Peer Advisors
Those providing the support worked towards obtaining a Level 3 QCF Advice and Guidance qualification whilst delivering the support provided through PTTF as part of the vocational element of their course. They are known as Peer Advisors.

Peer Advisors were selected and trained from amongst the serving prison population in HMP Leeds to provide peer support to other serving prisoners and from ex-offenders in the community to offer support to clients on and after release.

The Social Innovation Partnership (TSIP) were enlisted by St Giles Trust to evaluate the impact of PTTF with the aim of guiding improvement within St Giles Trust and contributing to a wider evidence-base of what works in reducing re-offending.
How were clients supported?
The project made contact with prison leavers four weeks prior to their release. Peer Advisors assessed each client, identified their needs, drew up an agreed action plan of support and liaised with agencies both within the prison and in the community.

Clients were offered 'through the gates' support on their release on the important first day out when the risk of re-offending is highest.

Ongoing support in the community was offered for up to 12 weeks, becoming more light touch as the client became stabilised and independent.

What support was offered?
A mix of flexible practical and emotional support was offered to clients both inside prison and in the community.

Typically, this involved help with accessing housing, employment and/or training opportunities, benefits, managing debts and engaging with specialist services around issues such as addiction and mental and/or physical health.

As ex-offenders themselves, Peer Advisors were ideally placed to provide highly credible emotional support to their clients and keep them motivated on the road to resettlement.

How many people benefitted?
During the course of the pilot, 203 clients received support from 43 Peer Advisors (17 in custody and 26 in the community) over a period of 13 months (February 2014 to March 2015).

Who were the clients?
Peer to the Future worked with low to medium risk offenders and some high risk clients (at the discretion of their Offender Supervisor) who had needs in at least two areas: housing, substance misuse, learning difficulties, low literacy and mental health problems.

The evaluation
TSIP used a mixed method approach towards evaluating the impact of Peer to the Future. It was based on three elements:

- data on hard outcomes in areas such as housing, employment
- interviews and focus groups with peer advisors, clients and staff
- a matched comparison study on externally provided data on arrests, charges and sentences.

The matched comparison study has so far been unable to be completed as critical external matching data is still being sought.

“THE REAL BEAUTY OF ST GILES IS THAT THEY DON’T GIVE UP ON PEOPLE. THOSE LADS NEED A SECOND CHANCE BECAUSE THEY FEEL LIKE THEY DON’T DESERVE ONE”
Impact findings

Hard outcome data
This showed that PTTF successfully supported clients to achieve practical outcomes across a range of areas which help minimise the likelihood of re-offending:

- 143 clients were placed in suitable accommodation
- 112 clients received support into employment, training or education
- 152 clients were helped to register with a GP
- 7 clients successfully gained employment

Through the Gates delivery – support was continuous and available prior to, on and after release. Clients received a continuum of peer-led support including at the time when the risk of re-offending was high – the moment of release.

- Benefits to the Peer Advisors – over a quarter successfully obtained the QCF level 3 qualification by the end of the project and more finished the qualification after that. All gained valuable employability skills which could be put to use in a range of professions beyond working with offenders. The experience of ‘giving something back’ helped them develop personally and kept them motivated on their own path to resettlement. Eight of the peer advisors successfully gained employment during the course of the programme.

Interviews and focus groups
This highlighted that central elements of the programme’s approach were considered valuable and effective.

They included:

- The use of Peer Advisors – both clients and peer advisors considered that this gave way to non-judgemental, trusted relationships whereby clients felt comfortable fully engaging with the support. The Peer Advisors themselves became positive role models to their clients and living proof that change was possible to achieve. Peer Advisors were able to draw on their own personal experiences to provide authentic, credible support to their clients.

Reconviction
The matched comparison study has so far been unable to be completed as critical external matching data is still being obtained.

However, data collected internally showed that only 14 out of 203 clients supported by the programme re-offended during the 13 months of the programme.

"There are guys in there that I can talk to that I can make a difference for; I've seen them change and start to do better. And it's good. It helps me make sense of it all. It's a bit like I am changing myself and my own past by doing it."

"Now I am just looking for as much help as I can get... It's the things that didn't occur to me that helped me most. Learning to prioritise my food.. I've never had milk in my fridge and teabags! It's stuff like that that's making me feel normal... for all my problems in life I always immediately turned to gear... now that's changing... I don't think I can do that without St Giles"
In summary

Peer to the Future successfully supported prison leavers – many of which had multiple needs - to successfully adjust to life in the community and offered a valuable path to employment for the Peer Advisors.

St Giles Trust
St Giles Trust works with offenders and disadvantaged people to help them rebuild their lives. It works in prisons and in the community reaching around 15,000 people each year.

Its services offer practical and emotional support through a peer-led approach of using people who have lived experience of the issues facing their clients.

It provides a range of services across the UK. This includes specialist services for young people, vulnerable women and disadvantaged families in the criminal justice system.

Find out more at www.stgilestrust.org.uk

The Social Innovation Partnership (TSIP)
We build bespoke systems to make it easier for people to generate, use, and share evidence about particular social issues and what works to address them.

Find out more at tsip.co.uk

It introduced to West Yorkshire the St Giles Trust model of combining a peer-led approach with a through the gate service.

Since the time of Peer to the Future, St Giles Trust is using Peer Advisors as a central element to the delivery of its work in Yorkshire under the new Transforming Rehabilitation contracts.

It has also secured funding from the Big Lottery to further develop its Peer Advisor model to create a network of Peer Hubs using Peer Advisors to address needs in the local community.