide practical and emotional support to other prisoners (clients), from the unique position of “someone who’s in the same boat” and through relationships of trust, empathy and mutual respect.

The SGT Peer Advisor programme delivers in over 30 prisons and youth offending institutions across England and Wales. Since 2015, **over 500 prisoners have either trained, or are training, as Peer Advisors, with 45% from BME backgrounds**, including some foreign national prisoners (FNPs). The Bell Foundation currently part funds the Peer Advisor programme in three prisons and has a specific focus on prisoners with poor or no English language skills, including FNPs.

Figures for May 2017 show that **in one month 3,771 clients were provided with 1,003 hours of one-to-one sessions**. In the same month, nearly 2,000 clients attended group sessions delivered by Peer Advisors. Limitations on data gathering, now being addressed, mean that these impressive figures are likely to be significant underestimates. New data gathering systems should provide more information to more fully assess the impact of the programme.

Delivering positive impacts for a prison system under pressure

The majority of prisons are overcrowded, understaffed and under significant pressure. Prisoners are frequently a combination of fearful, anxious, angry, distressed, and frustrated at themselves and the prison system. De-motivation, loss of self-esteem and depression are commonplace. Incidents of drug abuse, self-harm and suicide are increasing. Against this challenging backdrop, the SGT Peer Advisor programme delivers highly positive impacts in the prisons in which it operates, including:

- **For clients:** having a trusted advisor who enables them to understand what’s happening to them, prison processes and their entitlements; having support and advocacy to access services in prison and to plan for release and resettlement; having someone to “*talk things through with and work out a way forward*”. This results in reductions in feelings of frustration, fear, isolation and despair, and helps to reduce incidents of self-harm and suicide.
- **For Peer Advisors:** developing positive attributes including taking responsibility, self-esteem, empathy, motivation and integrity; professional training and supervision leading to an industry standard qualification; ‘work experience’ that enables Peer Advisors to develop self confidence, self esteem and a range of transferable skills that are highly beneficial in prison and on release.
- **For the prison environment:** delivering “*an essential service*” that supports the work of the prisons and their staff; creating a more positive environment in prisons; contributing to key Ministry of Justice aims for equalities, decency and safer custody, and the tests for a healthy prison environment; supporting the process of positive change and reform; facilitating positive relationship building between prisoners, and between prisoners and staff.

A highly professional peer service with sector standard, portable qualifications

SGT's Peer Advisor programme differs from other peer support provided in prisons (and in the community). Crucially, the Peer Advisor role combines information, advice and guidance alongside *"talking things through"*, empathy and mentoring. It is this combination that sets it apart from other, valuable services such as Listeners. Peer Advisor training is generally viewed by prisons as *"much more in depth than other mentoring courses"*, providing an excellent progression route not available through prison education, and a solid foundation for potential employment. Peer Advisors complement and work in partnership with other peer support such as that delivered through the Shannon Trust and Samaritans.

The Level 3 or 4 qualification delivered through the Peer Advisor training is higher than that available through prison education, providing progression which *"really gives you something to get your teeth into and focus on"*. This engages and motivates prisoners, providing *"a real sense of achievement"* that helps to address the lack of positive focus and self-esteem that affects many. Delivering the Peer Advisor model across a significant number of prisons, including local clusters in the East and South East, offers transferability and continuity of training in a prison system that currently is unable to achieve this. It also means that the prison estate benefits from a pool of skilled and qualified Peer Advisors.

Improving safety, equality and decency for the most vulnerable

English language or literacy needs amplify the issues and challenges faced by prisoners, presenting a barrier to understanding processes and accessing basic services. For FNPs, especially the many who have poor or no English language, deportation processes introduces a further level of fear. Peer Advisors provide essential access to understanding deportation/ repatriation processes as well as information on day-to-day prison routines for food, accommodation, health, education and other basic needs. This reduces

distress and self-harm, supporting HMPPS safer custody as well as equality and decency.

Those who have sufficient English to train as Peer Advisors are helped to develop and refine their English language skills, and to acquire a range of expertise and knowledge that can benefit them even after deportation. The Peer Advisor programme has much synergy with the Easy Read service delivered by SGT in HMP Wealstun, that produces accessible versions of prison documents for prisoners with language and literacy needs, and there would be benefits in exploring how these could work together more closely.

Supporting sustainable resettlement and helping to reduce re-offending

The positive impacts of the Peer Advisor programme are not limited to within the prison estate, but continue to benefit prisoners during and after release. Evidence from prison resettlement staff, and Peers who have been released, indicates that the programme helps individuals to get, and stay in, employment and to *"just deal with life better on the outside"*, reducing the likelihood of re-offending. SGT's world leader Social Impact Bond has reduced re-offending rates in Peterborough by nearly 10%, using the Peer Advisor model. Prisoners on Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) are able to train and gain work experience at SGT centres in Ipswich, Leeds, London and Cardiff. Resettlement staff identify that *"It's a really good step up for them, their heads are full of good things and it gets them into a routine for work."* However, the use of ROTL by the prison service has declined sharply and some prisons are unaware that SGT is able to offer this opportunity.

Enhancing prison performance and supporting culture change

The Peer Advisor programme contributes to achievement of the standards for a healthy prison (safety, respect, purposeful activity and resettlement) and the key performance indicators by which prisons are assessed. It also supports the culture change underpinning reform, importantly by positively changing relationships between prisoners and staff. It is regarded by Governors, senior staff and many frontline staff as an “essential service – I don’t know what we’d do without it”. The programme not only provides skilled Peer Advisors for vital prison roles but also at its most effective works hand in hand with wing staff, Offender Managers, Community Rehabilitation Companies and other key parts of the criminal justice system. If the issues of stability of funding and basic prison regime could be addressed, the programme has the potential to offer wide-ranging solutions to the problems facing the prison service and prisoners.

The attitudes of front line officers to the Peer Advisor (and other) non-statutory service are more variable than for senior staff. Positive views include that the Peer Advisors help to reduce self-harm and suicide; make it possible for staff “to get on with our job”, and that the Peers are regarded as honest and credible conduits of information to prisoners. Issues include a lack of understanding and/or awareness of the role of Peer Advisors, resistance because staff feel ‘vulnerable’ in the face of skilled and knowledgeable Peers, and perceived job erosion/loss.

Sustaining and widening the positive impacts: for prisoners, prisons and communities

The extent to which the Peer Advisor programme is embedded in each prison is dependent on the length of time that the programme has been operating, and on a range of other factors which can make sustaining and growing the programme a challenge. These include the type of prison; the range and depth of issues affecting the prison; the level of support from the Governor, senior and front line staff; prisoner movement, and continuity of funding for the programme.



To increase the benefits – for prisoners, the prison environment and the wider community, SGT, HMPPS and individual prisons should consider:

- **Fully embedding the model in prisons where it is not operating to its full potential, drawing on the essential features identified for an effective Peer Advisor programme which include:**

- commitment from the Governor and senior staff;
- integrating the model as an integral part of supporting prison reform;
- staff development to raise awareness programme benefits and allay fears;
- ensuring basic requirements such as unlock and prisoner movement, and
- identifying and securing sustainable funding, including developing financial models.

- **Introducing the model to new prisons that are part of geographical clusters in which one or more prison already has Peer Advisors – to expand the service and maximise the sustainability and portability of training and service delivery by Peer Advisors when prisoners are moved.**

- **Exploring how additional opportunities for Peer Advisors could be created through ROTL, to support further this effective element of resettlement.**

- **Establishing the Peer Advisor model in HMP Maidstone, to support the delivery of HMPPS' safer custody, equalities and decency aims, including through providing the support that reduces the likelihood of self-harm and suicide in the particularly vulnerable FNP population.**

- **Developing an 'FNP Peer Advisor Excellence Hub' at HMP Huntercombe that can provide a service to support FNPs in other prisons that currently do not have this type of specialist service and that have significant FNP populations e.g. HMP Wandsworth.**

- **Exploring ways to dovetail the Peer Advisor model with the Easy Read service, for the benefit of prisoners with English language and literacy needs, providing added value and synergy.**

- **Further improving data collection for the Peer Advice service, to evidence more effectively the business and social value cases for the model.**

St Giles Trust Peer Advisor programme: a brief background

The SGT Peer Advice programme involves training for a nationally recognised Level 3 or Level 4 qualification in Advice and Guidance, along with gaining experience of casework, under professional supervision and management. The Peer Advisor programme is different from other peer delivered services in that it provides a supported work focused pathway. The opportunity to gain an industry standard qualification, combined with significant supervision, management and on the job training, plus volunteer placements provide a much more in depth and comprehensive model than is the case for most peer mentoring schemes.

Previous and current studies of the Peer Advisor model show that a unique feature and key success factor of the programme is that those who train have the 'lived experience' of the clients who they will go on to support, giving them credibility, empathy and the ability to be positive role models. It is these features, and the positive progress that Peers enable in clients, that have resulted in the SGT Peer Advice programme gaining significant recognition and awards.

In the community, the programme is delivered through SGT centres in London, Leeds, Cardiff and Ipswich. These centres can also offer opportunities for those on Release On Temporary Licence (ROTL) from prison. London and Leeds each have recently established Peer Advisor 'hubs', providing a training route not only for SGT clients, but also for people working as volunteers in other third sector organisations.

The Peer Advisor role is a crucial element of all SGT's services for families and children, offenders and ex-offenders, people with complex needs, young people, and those affected by gang involvement or at risk of radicalisation. In the community, Peer Advisors work under the supervision of salaried SGT caseworkers and are trained to provide holistic support to clients on a wide range of issues including housing, welfare, training, budgeting and debt,

employment etc. However, their role is much broader and can include, for example, making sure a child gets to school, accompanying clients to appointments, providing advocacy at a homeless person's unit, carrying out home visits to a vulnerable family, listening and talking through problems, and, importantly, challenging negative views and behaviour. It is the relationship of trust that Peers develop with their clients that is central to the success of the service – in prison and in the community.



The Peer Advisor programme in prisons

SGT's Peer Advice programme operates in 34 prisons across England and Wales. From 2015 to July 2017, a total of 529 Peer Advisors have trained or are in the process of training. Numbers of Peer Advisors in each prison vary between 2 and 53. Two thirds of the 34 prisons have at least 10 Peer Advisors. Prisons where significant numbers of Peer Advisors have been trained/are being trained (2015-2017) include:

Prison	Number	Prison	Number	Prison	Number
Huntercombe	53	Oakwood	26	Sudbury	16
Send	44	Birmingham	25	Swansea	14
Peterborough	40	Wandsworth	20	Wayland	11
Send	36	Norwich	18	Wealstun	10
Cardiff	30	Hollesley Bay	17	Coldingley	10

The Bell Foundation's Language for Change programme seeks to reduce the re-offending rates for prisoners and ex-offenders who have English as a second language, through removing the language barrier to rehabilitation. As part of this programme, the Bell Foundation provides part funding for the Peer Advisor model in 3 prisons – HMPs Huntercombe, Wandsworth and Downview.

Of the total of 529 Peer Advisors, 284 (54%) are fully qualified. The majority of the remaining Peers are in the process of qualifying. The programme involves a 12 week group training programme (1 day per week), development of a portfolio and observations of Peer Advisors in client sessions. Typically, Peers begin providing client advice sessions during their training, once the tutor feels that they have sufficient skills and knowledge, and the Peer feels confident enough to begin delivery.

The gender and ethnicity profiles of Peer Advisors in comparison to those for the overall prison population are interesting and demonstrate that the programme is particularly effective in engaging female prisoners and those from BAME backgrounds, shown on the table below.

SGT does not routinely collect information on the nationality status of Peer Advisors, apart from in the prisons where part funding is provided by the Bell Foundation. This is due in part to the difficulties around identifying nationality status in prisons other than HMPs Huntercombe and Maidstone that are FNO only establishments. Peer Advisors are asked, but not required, by SGT to provide such personal details when they enrol on Peer Advisor training.

Profile	Peer Advisors	Overall Prison Population (2017)
Female	25%	5%
Black & Minority Ethnic (BAME)	45%	26%
BME Black & African	23%	11%
BME Asian	10%	7%

The prison environment

Prisons are operating under extreme and continuing pressure. MoJ information presented in the most recent Bromley Briefing (May 2017) reveals that:

- The UK has the highest imprisonment rate in Europe and the prison population has doubled over the last 14 years: 85,000 people in custody in England and Wales (March 2017). The majority of prisoners are sent to prison for non-violent crimes.
- 76 of the 117 prisons in England and Wales are overcrowded (May 2017). Nearly one quarter of prisoners are held in overcrowded accommodation.
- There is a current shortfall of over 900 frontline staff in public prisons, and nearly 700 support staff. The number of frontline staff has fallen by over 26% in the last seven years.
- Between 2010 and 2015 the number of assaults has risen from 14,508 to 18,874. 2015 saw the highest number of homicides in a single year (8). (MoJ)
- Rates of self-inflicted death, self harm and serious assaults are the highest since records began.
- Use of new psychoactive substances (NPS) such as spice has risen dramatically and is having significant adverse impact on prisoners, staff and the prison environment.
- Prison sentences are getting longer, with the average standing at around 16 months.

This snapshot illustrates the significant challenges faced by prisons in being able to manage and support prisoners. It highlights why distress, tensions and frustrations are so likely to arise amongst prisoners and staff alike.

Whilst the overarching policy, purpose and direction for prisons are set nationally, how this is translated 'on the ground' in each prison will vary, and there is a range of organisational cultures across the prison estate. In addition, historical circumstances and issues can make even those prisons of similar populations and security categories quite different in terms of operation and ability to embed programmes.

For this study, visits took place to five prisons delivering the Peer Advisor model, show on the table below. All except HMPs Huntercombe and Downview were originally part of the Government's 'reform prisons'. In recent months, there has been lack of clarity and direction with the reform agenda, and HMP Wandsworth now appears not to be part of this group. The study also draws on visits and discussions with staff in other prisons including HMPs Wealstun and Hollesley Bay.

Taken together, these prisons represent a good cross section of the estate as a whole, enabling a comprehensive review of how the Peer Advisor programme operates in different circumstances and locations.

Prison	Category and type of prisoner	Population	Location
Wandsworth	Cat B, male. Transitioning to remand. Cat C resettlement wing	Approx. 1,900 with 60% FNPs	Inner London
Downview	Closed Category, female	313, with 56 FNPs	Outer London
Ranby	Cat C, male	Approx 1,000 with 12 FNPs	Nottinghamshire
Coldingley	Cat C, male, working prison. Mainly long sentences and lifers.	Approx 500, with 10 FNPs	Surrey
Huntercombe	Cat C, male, FNP only	Approx 500, all FNPs	Oxfordshire

Prisoners and the challenges they face In comparison to the overall population, many prisoners have experienced significantly greater deprivation and abuse, as well as other serious problems in their lives:

Characteristic	Prison Population	General Population
Taken into care as a child	24%	2%
Experienced abuse as a child	29%	20%
Observed violence in the home as a child	41%	14%
Regularly truant from school	59%	5.2%
Expelled or permanently excluded from school	42%	>1%
No qualifications	47%	15%
Unemployed in the 4 weeks before custody	68%	7.7%
Never had a job	13%	3.9%
Homeless before custody	15%	4%
Have children under the age of 18	54%	27%
Are young fathers (aged 18-20)	19%	4%
Have symptoms indicative of psychosis	16%	4%
Identified as suffering from anxiety and depression	25%	15%
Have attempted suicide at some point	46%	6%
Have ever used Class A drugs	64%	13%
Drank alcohol every day in the 4 weeks before custody	22%	13%

Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile, Autumn 2016

The above figures serve to demonstrate the range of issues for which many prisoners require support and help, even before they have entered prison. Being in prison exacerbates some of these issues, particularly with regard to mental health and disability. 70% of people who died from self inflicted means had already been identified with mental health needs (Prisons & Probation Ombudsman, 2006). 36% of prisoners are estimated to have a physical or mental disability with 18% having a mental disability, as compared to 19% in the general population (MoJ, 2012).

There are a number of other particularly vulnerable groups in prison. 20-30% of prisoners have learning disabilities or difficulties that interfere with their ability to cope with the criminal justice system. They are more likely to have broken a prison rule, being subject to control and restraint practices and to spend time in segregation (Bromley Briefings, Autumn 2016).

This is a snapshot of just some of the issues facing prisoners, but serves to highlight the crucial role of support services in prison. Prison inspectors commented that *“prisoners often prefer support from their peers.....and peers are often easier to access, making them a more readily available source of support”* (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons Annual Report, 2014-15).

Foreign national prisoners (FNPs)

At the end of March 2017, the prison population of approximately 80,000 included just under 10,000 FNPs. These prisoners come from 169 different countries, with 50% from Europe (excluding the UK), of those, 42% from the European Union. Over half of FNPs are from nine countries: Poland, Ireland, Albania, Romania, Jamaica, Lithuania, Pakistan, India, Somalia.

HMPs Huntercombe and Maidstone are dedicated FNP prisons but together only have the capacity to hold around 1,000 FNPs. The remaining FNPs are accommodated in other prisons that have a mix of British and foreign nationals. In some prisons, particularly in London, FNPs account for a significant proportion of the total establishment population e.g. HMP Wandsworth, approximately 60% and HMP Wormwood Scrubs, approximately 40%.

FNPs do not form a homogenous group. Not only is there a very wide range of nationalities and cultures, but also differing levels of general education, mother tongue literacy, English language abilities and other skills. Clearly, some of FNP nationalities listed above may have good spoken English, although some may have literacy needs.

The circumstances of FNPs are also very varied. Some have come to the UK as migrant workers, others have been fleeing persecution, and some have been resident in the UK for many years, with families and established lives but have never applied for British citizenship. A minority have never seen their country of birth and may not speak the language, having come here as babies or very young children.

In 2016, 5,705 FNPs were removed from the UK (Home Office, Dec 2016). Around 85% of prisoners at HMP Huntercombe are deported or repatriated. Whilst for some, serving the remainder of their sentence in their country of birth may mean that they are able to have better contact with their families and communities, for others, the prospect of deportation can be very difficult to cope with. There are a number of reasons for this:

- Prisoners may fear for their safety, and even their lives, if they are returned to their country of birth. This can be the case even for migrants from countries without war or famine, who may have come to the UK to build a better life away from violence, or who are persecuted because of ethnicity, faith/belief, sexual orientation etc.
- Prison conditions in a person's country of birth may well be significantly worse than in the UK. For those with health conditions or disabilities, this can have particularly serious consequences. If an individual has no family support and is in this situation, the outlook is bleak, and in some cases, life threatening.
- Custodial sentences passed by English courts in most cases have the potential for up to half of the sentence being served in the community on licence. Many other countries don't have this system and, if deported, prisoners may well be made to serve the full term in prison. This means that the intention of a sentence passed in English courts is not realised if the individual is deported.

The impact of these issues for individuals is that *"they are in shock, and scared about what's going to happen to them. Even if they can speak a bit of English, they can't really understand what's happening to them, except that they are going to be sent back, and for some of them, that's a terrifying thing. For the ones who can't speak any English, they are totally in the dark and they can't even respond to the deportation process unless they have help"*.

A Safer Custody Bulletin (HMPPS July 2017) highlighted the increased suicide risk for FNPs, including that Lithuanian and Polish FNPs are overrepresented amongst FNP self-inflicted deaths. In addition *"Lack of effective communication with prison staff can increase the risk of suicide and self-harm in FNPs. Language barriers can also make it difficult for staff to recognise that an FNP is experiencing a personal trauma."*

Methodology for the review

This review took place between December 2016 and July 2017. Fieldwork included:

- examining a range of literature - SGT Peer Advice programme monitoring and evaluation reports and data; wider research into peer support in prisons and the prison environment; relevant Government documents.
- visits to five prisons - HMPs Huntercombe, Ranby, Downview, Coldingley and Wandsworth, which included on site discussions with 70 Peer Advisors, 26 clients and 19 prison and SGT staff.
- additional semi structured discussions and/or email interviews with:
 - Governors, senior managers, front line prison staff, SGT delivery and management staff, OMU, HMPPS, other organisations (Shannon Trust, University of Greenwich)
 - 7 Peer Advisors who are now released – 6 in the UK and one in the USA
 - 3 prisoners training/trained as Peer Advisors through Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) from prison



All interviews were conducted using a standard set of questions for consistency, tailored for different stakeholders.

What difference does the Peer Advisor programme make?

There are four key areas of impact provided by the Peer Advisor model that illustrate its value in the criminal justice system.

1. Impact for clients

Prison is a great leveller – most prisoners coming into prison will experience the combination of fear, vulnerability, anxiety and other issues, regardless of their background or previous life in the community. The experience of being in prison combined with the very challenging conditions prevalent in the prison estate mean that some prisoners spiral into frustration and anger, whilst others sink into despair, depression, self-harm and even suicide.

Evidence from Peer Advisors, prison staff and, most importantly, clients, confirms that Peer Advisors provide *“a serious buffer for people who are stressed. They address the anger, frustration, despair, fear, especially the anxiety of not understanding what is happening to you and feeling helpless and not in control.”* This quote encapsulates the *“essential role that the Peer Advisors play”*, particularly against the backdrop of the serious and mounting challenges faced in our prisons, and identifies the significant difference that the Peer Advisor programme makes.

Client feedback and monitoring data on interventions provided to clients show that it is **the combination of trust, empathy, listening along with practical, skilled information, advice and guidance** that is particularly powerful. Peer Advisors combine the skills of a listener with the more proactive skills of an advisor. This combination *“empowers you – they help you to understand what the choices are and then it's up to you. They don't*

“The Peer Advisors are vital because they have the trust of the prisoners. They can do things that we can't, because they aren't staff and they're in the same boat as the prisoners. Prisoners believe them – they are credible and trusted”.

do stuff for you, but they help you to do it for yourself, so it makes you feel better about yourself.”

Prison staff highlighted that *“The Peer Advisors are vital because they have the trust of the prisoners. They can do things that we can't, because they aren't staff and they're in the same boat as the prisoners. Prisoners believe them – they are credible and trusted”.*

Peer Advisors deliver a significant volume of support across prisons. SGT introduced new monitoring systems in April 2017. Using this new system, figures for May 2017 show that in one month 3,771 clients were provided

with 1,003 hours of one-to-one sessions. In the same month, nearly 2,000 clients attended group sessions delivered by Peer Advisors. These impressive results are still an under-estimate of the true volume of work delivered, for the following reasons:

- only around two-thirds of Peer Advisors are completing monitoring forms, and, of those, some may not be fully completed – further training and development on this would be helpful
- significant amounts of work take place before and after actual client sessions – paperwork, talking to members of staff etc. This is particularly the case in HMP Huntercombe where “Peer Advisors generally spend all their cell time working on paperwork for clients”.
- other work carried out by Peer Advisors, such as the OMU materials work (see page 20) is not accounted for in these figures.

In addition, it is worth highlighting that much more client facing work could be delivered if the significant restrictions on prisoner movement and unlock in many prisons could be addressed.

Peer Advisors help clients to tackle their emotional and practical issues as the following examples demonstrate:

Mary (poor English language and mental health issues): “I have a lot of problems. She (Peer Advisor) helps me. She talks with me and gives me advice. She helps me to understand what I need to do and who I need to speak to, and with forms.”

Terry: “I’m not able to read and write, so having someone available is really helpful – filling in forms and reading pay slips. I feel much better getting support. I have no confidence but it’s helpful knowing I can trust a Peer. I feel less frustrated and angry. I used to panic when I had a form to fill out or an issue to resolve, but now I feel calmer knowing I can go to someone. The Peers make prison a better environment because they are more accessible – you can approach them.”

Sam: “It makes a massive difference having a Peer, somebody to bounce ideas off. Two brains are better than one and to get that second

opinion. The Peer helped me with PTSD, personal issues, family and medical. Also to get work within the prison and ideas for future employment. They give me confidence in my decision making which makes me feel more secure in this environment. I feel less frustrated I’m able to talk through the conversation that I have in my own head – rationalising it avoids me ruminating. It’s positive having them.

There’s always an open door where someone is willing to listen, signpost, give information. You know that you’re not going to be fobbed off or have to wait. I feel massively more secure about what happens when I get out. I’ve gone through everything with my Peer and he’s helped me improve on my future plans. The Peer is in the same boat as me. I expect a more straight answer from them. They tell you how it is. There’s a trust issue about confiding in staff – it’s not an option. I think they should be strict on who trains as a Peer to stop anyone who’s not doing it for the right reasons, like just ticking a box.”

Adam: “It’s very reassuring having the Peers. It’s my first time in prison and I really need the help. I feel comfortable with him and I know he’s there and I can talk to him. He gives me emotional support. My emotions were all over the place and I felt relieved getting the support. It gets my frustration out, being able to talk, him being there to listen and not being judgemental. The Peers make prison better, they help to develop people. If you speak to a member of staff you’re scared of it being taken the wrong way and frightened of being disciplined for sharing how you really feel. A Peer is readily available and they keep conversations confidential.”

“The Peers make prison better, they help to develop people. If you speak to a member of staff you’re scared of it being taken the wrong way and frightened of being disciplined for sharing how you really feel.”

Leon: *"The Peer support has made a big difference to me. A great burden was lifted, talking about the crime I committed when I just arrived. Anxiety and depression was a big problem and talking to a Peer helped so much. My advisor also helped me to get on a list to try and get my medication sorted for my mental health. Just being able to talk through everyday problems is a huge help, especially if it's your first time in prison. Things like medication, wing problems and work problems can cause anxiety for me and my Peer helped me talk about issues and tried to link me up with MAPS and officers who could help. My anxiety has gone a lot and I don't feel isolated to the level I did when I first came here."*

Simon: *"Peers made a major difference for me. I had help from two Peers for a number of things. They helped me making applications to a number of different departments within the prison and help to draft a formal letter to prospective employers (in the community) in order to enhance my employability. It has made a huge difference because I felt that I was actually being listened to. It has made me feel more positive about some things when I get released, like employment, but I'm not so positive about things that I don't have any control over. I think that if I'd asked a member of staff for help, they would have directed me to a Peer anyway, and I think that the Peers are able to offer a greater service to fellow prisoners. I would like to suggest a drop in surgery to allow inmates from all wings to access the service."*

FNPs have the added and hugely significant stress of deportation in addition to all the other challenges prisoners face, with many very fearful of being returned to and incarcerated in their country of birth. For FNPs who have few or no English language skills, FNP Peer Advisors at HMP Huntercombe form a highly experienced, trained and cohesive team providing essential access to understanding deportation/ repatriation processes and advocacy where needed, as well as information about and access to essentials such as meals, health and education.

There is significant evidence that Peer Advisors reduce incidents of self harm and even suicide in this particularly vulnerable part of the prison population, as underlined by prison staff: *"we had an incident on Friday with*

a chap who'd just arrived, couldn't speak English and was identified as a suicide risk, partly because he couldn't understand what was happening to him. We called in a Peer straight away – he found someone who could interpret and together they explained things, the forms and the process, and calmed him down. Without that, we would have been on 24 hour watch".

Milo: *"When I came here (prison) I was all over the place. It wasn't just the paperwork, I was in a bad way. The help they give is immeasurable. They put themselves in our shoes – they have been there so they understand. They are like a light in a tunnel. They calm our minds and that helps us to be here, and it makes our families feel better too. We have done wrong, but we are good people deep inside. They (Peers) help you to realise that it can get better."*

I saw a guy when he came in. He was head down, looking really bad. I said to talk to a Peer. Then I see him a couple of weeks later and he is smiling and very different – it makes you feel good to know that people can get help and feel better."

Everyone benefits from them – if they weren't here the prison would explode with people who are afraid and upset. Because they are here, you don't have to call a Listener for people all the time – if they weren't here we would need to do that because people are in a bad way. They help on many levels – paperwork (for deportation and repatriation), helping us to get education and healthcare, moving wings to be with others from same country, and then just being there."

They work so hard. If the doors (cell) were open, it would be a 24/7 service. If you get papers on a Friday, they will work through the weekend to sort it out. It's necessary because you get a short time to reply and if you don't then they (UK Border Agency) will just take you."

FNPs are not entitled to any formal resettlement services. This makes the service offered by Peer Advisors all the more essential, for those who may be granted permission to remain in the UK after release and for those returning to their home countries. For example, many FNPs have problems in ensuring that their personal items are kept track of so that they have them on deportation/release. This is particularly important since mobile phones contain all their contacts and will be needed after deportation. Peer Advisors helping FNPs provide significant support around this issue as well as others.

In HMP Huntercombe, Peer Advisors in their specialist capacity spend “all the time in their cells working on the paperwork for clients”. Whilst figures are not available for the precise number of hours spent on client casework, the particular dedication of these Peer Advisors is reported by clients and staff alike.

“The Peer Advisor training gave me something to aim for, to feel good about.”

2. Impact for Peer Advisors

Peer Advisors evidently gain an enormous amount from training and qualifying, and in delivering a service for fellow prisoners. Many Peer Advisors highlight that it gives them “*responsibility, pride and integrity*”, and a constructive and positive focus. Peer Advisors develop self-esteem and self confidence, along with a sense of “*hope that you can do more with your life than you have up until now*”, as illustrated by the following examples:

Dave: *“When I came into prison, I felt hopeless and helpless. The Peer Advisor training gave me something to aim for, to feel good about. You know that you’ve done something wrong and you can’t put it right, but being a Peer means that you can repay something, give something back, try to do something right for yourself and for other people.*

When you’re feeling really low, getting the opportunity to do something that makes you feel better is really important. It makes you feel more optimistic about the future – like you can imagine doing something good when you get out too.

A lot of the guys in here are at rock bottom and also they may have a lot of different problems that come altogether. We can’t solve them all, but we can help to point them in the right direction, talk things through and help them to look at their options. The talking is really important because we’re all in the same boat – we know how it feels to be in here. But the thing about being a Peer is that it isn’t just talking, I can give practical help sometimes too, and information. The training teaches you how to help people to help themselves – that’s a really valuable thing to understand. It makes you feel so good to see someone who came to you with their head down and low, then being cheerful and positive about life.

We can’t solve all the problems – that’s not what we’re here for, and there’s still lots of frustrating things about being in prison. But we do help people to understand what’s going on and how to do things like apps (applications) so that they know how to ask for what they need. If you’ve got a bit of a problem with reading and writing then that kind of help is

really important – not just understanding the words on the form, but what the process is and the best way of going about things.

If we didn't have the Peer Advisor programme, it would be chaos in here. I wouldn't like to think what would happen. We do help to keep things calm."

John: *"Training as a Peer makes me happy – I'm gaining knowledge, learning skills and it's hugely satisfying to help other people and to get respect for doing that. You have to do it with a passion – it's hard work so you need to be motivated. I would never have done anything like this on the outside, now I'm planning to try and do a job like this when I get out. Simon (an experienced Peer Advisor) was an inspiration to me – he's a pillar of the programme, a role model, and it made me want to do that and be like him. It makes you want to be a better person.*

Doing the training and being a Peer Advisor helps us to be better people. It opens your eyes to race, diversity, to understanding people from different countries. Before I did the training, I didn't really take much notice of those things and I suppose I didn't really want to understand. Now, I think very differently about other people from different places.

The course and doing the work really helps you to develop your problem solving skills. The processes (for deportation) mean that you have to work on one stage at a time and be methodical. Doing that teaches you skills that you can apply to anything – problem solving, working through things properly. You can use it in all walks of life.

Everything that's done is life changing - it helps someone's mental health, their anxiety and they see the world differently. It's a very responsible job being a Peer – you have that responsibility to help people make changes and to be happier.

People are not articulate – they may not be good in their own language, let alone English. Many have mental health problems. Our support helps

them with all of that, and gives them a voice. The officers trust us more now and they know that we can help. Their attitudes have changed towards us and we are more of a team. We work together."

The programme provides a good level of qualification (L3 or L4) that is not available through prison education programmes or other mentoring training. Most prison education is below or at Level 2. Whilst this can help to provide appropriate support and progression for many, for those with more ability and for the minority with higher level qualifications, it does not offer an engaging educational experience. The limitations of prison education can be a source of frustration for some prisoners including those serving long sentences who have worked their way through all the courses; those who have higher level qualifications; those who may have literacy around Level 1 (the minimum needed to do the training), but who are highly motivated and have potential. The Peer Advisor programme gives the opportunity for such prisoners to *"get their teeth into something that is much more satisfying and that stretches them"*.

In the words of one Head of Education *"this course is much more in-depth than the mentoring courses and follows a City & Guilds curriculum to A level standard. I'm very happy that we're able to offer it here"*. This view is reinforced by Peer Advisors who highlight that *"before you do the programme, you're doing things (prison roles) to the best of your knowledge, but after you've done it you have more knowledge and skills, and the confidence to do it really well."* The qualification and training are industry standard, helping to improve employment prospects for offenders when they leave prison.

"[The IAG] is much more in-depth than the mentoring courses and follows a City & Guilds curriculum to A level standard. I'm very happy that we're able to offer it here"

In addition to these benefits, SGT have delivered the programme in at least two prison clusters – East of England (HMPs Norwich, Hollesley Bay and Wayland) and London/South East (HMPs High Down, Coldingley, Lewes and Ford), prisoners moving through prisons in these clusters are able to continue their training if they need to move before they have completed. Portable training and qualification is somewhat of a ‘holy grail’ in the prison education system. It has been an aim for many years, but yet to be achieved. The Peer Advisor programme occupies a unique position in being able to offer this. In addition, offering training and delivery through clusters enables a group of prisons to develop a skilled and qualified pool of resource that benefits everyone.

The programme also delivers significant benefits for those FNPs training as Peer Advisors. For prisoners whose first language is not English it also provides opportunities to develop all aspects of their English, including understanding technical and formal language, picking up the nuances and idioms that improves understanding as well as expression, and being able to use appropriate language and structure in written case notes.

One tutor observed that *“you can see the language development through the case notes – the improvement in vocabulary and accuracy, and a growing confidence in how to use English language”*. As English language skills increase, both for non-native and native English speakers, their confidence grows. This enhances their ability to provide a high quality service to clients in the prisons.

Peer Advisors not only achieve a nationally recognised Level 3 qualification, but also develop a range of highly valuable transferable skills that can be used on release, for example:

- customer care
- time and ‘case’ management
- teamwork
- relationship/trust building, including confidentiality and drawing boundaries
- dealing with difficult situations and diffusing tension/anger

- how to interpret key legislation eg: equal opportunities
- presenting to groups (including staff)

The programme involves a considerable amount of self-reflection and “space to breathe”. *“It really makes you think about yourself, how you handle things, how you handle yourself, how you come over to other people – that’s really useful in all sorts of ways”*. This increased self-awareness is a very valuable life skill and supports the type of self development that can underpin successful rehabilitation. Prison staff also notice the difference that the training and development makes – *“you see people becoming calmer, they grow in confidence and that’s important if they are going to make progress and turn themselves around”*.

Peer Advisors also gain new insights and perspectives through their training and work, for example, *“I used to be quite judgemental, but now I’m much more accepting of people’s differences”* and *“the training has made me challenge myself and my beliefs, so I feel I can now help others to do that if they are negative about things or other people, or they are stereotyping. It’s important because if you just lump everyone like the screws into one group, you’re not open to the good ones helping you, and if you have bad feelings about people from particular countries that’s not going to help you either.”* These developments not only benefit individual Peer Advisors, but also the clients that they support.

This study has found evidence that the skills and qualification gained through the Peer Advisor programme are helping ex-offenders to move into and perform better in employment, thereby improving their life chances and reducing the likelihood of re-offending. This includes for prisoners released back into the UK and after deportation to their home country as the following examples illustrate:

Sharon – working for a homeless charity in the USA: *“Doing the Peer Advisor Training guided me as to how to help other prisoners and*

understand the Prison process. It also give purpose at the prison, something to look forward to doing while improving my own self. There were no negative impacts, everything learned and experienced are being used at my present job.

The Peer Advisor Programme gave me knowledge I didn't have before. Prisoners always felt more confident to talking to a Peer Advisor over a PO (Prison Officer). The Peer Advisors are the bridging gap between prisoners and PO where as they were able to relay between staff and prisoners and it give PO better understand of what prisoners needed. Prisoners were able to express or explain their needs without feeling stressed and inadequate.

It was during my Peer Advisor training that I realized what I wanted to do with my life, which was helping clients transition from one stage in life to another one. I was released in 2014 to my country of birth Trinidad and Tobago, then return to my home resident in the United States.

I started working at Breaking Ground in 2016 as an Eligibility Specialist in the Leasing and Compliance Department for Low Income Housing. At this job, applicants apply for low income apartments. We make initial contact with applicants and request information to verify their eligibility and scheduled interviews. After receiving and verifying their document, it is submitted to Housing Preservation Department (HPD) for approval. Once approved we take the applicant to see the apartment and then they sign a lease. It sounds simple but filling 75 apartments from a list of 85000 applicants with different apartment preferences (Disabled 7%, Community residents 50%, Municipal employees 5% and General Public) requires detailed work and accurate figures.

My Peer Advisor training did help me get this job because of my experience with interviewing clients for housing, from when I did volunteer work with St Giles Trust. In my present job I have used my knowledge as to what the applicants will need to get for low income housing and how to get the information from them in a timely manner. In general this training give me a better understanding of myself – areas where I lacked confidents, assertiveness, continuation of goals and what

is realistically achievable.

When I got released I didn't only come home a free person, I came home a free person with knowledge and experience. Also knowing what field area I wanted to work in. It was a bit hard at first with getting into that field or anything similar without working experience in the United States. Then Immigration had issues with me as a green card holder with a conviction and working with less fortunate clients. At present I cannot accept any promotions because it would require a License and I am in Immigration probation.

I have learned all the different positions in my department - Intake, Compliance and Leasing.

At the end of the month when I am showing a homeless client their new apartment (after all the work put in from the initial interview to getting their personal documents, housing voucher, verifying their eligibility and approval by the HPD), I know the Peer Advisor training I got through St Giles Trust helped me a lot. I have a career that I look forward to doing every day."

Mary – working at an optician: *"I was in Holloway and then was moved when the prison closed down. The Peer training was a really good thing to do, and it's great that all kinds of different people are able to do it. I had quite a good education, but lots of women haven't had that opportunity and it's really good that there's some training with a proper qualification that everyone can go for. The Level 3 qualification is equivalent to 2 A levels and it's good to have that qualification, especially as most of the other qualifications in prison aren't at that level. I was lucky and got the opportunity to do an optical course as well with Specsavers on ROTL (Release on Temporary Licence).*

Training as a Peer Advisor really increased my skills - my empathy and behavioural skills, as well as understanding autism, dyslexia and learning difficulties, and how they affect people. In my job now at Specsavers I

see quite a few children with autism and other disabilities and the Peer training has really helped me to work with them more effectively because I have a better understanding.

It's impacted on everything for me, not just at work. It has generally helped me to understand and get along with people better. The Peers are really important in prison – to have someone who's on the same level as you is really helpful. There's a massive trust issue in prison and the Peers really help to address that. It makes it more harmonious. The training was really good, and doing it with other people was really helpful too – you learn how to work with other people.

I've been lucky because I could do the optical course to get into the job I'm doing now. For other people who maybe don't have a particular job to go to like me, the Peer training would really help them to get a good job, it gives them a lot of skills and confidence that they wouldn't otherwise have coming out of prison. It should be available for more people.”

“There's a massive trust issue in prison and the Peers really help to address that. It makes it more harmonious. The training was really good, and doing it with other people was really helpful too – you learn how to work with other people.”

Tony – looking for work in an IAG role: “I am a refugee from Cameroon and I was released (into the UK) 3 months ago. Life is quite difficult at the moment. I'm not able to live with family because of nature of my offence. I was convicted of dangerous driving with kids in the car, but I do see my kids which is good.

Before I went to prison I was a qualified teacher, but I can't do that now. Doing the Peer Advisor training meant that I could use my skills positively. I really enjoyed helping other people there – there are so many really desperate people and you can help them. I really enjoy helping other people – it makes you feel better.

I wanted to do the Peer training because when I went to prison it was awful and the Peer was someone that you could go to. They were different from the staff because you can have a more open conversation with them and they also know how you feel. Because everyone is a foreign national as well, the Peers understand why you are so scared about deportation. The people in there couldn't understand what's happening to them without the Peers.

Because of doing the Peer training, I'm looking for work in that field and I'm hopeful that I'll find some. The Peer Advisor training is a really good idea for people – it gives you something positive to aim for and it also helps other people. That's really, really useful.”

Chris, on release he worked as a volunteer in a Peer Advisor role and is now a paid caseworker with St Giles Trust: “ I first came into contact with Peer Advisors in prison and then I started doing my training with St Giles on ROTL, and working as an admin support there. At the same time I was working in the prison as a Peer Advisor.

It gave me a real focus when I was in prison. There's an element of informal advice in prison from people who know the system, but that's not always the most constructive and helpful thing to have, so the Peer Advisor system means you can still have advice from a peer, but it will be from a point of real knowledge. Prisoners will automatically go to other prisoners, so if they can get professional support it's much more positive.”

These are only a handful of examples, but serve to illustrate the positive impact of training and working as a Peer Advisor, and the transferability of the skills and knowledge acquired through the role. Following up Peer Advisors when they leave prison is a notoriously challenging task. That said, the more evidence that can be gathered – narrative and hard figures – the more effectively SGT can identify the impact that the programme has on rehabilitation and reducing re-offending.



3. Impact for the prison environment

There is clear evidence that the Peer Advisor programme is making a difference and *“having a positive effect on the spirit of a prison”*. Senior staff and Governors, as well as many frontline staff, were overwhelmingly positive about the Peer Advisor programme – *“the Peers are working well with officers – they play a very important and complementary role. It’s a very necessary service – there’s stuff that Peers can do that staff can’t”* and *“they take pressure off the staff – we’re looking to extend the role”*.

Peer Advisors fulfil a variety of prison roles that are a vital part of prisoners’ existence, including Wing Representative, Prisoner Information Desk Orderly, Reception Orderly, Equalities Orderly and others. This places them in positions of trust and knowledge. The system of using Peer Advisor training as a route into prison roles enables the programme to become embedded into prison organisation and structures, providing the prison is able and willing to facilitate the establishment of the programme. Prisoners are able to fulfil the function of the role to which they are allocated, using the skills they have learnt in their Peer Advisor training, enhancing the role considerably. For example, they are able to offer skilled IAG and signposting alongside dealing with applications and enquiries from prisoners. There is high demand in prisons for the programme, and in many cases *“Peers can’t be trained fast enough to meet demand”*.

When asked what the prisons would be like without Peer Advisors, many staff felt that *“we wouldn’t cope without the Peers”, “I can honestly say I don’t know how I would do my job without them”* and *“this place couldn’t operate – I dread to think what it would be like for us all – prisoners and us.”* For prisons with FNPs, staff stressed that *“they manage the shock of repatriation and what it means”*. Staff also recognised the value of Peer Advisors as *“a role model – they are active citizens in our prison.”*

It is clear that where the Peer Advisor model is embedded effectively, there is significant partnership working between Peer Advisors and HMPPS staff, including prison officers and those working in offender management (OMU), for example, prison staff commented that: *“the OMU always refers prisoners*

to a Peer – they (OMU staff) know that the Peer can support the prisoner much more effectively.”

Whilst the Peer Advisor programme is generally very well accepted and valued, there remain some, mainly frontline, staff who are either unaware of the Peer Advisors or who feel that they may be encroaching on the role of staff. This is discussed further in the section on challenges on page 21.

The four tests of a healthy establishment against which prisons are inspected and assessed are:

- **Safety:** Prisoners, particularly the most vulnerable, are held safely.
- **Respect:** Prisoners are treated with respect for their human dignity.
- **Purposeful activity:** Prisoners are able, and expected to engage in activity that is likely to benefit them.
- **Resettlement:** Prisoners are prepared for their release back into the community and effectively helped to reduce the likelihood of reoffending.

“I don’t know how we’d manage risk without them. They prevent an awful lot of self harm.”

Evidence shows that the Peer Advisor programme contributes to prisons being able to meet these tests by providing *“an essential service”* that supports the work of the wider prison and staff who are under immense pressure.

- **Safety:** Many contributors commented on how Peer Advisors help to diffuse and calm situations that would otherwise result in self harm, harm to others, violent incidents or even suicide:
 - *“I don’t know how we’d manage risk without them. They prevent an awful lot of self harm.”*
 - *“Just last Friday, Peers undoubtedly helped prevent a suicide – a Lithuanian man with no English, couldn’t understand the papers*

and thought he was going to be deported immediately. We called for a Peer and they were able to explain the paperwork, reassure him that this was a process that they could help him understand and support him with. That had an immediate effect on staff resources – we didn't need to have him under constant observation, just every 2 hours, because we knew that he wasn't going to try and hang himself because the Peer was helping him. It isn't just about saving us time or staffing – we have to follow procedures in those instances, but it's about the Peer being able to do something that we just can't – it's invaluable and it saves lives.”

○ *“Frustration builds when people don't have an outlet. A relatively small worry at 6pm on a Friday night can build to an enormous issue that may explode over the weekend. The Peer Advisors can diffuse that – it makes a huge difference.”*

- Prisoners and Peers also report *“getting better bonds on the wing – people help each other more, they care a bit more”*. This helps to reduce the tension that can so easily flare up in prisons under pressure from overcrowding and understaffing.
- **Respect:** Peer Advisors are trained in all aspects of equality and human rights legislation. This means that they are able to conduct themselves in accordance with the HMPPS ethos with regard to respect, equality and dignity, and, where needed, to advocate on behalf of clients with regard to this. *“Peers really support our decency agenda – they help with focus groups with prisoners to explore what it means to them”*. In addition, there is evidence that the Peer Advisor programme enhances respect and understanding between prisoners, including those from different ethnicities and nationalities, as highlighted in the previous section. There are over 80 different nationalities in HMP Huntercombe, and HMP Wandsworth also has a very diverse prison population. Many prisoners have not been in a situation where they need to live closely alongside people from different backgrounds and with different cultural norms. The diversity of the Peer Advisors and the skills and insight that they gain provides a significant contribution to enhancing mutual understanding that can

diffuse tensions that may arise between individuals and between groups.

- **Purposeful activity:** the level, breadth and depth of the Peer Advisor training, along with the role that prisoners are able to take in supporting other prisoners both provide highly purposeful activity. This activity benefits prisoners and the prison whilst the offender is in custody, and helps to prepare them for release, clearly contributing to prisoners' achievement of sentence plan objectives – Peer Advisors and their clients. The opportunities that the programme provides of *‘giving back’* or *‘making amends’* is regarded as highly important by many Peer Advisors. In this sense, and through the valuable and high quality service provided to others in the prison community, the programme delivers a form of *‘community payback’* whilst offenders are in custody.
- **Resettlement:** the Peer Advisor programme supports the resettlement of Peer Advisors and their clients. Peer Advisors gain qualifications, skills and self-confidence that enhance their employability and the *‘resilience’* that are vital for successful resettlement that reduces the risk of re-offending. For clients nearing the end of their sentences, the Peer Advisor provides valuable advice and signposting for housing, benefits and employment.

The contribution of the Peer Advisor programme across these four key areas also supports the achievement of a wide range of prisons' key performance indicators.

“Peers really support our decency agenda – they help with focus groups with prisoners to explore what it means to them”.

Prisons are very challenging environments – for prisoners and staff alike. The Peer Advisor programme, whilst it is delivered in over 30 prisons, is of relatively small scale in each prison and cannot tackle deep-seated issues such as overcrowding and understaffing that require intervention (and resourcing) from the prisons, HMPPS and MoJ. The programme helps to offset the impact of these institutional issues, as well as supporting prisoners to tackle their own problems. It is clear that, even if the institutional issues were solved overnight, the Peer Advisor role would still have hugely positive impacts for prisoners.

There is also evidence that the Peer Advisor model could play a pivotal part in prison service development and reform. Although there is currently a lack of clarity about the precise nature of the prison reform agenda, there appears to be general agreement about *“being able to look at, and do things differently”* to improve the functioning and effectiveness of this critical part of the criminal justice system. The development of mutual respect between prisoners and staff, such as through the Peer Advisor programme, is seen by senior prison staff as key to improving prisons, including through any reform agenda.

There are powerful examples of how the Peer Advisor programme facilitates positive relationship building that is helping to change prison culture – *“without the Peers, we would go back to us and them – as a staff member, I don’t want to see that happen.”* These examples include improved relationships *“on the wing, we (Peer Advisors and officers) work as a team, we respect each other’s roles and we know where the boundaries are.”* In some prisons, Peer Advisors, officers and senior staff meet regularly to plan service delivery and development – *“it’s very much a partnership, and that’s how it should be. The Peer Advisor programme helps us to achieve that.”*

In some prisons, being a Peer Advisor enables prisoners to get involved in a range of other activities that are beneficial for them and for the wider prison community. Examples include:

- In HMP Huntercombe, Peers are now supporting the Offender Management Unit (OMU) processes in the prison and are currently producing culturally appropriate versions of OMU cell work materials

that include modules on anger management and cognitive behaviour therapy to try and provide more support for FNPs. This is particularly important since FNPs have no formal access to the rehabilitation/resettlement provision that is a mandatory part of British nationals’ sentence plans. In addition, because of the highly specialist and skilled nature of the work that Peer Advisors undertake in relation to deportation, the team are able to provide services to other prisons on an ad hoc basis (and via staff) that have FNPs but no specialist Peer Advisors to support them.

- In HMP Wealstun, Peer Advisors work on the Easy Read (ER) service developed by SGT at HMP Wealstun that enables prisoners to train in ER techniques and produce ER versions of complex and technical Prison Service Instructions. The ER documents provide access to important information for prisoners with literacy and/or ESOL needs. The positive impact of the service has enabled HMPPS to provide further funding for its development. Prisoners with English language and/or literacy needs in other prisons would benefit from ER documents and there is significant potential for synergy and added value in operating ER and Peer Advisor models jointly in additional prisons.
- In HMP Coldingley, Peer Advisors deliver group sessions to prisoners on employability, as well as for induction for new prisoners, a role that many Peer Advisors take in prisons. In addition, some Peer Advisors are involved in the Keep Out programme where young people at risk of offending are invited into the prison to sessions run by prisoners to raise their awareness of the consequences of crime and the experience of being in prison.

Peer Advisors work effectively with other peer support programmes delivered through partners including the Shannon Trust and the Samaritans (Listeners). An important element of the role is to signpost and refer clients to appropriate services. This means that they not only provide a central point of information and advice, but also can help to promote partnership working across different services in the prisons.

4. Impact in the wider community

The impact of the Peer Advisor programme as delivered in prisons stretches well beyond the prison walls. Whilst much of the evidence is anecdotal, it is nonetheless persuasive:

- **Reducing re-offending:** A senior member of staff reported that, *“anecdotally, more people are successful on release after the Peer Advisor programme than for any other programme”*. As identified, the qualification, skills and experience acquired by Peer Advisors and the support provided by them to clients can help to reduce the risk of re-offending. This brings significant benefits for the community in reductions in crime and distress to victims. A Head of Reducing Re-offending highlighted that *“our CRC (community rehabilitation company) employs some Peer Advisors and they do tremendous work supporting the guys. It’s added value for the taxpayer and for resettlement because they have increased confidence, self esteem and ability on release – that’s real value.”* SGT are currently waiting for the MoJ data lab to provide data on the number of Peer Advisors who have re-offended since the beginning of the project in 2012.
- **Volunteering and employment:** Peer Advisors are better equipped to move into sustainable employment, whether it is in a similar field or in something very different. The volunteering work undertaken by Peers in the community is of immense social value, and paid employment means that ex-offenders are contributing to the economy and the public purse through taxation.
- **Supporting family relationships:** The sense of pride and achievement felt by Peer Advisors and the insights into relationships can have positive effects on their own personal and family relationships. In addition, the support and advice provided by Peer Advisors to clients clearly helps them to address issues with their relationships which benefits the families of those clients.
- **Tolerance and empathy:** Many Peer Advisors commented on how their attitudes and *“stereotyping”* has been challenged for the better by being on the programme. These changes appear to stay with them on release and benefit them in their work and life outside prison.

Whilst these impacts may be small scale, they are significant and can only serve to benefit the families, social and work circles, and communities where ex-offenders settle on release. Contrast this with someone who may not have had the benefit of being a Peer Advisor or getting support from one. The ripple effect of a single crime, or persistent prejudice or even extremism, potentially has a negative impact of far greater magnitude.

SGT’s involvement in the world first Social Impact Bond initiative has just been proven to deliver a 9.7% reduction in re-offending rates for those ex-offenders being released from HMP Peterborough. This innovative approach uses the Peer Advisor model and involves investors contributing funding against which they receive an interest payment if the re-offending rate is reduced by at least 7.5%. The taxpayer also saved £10 for every £1 invested (Pro Bono Economics and Frontier Economics, An Economic Analysis of Through The Gates, 2009)

Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) is a very effective mechanism for supporting offenders to re-establish their lives in the community ahead of full release on licence. Unfortunately, despite 99.9% of ROTL arrangements being completed successfully, there has been a drop of nearly 40% in the availability of ROTL across the prison service over the last three years. (MoJ, Bromley Briefing, 2017)

SGT regularly offers places to those on ROTL – either those who have trained, or part trained, as a Peer Advisor in prison, or who express an interest in training at SGT premises whilst on ROTL. These placements are very effective and in some cases have led to ex-offenders being employed as paid caseworkers by SGT.

The Resettlement Officer for one prison that offers ROTL observed that, *“when I go to the St Giles office, I meet guys who’ve been inmates with us. It’s a really good step up for them, their heads are full of good things and it gets them into a routine for work. Some who’ve been in for a long time have lost their independence and confidence – this helps to get it back so they can cope when they leave.”*

That said, a number of prison staff seemed unaware of the ROTL service offered by SGT. This is potentially a missed opportunity, for prisoners, prisons and SGT alike.

Challenges in delivering the Peer Advisor model in prisons

The Peer Advisor programme is delivering significant benefits in prisons. However, there are a number of challenges in establishing, embedding, sustaining and developing the programme:

- **Prison pressures and constraints:** as outlined earlier, prisons currently face significant challenges in providing basic facilities and services. Staff shortages can mean that prisoners are not unlocked to attend training, including for Peer Advisor training. Where prisoner movement is restricted, clients are unable to access Peer Advisors who may not be on their wing, and initial assessment surgeries that are so helpful in enabling Peer Advisors to 'triage' clients cannot take place. Revised risk assessments, which can be prompted by a host of different factors may also prevent training courses from starting, and prohibit sufficient prisoner movement. The need for security in prisons is clearly understood, however, it appears that understaffing often precipitates movement restriction rather than security issues.

Whilst these circumstances present more challenges for establishing the Peer Advisor programme, because they contribute to prisoner frustrations, they make the programme even more essential. Tensions and prisoner frustrations are likely to run highest where there are the most pressures in prisons, and the positive impact that Peer Advisors can have in reducing these serious issues is clear.
- **Staff attitudes, awareness and turnover:** Positive staff attitudes are key in enabling an effective Peer Advisor service to be established. Some staff can feel challenged or undermined if their knowledge levels don't match those of Peer Advisors, or if they have a perception that Peer Advisors are eroding staff roles. Whilst defensive positions may be understandable, particularly when staff are under pressure, senior staff and Governors were quite clear that these unhelpful cultures needed to change in order to properly implement reform, including working well with prisoners such as Peer Advisors – *"some staff feel we're giving more to the men than to them – we need to turn that around and it's a culture change"*. Another senior staff member added, *"we need to sell it to staff as 'it makes your job easier' and that it empowers staff to carry out their roles"*. Many prisons are large and may not have effective communication. Some staff are simply unaware of the role of Peer Advisors and therefore don't realise that they can refer prisoners to them for support.

- **Significant turnover and changes of staff in the prison system:** Front line staff turnover is high and many senior staff (Executive Governors, Governors) move roles within the criminal justice system on a frequent basis. Where new senior staff have no previous experience or knowledge of the Peer Advisor programme, there may be a lapse in support which can seriously affect the embedding and/or sustainability of the Peer Advisor model.
- **Inconsistent resourcing:** The Peer Advisor programme is currently funded through a variety of different sources, much of it fairly short term. SGT has done very well to ensure the continuation of the programme in so many prisons. However, there have been gaps in delivery because secure funding has not been available. These gaps waste resources. Experienced staff often need to move to other jobs and are lost. There is also considerable loss of momentum which means that significant time and resource has to be put in place to re-establish the programme when new funding becomes available.



Moving forward: how can the Peer Advisor programme build its impact?

The Peer Advisor programme currently delivers significant and wide-ranging positive impact for a relatively small scale programme in each prison. To increase the benefits – for prisoners, the prison environment and the wider community, SGT, HMPPS and individual prisons should consider:

- **Fully embedding the model in prisons where it is not operating to its full potential.** The essential features required for the Peer Advisor model to be fully embedded, most effective and have the greatest impact for the criminal justice system include:

- Strong commitment from senior staff/Governor to ensure that the model is 'championed'; essential for it to be established in the challenging prison environment.
- Incorporating the model as an integral part of prison reform that can support positive change in line with the overall direction and policy of the prison and HMPPS.
- Staff training and development to raise awareness amongst staff about the Peer Advisor model and its benefits, and to change negative perceptions, for example, around job erosion, risk etc.
- Appropriate security levels for risk ratings, unlock and prisoner movement to facilitate training delivery and Peer Advisor meetings with clients.
- Stable funding, facilities and resources - Governors and HMPPS face significant challenges and difficult choices in terms of allocating finite resources. That said, the Peer Advisor model is clearly regarded as an "essential" service. In addition to SGT's

continuing efforts to source financial support from a variety of sources, and the valuable contribution of the Bell Foundation, some sustainable funding from the criminal justice system would yield significant benefits in the current climate and may also help in leveraging in other funds. Continuing to develop a range of financial models for the programme will be beneficial in helping to explore how joint approaches to funding could be found.

- **Introducing the model to new prisons that are part of clusters in which one or more prison already has Peer Advisors.** This will expand the service to a greater number of prisons and prisoners. This approach would also maximise the sustainability and portability of training and service delivery by Peer Advisors when prisoners are moved. This will provide added value.
- **Exploring how additional opportunities for Peer Advisors could be created through ROTL,** to support further this effective element of resettlement. This should include SGT raising awareness across the prisons with which it currently works, of the opportunities that can be offered through this route.

- **Establishing the model in Maidstone prison**, to support the delivery of HMPPS' safer custody, equalities and decency aims, including providing support that reduces the likelihood of self-harm and suicide in the particularly vulnerable FNP population.
- **Developing an 'FNP Peer Advisor Excellence Hub' at HMP Huntercombe** that can provide a service to support FNPs in other prisons that currently do not have this type of specialist service and that have significant FNP populations eg: HMP Wandsworth. The Peer Advisor Manual being developed at HMP Huntercombe could provide a very valuable resource across the prison estate.
- **Exploring ways to dovetail the Peer Advisor model with the Easy Read service**, for the benefit of prisoners with language and literacy needs, and to provide added value through a synergistic approach.

Finally, whilst there is a wealth of evidence to illustrate the impact that the Peer Advisor programme has on the lives of individuals, for the prison environment and the wider community, it is patchy in places. Improving the consistency, range and depth of data collection would enhance the evidence base considerably, helping to underpin the business and social impact case for the Peer Advisor model. Data collection should include more consistent logging of client interventions and time spent by Peer Advisors on these, as well as qualitative evidence of the impact on clients' lives.

Developing and introducing an additional module for the Peer Advisor programme which focuses on monitoring and, particularly, evaluation skills may support this critical aspect of the model, as well as providing Peer Advisors with additional, transferable skills

Conclusion

The Peer Advisor model is providing significant positive impacts and benefits, for prisoners, the prison environment and wider community. If the capacity for the programme can be further developed to create a 'critical mass' in the prisons in which it currently operates and additional prisons, the model has the potential to help the prison service make real headway in tackling some of its most challenging issues.



Appendix:

Methodology and Key Sources

Key sources

St Giles Trust MPR data for the Peer Advisor programme and periodic reports to the Bell Foundation

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