

# A life sentence really?

The resettlement of ex-prisoners with a conviction for a sexual offence and the role of a housing support charity in this process

By Helen Mills and Roger Grimshaw

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## Foreword

### Former HM Chief Inspector of Probation, Andrew Bridges

This report is valuable for what it doesn't do as well as what it does do. In describing the experiences of the residents and staff of a specialist home for those with convictions for sexual offences, it rightly avoids making either a plea for sympathy for the residents or a dramatic claim for measurable success in terms of reconviction rates (although its tracked results are very encouraging, as the report points out, this is a problematic indicator for judging resettlement work with this group).

Instead it powerfully illustrates the demands and dilemmas facing staff and the individuals who have offended when the aim is to achieve both *rehabilitation for the individual* and *protection for the wider public*.

To some extent, all who now work with ex-prisoners of any age or detail are expected to be aware of public protection considerations, and to be able to demonstrate that they are taking all reasonable action to prevent potential harm to the wider public. Alongside these 'controlling' actions, they are also expected to find ways of 'helping' and 'changing' the individuals they're working with, so that they can resettlement in the community and learn how to behave differently in future.

However it is particularly important, and in practice particularly difficult, to achieve both these purposes when working with those with a conviction for a sexual offence. Although reconvictions for sexual offending are statistically less frequent and less immediate than for other offences, each individual incident does of course raise very high public concern. Therefore the staff member faces a dilemma on each occasion that a resident admits to any 'risky' thoughts or feelings – should he be helped or controlled this time? Equally, does the resident feel able to disclose such thoughts or feelings to the staff member? All this is very difficult in practice when the wider context is that few people want to offer someone with a conviction for a sexual offence either a job or a place to rent.

This report sets out these very demanding difficulties in a clear yet dispassionate manner, putting some flesh on the reality of what it is like for the individuals dealing

with this challenge every day in this rather special community. For bringing this subject matter to life it is a very useful study.

**Andrew Bridges**

(HM Chief Inspector of Probation 2004-2011)

September 2011

## **Executive summary**

How to respond to those leaving prison with a conviction for a sexual offence is a highly emotive issue. Resettlement is recognised to have a contribution to make to public safety outcomes. However, the process of how resettlement is achieved, the challenges facing those with convictions for sexual offences in the community and the professional issues encountered by organisations working with a resettlement agenda with this group have received relatively little research attention.

This research was undertaken with the intention to better understand what happens to those with a conviction for a sexual offence after their prison release, and what the role of a housing support service is in supporting the post prison resettlement process. It is based on fieldwork concerning Bridge House; a hostel operated by the Stepping Stones Trust for ex-prisoners with a conviction for a sexual offence.

Considering reconviction rates is a common approach in research about resettlement organisations generally, though it is well recognised that this is a problematic indicator to assess resettlement work with this group. In Bridge House's case, access to the Police National Computer in 2003 showed that none of the 32 people who had resided at Bridge House had been convicted of a further sexual offence. However, this relatively small sample size, in the context of considerable variation in the reconviction rate over time and according to the original sexual offence conviction, preclude drawing an informed conclusion from this information about the impact of Bridge House on sexual reconviction rates.

Research must therefore consider other kinds of outcomes achieved for those supported. Progress regarding three key resettlement outcomes is considered in this research (housing, community reintegration, and employment). The practice of Bridge House in support of these outcomes is also considered. The research draws on 19 interviews with those convicted of a sexual offence who resided at the hostel, staff and volunteers at the hostel and representatives from partner organisations, including statutory agencies with a responsibility to supervise this group of ex-prisoners.

## **Housing**

“I just wanted an environment where it was safe”

Upon leaving prison those interviewed had few housing options available to them. As a hostel specifically for those with a conviction for a sexual offence, Bridge House was considered to offer residents somewhere safe and in contrast to the sometimes debilitating fears those with a conviction for a sex offence had about the world around them.

The considerable waiting list to access local authority social housing meant moving on from the hostel could take up to nine months to be negotiated. However, most Bridge House residents successfully moved on to long-term independent accommodation.

## **Community reintegration**

“You only socialise by going where there are people [...] but the restrictions are so tight sometimes that you wonder how they expect you to reintegrate.”

Isolation was an intractable issue for those with a conviction for a sexual offence. Anxiety about disclosure, fears regarding possible rejection and concerns to protect their personal safety, meant the process of forming new relationships and developing positive social networks was immensely difficult.

Because social spaces and relationships have been part of individuals’ offending behaviour in the past, statutory public protection agencies subject social networks to considerable scrutiny and potential restriction. Statutory agencies’ concern not only with individuals’ actions, but with the possible intention of these actions (grooming behaviour in particular) resulted in residents’ social contact being subject to intense and pervasive suspicion. Some ex-prisoners interviewed had concluded that restricting their presence in social settings was easier. However, being unable to develop acceptable, healthy social relationships is itself a recognised risk factor in further sexual offending.



Circles of Support and Accountability: an approach which attempts to combine elements of restriction with an attempt to overcome isolation through accountability to others, had proved difficult for Bridge House to adopt. The resource implications that this model required were prohibitive for a small voluntary organisation.

## **Employment**

“I’ve actually applied for over a thousand jobs since I’ve been out [of prison [...]] not once have I even got to an interview stage.”

Prospects for finding formal employment seemed poor or virtually non-existent. Returning to their former employment was usually not an option for residents as a result of their conviction and the restrictions governing the employment of those with a sexual offence conviction. Older age, little experience in a ‘new’ area of employment and concerns about disclosure presented significant obstacles to residents gaining acceptable employment. Bridge House was considered supportive and enabling in creating purposeful activities to address the void left by the lack of employment in residents’ lives. However, Bridge House’s provision of supportive advice and referral to employment agencies was not considered by residents to meaningfully engage with the considerable barriers faced with regards to gaining employment. Many appeared to face a future of no or minimal employment.

## **Staffing at the hostel**

The informal, responsive and supportive nature of staff interactions with residents at Bridge House was valued by residents, who were often struggling to come to terms with the overwhelming experience of life after prison. The Bridge House support model focused on current residents. Supporting residents after their move on from Bridge House had been hampered by risk management concerns prohibiting a group based support model and by resource constrictions limiting the formal support available to individuals after leaving Bridge House.

Bridge House intended to provide a housing support approach distinct from a probation hostel in terms of its faith orientation and its emphasis on supporting longer term resettlement. However, it must also meet public protection agencies requirements for approved housing providers to this group. Meeting these expectations regarding monitoring risk and contributing to information sharing about residents proved particularly challenging.

It was generally agreed that formal structures for staff and volunteers needed to be improved given the seriousness and complexities work with this group entailed such as ensuring the establishment of acceptable boundaries between staff and residents.

### **Conclusion and implications**

Those with convictions for a sexual offence have been shown to travel a limited distance towards key resettlement outcomes, such as gaining meaningful employment and renewed social contacts. Resettlement has been shown to be a difficult process, with particular and profound barriers faced regarding overcoming isolation and exclusion.

This is also a challenging area for the voluntary sector given public protection agencies' expectations for accommodation providers to contribute to monitoring and upholding restrictions, whilst pursuing resettlement ambitions.

Formal structures for staff at the hostel, support to residents following their move on from Bridge House, and developing residents' access to meaningful employment opportunities are all suggested areas of work for the Stepping Stones Trust to develop. However, in the coming period the funding climate for voluntary sector housing and resettlement work with this group is uncertain.

The voluntary sector is well placed to provide a safe environment which prioritises resettlement and a belief in rehabilitation. Achieving better resettlement outcomes will require broader debate about the costs and benefits of the current arrangements governing this group and the contribution such practices make to support individuals to lead better, more complete and safer lives.

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# Introduction

Sexual offences cause great concern and anxiety in society. Criminal justice measures to manage those convicted of serious sexual offences after their release from prison have expanded considerably over the last decade and attest to the policy attention this issue has generated.

Protecting the public against further offending is of paramount importance in these arrangements. This cannot be achieved by restriction and monitoring alone, resettlement also has a role to play (Criminal Justice Joint Inspection, 2010). However, whilst considerable literature is available about ex-prisoner resettlement and reintegration in general, the transition from prison for those with a conviction for a sexual offence has been little previously explored. Concerns have also been raised that resettlement has become relatively sidelined by the dominance of restriction and monitoring the arrangements for supervising this ex-prisoner group (McAlinden, 2010).

This report presents the findings of a qualitative research study carried out by the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies about the resettlement of ex-prisoners with convictions for sexual offences. The research was commissioned by the Stepping Stones Trust, a voluntary organisation whose work includes operating a hostel for ex-prisoners with a conviction for a sexual offence. Funds to conduct this research were obtained from the Man Charitable Trust and the Oak Foundation.

By evidencing the successes and challenges of the Stepping Stones Trust's work with those convicted of a sexual offence this research hopes to inform the development of good quality practices regarding achieving resettlement outcomes for this group. To this end the research addresses two aims:

1. To explore the transition from prison for those with a conviction for a sexual offence, and challenges to this group's resettlement from prison in the longer term.

2. To provide reflection on the nature of support the Stepping Stones Trust offers those with a conviction for a sexual offence in the context of information about the circumstances facing this group and current policy and practice regarding this work.

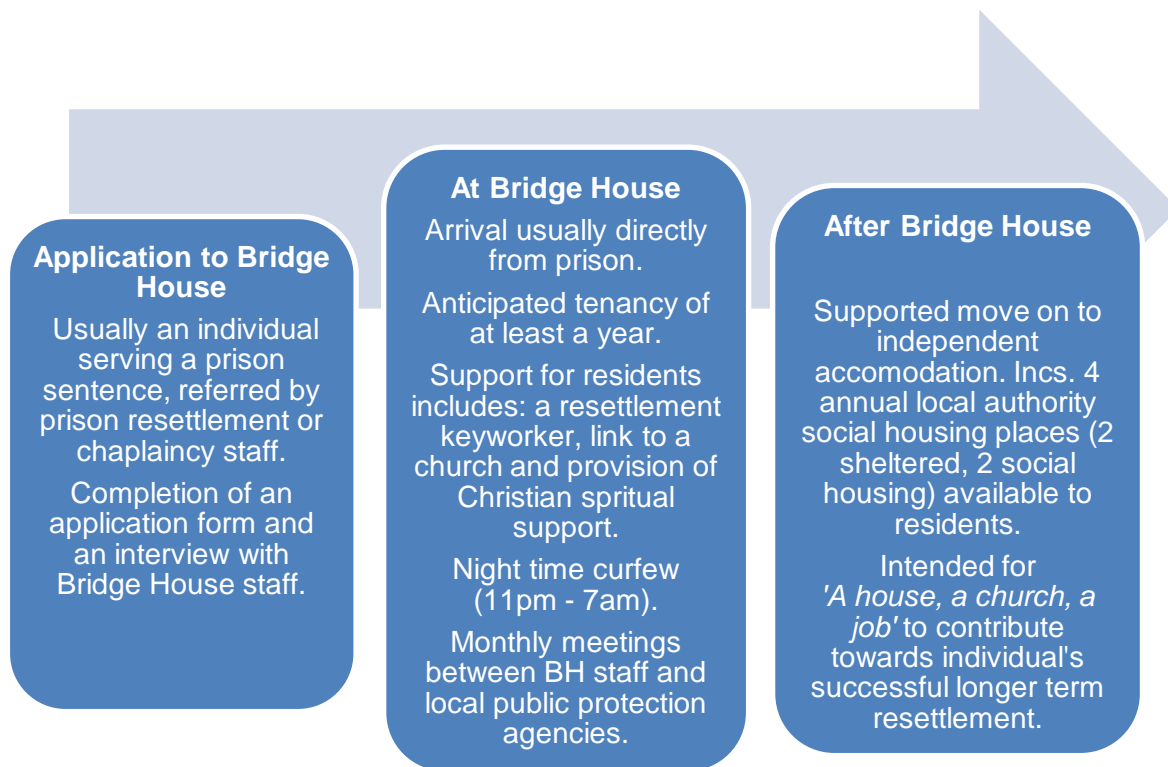
### **About the Stepping Stones Trust and its provision for those with a conviction for a sexual offence**

Founded in 1984, the Stepping Stones Trust (SST) is an evangelical Christian charity. Over the course of the organisation's history, the SST has operated a number of support projects for prisoners and ex-prisoners. Its work is bound by the common principle that successful resettlement for ex-prisoners can best be achieved by supporting individuals to find 'a home, a church, a job' through the provision of Christian-based support.

This research focuses on Bridge House, a five bed hostel the SST operates for male ex-prisoners with a conviction for a sexual offence. Bridge House was established in 1993. The main source of funding for Bridge House is a grant from Supporting People, a government programme for funding housing support services for vulnerable people. Other sources of funds for the hostel include residents' housing benefit entitlement, a monthly contribution residents' made to household expenses, and donations from individuals and Charitable Trusts.

The diagram below outlines the intended journey for those who come to Bridge House.

## Applying, residing, and moving on from Bridge House



Bridge House is for men aged 18 and over who have a conviction for a sexual offence. Typically those who apply to Bridge House are serving a prison sentence and are referred by prison resettlement staff or by a member of the prison chaplaincy. Individuals have also been referred to Bridge House by the probation service and by voluntary resettlement organisations. In addition, self-referral is possible and applications from recent ex-prisoners with a conviction for a sexual offence are accepted.

As well as applicants meeting the criteria for a place at the hostel (see Appendix) Bridge House staff also consult with public protection agencies regarding whether Bridge House is an appropriate placement from a risk management perspective for an individual.

After completing an application form, applicants are interviewed by Bridge House staff. At the interview stage Bridge House staff take into consideration an individual's support needs, how the applicant may fit in with the residents they are likely to share

the house with, and whether the applicant has successfully completed the Sex Offender Treatment Programme whilst in prison.

The most commonly recorded reasons that those who completed an application form did not become a resident were because<sup>1</sup>:

- Applicants were judged as at too high a risk or public protection agencies advised that Bridge House was not appropriate for an individual's risk level.
- There was no available room at the hostel.
- Applicants did not accept responsibility for the sexual offence for which they had been convicted.
- Applicants were judged as in too higher need for the hostel.
- Applicants who had been offered a place no longer wanted to come to the hostel or had found alternative accommodation for after their prison release.

Prior to their prison release, successful applicants to Bridge House may communicate with Bridge House staff by letter, telephone call, prison visit and, if possible, by temporary home leave to the hostel.

At the time of this research Bridge House was staffed by: a manager, a key worker, a social work placement student and a number of staff who monitored the night time curfew. In addition a key worker based at another SST hostel carried out one-to-one key work with some residents and a volunteer befriender made weekly visits to the house.

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<sup>1</sup> All data quoted in the report about Bridge House applicants and residents collectively is extracted from SST electronic records. Data about Bridge House applicants and about departures from Bridge House refer to the period 1993 to the end of June 2011. Data about residents refers to the period 1993 to the end of March 2011. Due to gaps in organisational data collection this information is not considered to be inclusive of all Bridge House residents.

Sixty four people are recorded as having resided at Bridge House since it opened, with an average of three arrivals to the hostel each year. Residents' average age is 42 years old and the vast majority are White British (94 per cent).

## **Methods**

The relatively small number of Bridge House recipients and the nature of the ex-prisoner group it supports informed the decision to undertake a qualitative research approach based on interviews with those involved with the hostel.

Individuals from the following categories were approached to take part in an interview as part of this research:

- Current residents at Bridge House and all former residents for whom contact details were known to the SST (n=26).
- All current Bridge House staff and volunteers.
- Representatives from partner organisations that had been identified by Bridge House as involved with the hostel or with the lives of residents. This includes representatives from local public protection agencies.

In total 19 semi-structured interviews were carried out with individuals in the following categories:

- Six residents or former residents of Bridge House.
- Seven members of Bridge House staff or volunteers.
- Six representatives from partner organisations.

Interviews were conducted in person with three exceptions who preferred to be interviewed by telephone. All interviews took place between January and March 2011. Interviews with those Bridge House supported lasted between two and six hours. All interview transcripts were analysed with the assistance of QSR NVivo8 data management software.



Attempts to identify an intervention's affect by considering reconviction rates have been a prominent approach in research about ex-prisoner work, but this approach was not considered an appropriate avenue to pursue as part of this research.

A two year follow up period is commonly used to calculate reconviction in ex-prisoner work. Using this measure, calculated reconviction rates for ex-prisoners convicted of a sexual offence are relatively low compared to the ex-prisoner population generally. The two year reconviction rate for the 1463 Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) eligible ex-prisoners with a conviction for a sexual offence for **all** offences, including return to custody for compliance, is 10.5 per cent. And the two year reconviction rate for a **sexual** offence for all MAPPA eligible ex-prisoners is 1.1 per cent (n=9876) (Peck, 2011: 19-20, data refers to 2004).

However, studies which have considered the reconviction of those with a conviction for a sexual offence over a longer period suggest the reconviction rate rises significantly over time. A reconvictions study over a four year time period for ex-prisoners who had a conviction for a sexual offence and had served a prison sentence of over 4 years, found 4.3 per cent returned to custody because of a conviction for a further sexual offence (n=162) (Hood et al., 2002).

Whilst this study suggests the reconviction rate increased over time, equally it found substantial reconviction variation according to the type of original sexual offence conviction in the sample studied. None of those originally imprisoned for an offence solely against a child in their own family were reconvicted of a sexual or serious violent crime, even when the follow-up period had been extended to six years (ibid: 2).

The longest follow up reconviction study identified is a 21 year study of adult males released from prison following a conviction for a sexual offence in 1979. A quarter (24.6 per cent) of the sample were reconvicted of a sexual offence over this period (1979 – 2000, n=419) (Cann et al., 2004).

The only reconvictions information available about Bridge House is that in 2003 access to the Police National Computer showed that none of the 32 people who had resided at Bridge House over the previous ten year period had been convicted of a further sexual offence. However, this relatively small sample size, in the context of considerable variation in the reconviction rate over time and according to the original sexual offence conviction, precludes drawing an informed conclusion from this information about the impact of Bridge House on sexual reconviction rates.

The accounts explored in this report are from those who accepted an invitation to take part in an interview for this research. There are limitations to the extent to which they may represent all those Bridge House has supported. It is likely that the accounts gathered from former residents reflect those who had particularly positive experiences with the SST and exclude those who may have been less likely to have had a positive experience, because only those ex-residents the Trust had contact information for could be approached. All the former residents interviewed had made a planned departure from the hostel, and most had maintained some form of continued contact with the SST since they had moved on from the hostel. In addition whilst Bridge House accepts referrals from individuals who have a conviction within the wide category of 'sexual offence', all those interviewed had convictions for a sexual offence involving those aged under 16 years old. This offence category impacts on the nature of supervision arrangements to which interviewees were subject. It is also an important consideration regarding the application of these research findings to ex-prisoners with convictions for sexual offences more broadly.

An ethical statement for this research and further detail about the interview schedules are available by request to the report authors.

### **Structure of this report**

Chapter One sets the scene for this qualitative study by introducing key elements regarding the context for resettlement-focused housing support and considering previous research about the housing and resettlement of those with convictions for sexual offences.

The interview material gathered is explored in four chapters. Chapters two to four consider three key areas of resettlement: housing, community reintegration and employment. Consideration of these matters intends to recognise the importance the SST places on these hoped for outcomes for those it supports, as captured in the organisational ethos of providing ‘a home, a church, a job.’ Each chapter considers residents’ needs and experiences regarding this resettlement pathway, the barriers faced, and Bridge House practice to support progress regarding this aspect of resettlement. Chapter five considers staffing at Bridge House, particularly the relationships formed between staff, residents and representatives from local public protection organisations.

The conclusions and implications of this research are explored in chapter six.

In the period since the research took place it has emerged that due to changes in the prevailing funding climate a significantly different future faces Bridge House. An outline of this and an account of work undertaken by the SST following this research are given in a postscript written by the Trust’s chief executive.

### **Quotation conventions used in this report**

‘Residents’ is used to refer to interviewees’ experiences of residing at the hostel. This includes former residents’ recollections of their time at Bridge House as well as current residents.

Quotes are attributed to the following categories:

- ‘Resident’ (see above for description).
- ‘Worker’ refers to Bridge House staff and volunteers.
- ‘Public protection representative’ refers to an individual from a statutory agency responsible for managing those with convictions for sexual offences according to public protection guidance.

- ‘Partner organisation’ refers to a representative from an organisation that works alongside Bridge House or is involved in residents’ lives but who does not work for a statutory public protection agency.

The following conventions have been used regarding quotations:

- Double quotation marks are used when directly quoting an interviewee’s words.
- Words inserted for clarity are in squared brackets, when words have been omitted this is indicated with [...].
- Single quotation marks are used when quoting a written source.

## Chapter 1: Setting the scene: a literature-based approach

Comments from experts emphasise the challenges of housing people with sexual offence convictions: ‘notoriously difficult’ (Kemshall, 2007: 272); and ‘daunting challenges’ (Maguire and Nolan, 2007: 162) serve to make an unmistakable point. Despite awareness of these problems there is a notable gap in the research and evidence base that might help to address them.

Because policy has focused on criminal justice outcomes such as reconvictions, all service evaluations have been complicated by the relatively low reconviction rate for people with sex offence convictions and for sexual offences (McAlinden, 2009; Criminal Justice Joint Inspection, 2010). It is important for researchers to examine other rehabilitative outcomes like achieving stable independent accommodation or employment.

Research on the effectiveness of supported accommodation in the UK has been described as ‘sparse’ (Kirkwood and Richley, 2008). More widely there is a general lack of evidence about the impact of voluntary sector resettlement programmes that makes it difficult to find suitable comparative evidence (Hucklesby and Worrall, 2007). It is not, therefore, entirely surprising that evidence about the impact of housing support on the behaviour of people with sexual offence convictions is hard to find (ODS Consulting, 2008).

When an initial search for relevant literature was made it was clear that evidential sources were very limited and heavily focused on the United States, where legislative arrangements for sex offenders are known to be different from England and Wales<sup>2</sup>. Accordingly this section will discuss what is known about the context for provision, and focus on key issues that have been identified in dealing with resettlement and rehabilitation.

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<sup>2</sup> A search was made of the CSA Illumina database on 29 November 2010. There were 14 items using keywords ((sex offender) OR (child molester)) AND (accommodation OR hostel OR housing) AND support from 2005 to 2011.

## **Resettlement and rehabilitation**

‘Resettlement’ is an official concept that embraces several aspects of transition for people leaving prison, such as obtaining employment and housing as well as dealing with drug or mental health issues and contact with family. The different dimensions of resettlement have been analysed helpfully: according to Hucklesby and Wincup (2007), there is typically a ‘risk’ model which leads to a cautious supervision of users, contrasted with a ‘need’ model that prescribes help and assistance in a positive and pragmatic way. However they also point to other models: ‘co-production’ in which the user is brought into a process so as to maximise engagement and personal responsibility for achieving realistic goals; and ‘social partnership’ approaches which refer to wider involvement in reconciliation and reparation. The goal of resettlement should, however, be distinguished from the more advanced notion of ‘rehabilitation’ which implies a restoration of status, and therefore a lifting of the stigma that falls on those convicted of sexual offences (Maruna, 2011).

The literature shows that rehabilitation and resettlement are not straightforward concepts and therefore housing support can be implemented with different emphases, depending on the extent to which risk, need, or partnership aspects are given priority, and on whether there is a clear perspective on long term rehabilitation.

## **Law and enforcement**

The law governing the community-based management of people convicted of sexual offences has become extensive (Stevenson et al., 2004). In addition to the requirements of the Sex Offenders Register, civil measures introduced include Sex Offender Prevention Orders intended to protect members of the public from serious sexual harm and Risk of Sexual Harm Orders designed to protect children. Orders may take the form of forbidding proximity to people at risk, which can involve prohibiting residence near to a place frequented by a vulnerable group, such as a school. The existence of Orders creates obligations on service users that are likely to affect the practice of risk management. It is worth noting that ‘compliance’

reconvictions (e.g. for breaches of registration) under this type of legislation are higher than for substantive offences (Howard, 2011).

## **Risk management and accommodation**

Since legislation in 2000, the management of risk has been governed by the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA).

These regulations set out the following Levels of risk: Level one (low/medium risk, supervised by a single agency); Level two (more complex or higher risk cases, with local interagency risk management); Level three (high risk cases which fall directly under MAPPA). The vast majority of cases registered as 'sex offenders' in London, for example, are managed at Level one or two (MAPPA, 2010).

Though both are aspects of risk management, 'registration of offenders' and 'community notification' are wide topics that in themselves fall outside the specific remit of our literature discussion; however surveillance requirements and residence restriction clearly affect service users' access to housing options. High surveillance will mean increasing contact and lines of accountability through observation, curfew enforcement, CCTV, and other electronic means. Close proximity between a risk manager and the user is assumed to broaden and enhance the effectiveness of surveillance. Only certain kinds of accommodation furnished with the appropriate staffing and equipment fulfil such requirements.

Residence restrictions similarly mean that sensitive locations near clusters of vulnerable populations (schools, etc.) are forbidden to the service user. The research about residence restrictions is largely drawn from the United States where such restrictions are more constrictive than in England and Wales. The evidence from the United States indicates these measures do not reduce sex offending (Tewksbury and Levenson, 2007; Socia and Stamatel, 2010; Burchfield, 2011: 413).

It is apparent that the level of 'enhanced supervision' provided by probation hostels operates as a kind of benchmark for provision intended to accommodate and manage people with sexual offence convictions. The supervisory features seen as important in

such hostels include relatively high levels of contact between staff and residents, partnership with other agencies, such as police, and security measures such as CCTV (Silverman and Wilson, 2002; Criminal Justice Joint Inspection, 2008).

However it is acknowledged that the probation hostel is not ideally placed to promote effective resettlement (Kemshall, 2007: 273). Other forms of provision must therefore be managed so that the wider aims of resettlement are adequately addressed. Lack of move-on accommodation from approved premises continues to be reported (Criminal Justice Joint inspection, 2010).

### **Linking accommodation and support**

Since 2003, the funding and commissioning of general housing support services has been carried out by local forms of the Supporting People programme which also took over the funding of accommodation services for people under probation supervision. However, a joint inspection criticised gaps in strategic cooperation to ensure that people under probation supervision obtained due consideration in accessing accommodation (Criminal Justice Joint inspection, 2008).

While support can be given on the premises where the user resides, the aim of 'floating support' is to provide support wherever the user resides. It can, in principle, be transferred when the user changes accommodation. According to a regional study, it is generally cheaper than 'live-in' support, which has implications for the Supporting People budget; however, practitioners expressed doubts about whether it can meet high and complex needs among people who have left prison (Maguire and Nolan, 2007: 155). Nonetheless if people are supported together in the same premises there can be challenges simply because of the close proximity of others with complex needs (ibid: 154; Kirkwood and Richley, 2008: 8). It follows that some doubt persists about whether a single cost-effective model linking support to accommodation provision can be identified. The context for housing support provision is therefore complex and it is not surprising if it is seen as a challenging task.



## **Rebalancing multi-modal approaches in a positive direction**

It is understood that housing support should be an integral part of a multi-modal approach to resettlement that includes risk management and relapse prevention (Kemshall, 2007: 274). In a recent inspection it was found that the balance between restriction and rehabilitation in risk management plans had shifted too far in favour of restriction (Criminal Justice Joint Inspection, 2010: 31). How support is delivered is therefore likely to be affected by the emphases given to these rather different considerations in the plans made for individuals.

Given that the aim of resettlement is to assist living in the community, it is all the more important to seek ways of motivating users, involving them in planning, and establishing acceptable internal goals, rather than relying on compulsion (Kemshall, 2007). Instilling 'hope' is therefore seen as a key ingredient of effective resettlement work (McAlinden, 2009).

## **Need for social support**

On the question of social links, there are two views about people with sexual offence convictions: one is that they are skilled in making contacts; another is that they suffer from social isolation. A study of professionals' views found evidence of both perspectives, with the latter emerging as the stronger. Housing difficulty appeared to be a risk factor for isolation (Armstrong et al., 2008: 33). In the United States, research also indicates that housing insecurity can isolate people with sexual offence convictions from social supports and that isolation may lead to negative feelings which might trigger relapse (Tewksbury and Levenson, 2007; Burchfield, 2011: 414). Making friendships or relationships while experiencing supervision in the community can be difficult or frustrating. For example, in a case study, an ex-prisoner reports his sense of feeling restricted socially while wishing to comply with conditions designed to protect potential victims (Silverman and Wilson, 2002). The research therefore makes a significant suggestion about the potential role of support in reducing emotional difficulties that might otherwise undermine rehabilitation.

In this context the development of Circles of Support and Accountability has been seen as providing opportunities for needed support as well as helping the individual to comply with risk management. ‘Circles are aimed at providing a sense of community for individuals who, it is believed, would otherwise be isolated and socially marginalised.’ (Armstrong et al., 2008: 74)

By involving communities of volunteers, the Circles epitomise the ‘social partnership’ model of resettlement. Building a ‘network of social capital’ can assist the service user to avoid a return to negative patterns of behaviour (McAlinden, 2009) and a promising body of evidence about outcomes of the Circles is progressively emerging (McAlinden, 2006; 2009).

### **Moving on**

Living independently is both a resettlement and a rehabilitative goal; though it is challenging to achieve. Any relaxation of supervision in the move-on accommodation must be balanced by the requirements to observe the conditions of prevailing licences, orders, and registration requirements which mean that elements of restriction or supervision will remain. The different housing sectors present a range of obstacles to organising effective move-on.

A number of challenging problems in managing provision in social housing have been attributed to a wider policy framework which increases the responsibilities of social landlords (for anti-social behaviour measures, for example) while also increasing the concentration of needy users in a hard-pressed social housing sector, without enabling it to access sufficient resources to meet those needs (Flint, 2006). However according to recent research in the North West region, arrangements to find settled accommodation for high risk offenders under MAPPA are seen to be working ‘quite well’ (Crookes, 2010: 5).

The private sector makes clear to providers whom it wishes to exclude, and people with sexual convictions form one of these significant categories.

*Well, they [private sector landlords] know that their prospective tenant is an ex-offender, that's all they pretty much know, sometimes they persist and say they don't want to know what the offence is, but they want to know what the offence isn't, so they'll say we don't want somebody who is a sex offender or an arsonist or a high risk violent offender, but beyond that we cannot give any direct, concrete information.*

(Specialist housing support provider in Pleace and Minton, 2009: 31)

If the 'silting up' of specialist provision is to be avoided, a strategic effort to establish bridges to safe, stable and independent accommodation seems to be necessary, on the lines set out by Crookes (2010).

Beyond these practical arrangements lie important questions concerning the existence of a path to rehabilitation: is there a closing point to criminal justice status, or is it a perpetual label, with consequences that will endure in every place an individual occupies? "It's like always having a video camera on", says one (Silverman and Wilson, 2002: 124). What kind of a future is likely to unfold for people in his position?

## **In conclusion**

This section of the report has noted a gaping absence of evidence about the impact of housing support for users with sexual offence convictions. As a consequence, it appears as if policy has been developed in a relative vacuum.

The section has introduced key elements of the context for resettlement-focused housing support such as legal controls, risk management, and the key balance between restriction and rehabilitation.

It has also sought to identify key issues for the management of accommodation provision including the link between support and accommodation, the significance of emotional support for people experiencing insecurity and isolation, and the challenge of transition to move-on accommodation. In the following sections we shall see how the case study sheds light on experiences of housing support, and how a number of these issues are faced in practice.

## Chapter 2: Housing

### The move from prison to Bridge House

*I was having an interview with my then probation officer and I said, 'I don't know what we can do but there is no way I'm going to a probation hostel, under no circumstances.' And she said 'Have you heard of an organisation called Stepping Stones?'*

Resident

With one exception, all those interviewed had arrived at Bridge House directly from prison and, as part of their licence agreement, had been required to live at a probation approved premises in order that:

- Their licence conditions be appropriately monitored (such as a curfew or prohibited access to the internet).
- They reside somewhere with enhanced surveillance compared to independent living.

Typically those who became residents recalled first having heard about Bridge House from a probation officer, resettlement officer or a prison chaplain in the context of discussing their prison release. These recollections suggest that Bridge House had been mentioned for two reasons. In some cases because of an individual's Christian faith Bridge House was deemed an appropriate housing option. Or for some, Bridge House seemed to have been mentioned in apparent desperation about the living arrangements for an individual following their release from prison.

Whilst in prison, those interviewed had been presented with a narrow set of housing options upon their release from prison. But for Bridge House and one other voluntary provider, those interviewed recalled a probation-run hostel had been their only other housing option. The paucity of the housing options facing some of those with convictions for sexual offences was highlighted by one interviewee who was informed by their resettlement officer that if they did not receive a place at Bridge House they might be housed in night shelters, an option incompatible with the daytime curfew they would be subject to.

The desperation with which those with a conviction for a sexual offence described the housing options that faced them after prison reflects a known shortfall in probation-run hostel places for those with a conviction for a sexual offence. A 2008 inspectorate report notes that in some areas of the country there were no hostels to which convicted sex offenders could be referred (Criminal Justice Joint Inspection, 2008: 32). Insufficient hostel places for those with a conviction for a sexual offence after their release from prison has been recognised since at least the early 2000s. However attempts to overcome this shortfall by growing the statutory hostel estate ‘proved impossible due to local opposition’ (ibid: 26). In addition, as a result of a media campaign, 14 of the 100 probation-run hostels were prohibited from accommodating those convicted of a sexual offence against a child under 16 due to hostel location (Burnett and Eaton, 2004: pvii ). In the voluntary sector, many resettlement hostels for ex-prisoners do not accept referrals from those with convictions for sexual offences.

At the point of discussing their post-release accommodation most were held in vulnerable prisoner units. For some this had been the case for several years of their prison sentence. For those with a conviction for a sexual offence, contemplating their prison release elicited fears of leaving the perceived security of this enforced segregation. Bridge House residents recalled feeling “absolutely petrified” and that it was “quite a scary feeling to leave prison”. Those ex-prisoners interviewed typically had a strong reaction to the notion of leaving prison to go to a probation-run hostel. Such a move was considered “worse than where I am now”, “horrendous”, “the thought of a probation [hostel] just filled me with dread” and that “it was the very last place I ever wanted to go.”

“I just wanted an environment where it was safe” said one interviewee, a key criterion for housing which a probation-run hostel was universally considered by those with convictions for a sexual offence to not have been able to offer. Residing at a probation-run hostel would entail living with people who had a variety of convictions. Interviewees considered that in order to be safe in such an environment, they would have to conceal the nature of their offence from other residents and they were unsure that this would be sustainable or healthy. At best they anticipated living

with the anxiety of possibly being ‘found out.’ At worse, they feared bullying or being attacked because of the nature of their offence.

In addition to concerns about safety there were dire expectations about the support and atmosphere statutory housing provision provided. One interviewee described probation hostels as “dumping holes more than anything else for people who perhaps couldn’t fit in in other places.” Interviewees expected possible short-term tenancies, potentially being moved around between probation hostels and no support. A probation hostel was considered by those who applied to Bridge House as meeting their housing needs in the most minimal way.

It is important to point out that such judgments were not assessments of the men’s experience of probation hostels; none of those interviewed had resided in a probation hostel. It was however a view they had arrived at primarily from talking with other prisoners who had lived in probation hostels.

As a sex offender specific hostel, Bridge House was considered by residents to have had an important safety benefit over generic hostel provision. They would not have to conceal their status as a sex offender for fear of possible reprisals or of being ‘found out’ by other residents. Other reasons those with convictions for a sexual offence had applied to Bridge House included:

- The offer of guaranteed stable accommodation for a period of up to a two year period.
- Longer term resettlement support with employment and independent living was offered.
- The expectation that the provider would have knowledge of the particular resettlement challenges for those with a conviction for a sexual offence.
- For some, the opportunity to be in an environment where their Christian faith was nourished.

## Living at Bridge House

“Going to Bridge House was like going to the Ark when the flood came,” was the analogy made by one interviewee. As they went on to explain:

*You know what the public opinion is of people generally who have been in prison and yet here were Christian people who took others for whatever they had done with no blame, just understanding, compassion, sympathy. To say it was a buffer against the world is really underestimating it because you felt totally protected but you were made to face up to real situations. You weren't wrapped in cotton wool, if there was a problem you had to deal with it face on and they would be there and help you and when people got really upset and depressed they would give you all the time in the world. [Bridge House staff] would stay on, they wouldn't just get the first train home.*

Resident

This explanation alludes to a number of elements about residing at Bridge House which were valued by residents.

Residents had felt safe when living at Bridge House. The importance of the location of Bridge House and its specific client group not being simultaneously in the public domain was widely acknowledged amongst interviewees. The SST was universally considered to handle this matter with appropriate care and sensitivity. The considerable lengths undertaken by the SST to protect the identity of the house were cited by residents. This included residents agreeing not to inform anyone of their address without the prior permission of the SST, to not allow anyone to be with them when they returned to the property, the use of a PO Box rather than using a street address for all mail, and residents not being on the electoral register during their stay at the House. The priority the SST gave to protecting Bridge House's location was highly valued by residents anxious about reprisals and aware of previous media exposés of other hostels which had compromised safety by revealing their location.

Bridge House was overwhelmingly considered a supportive environment by residents, particularly when it came to accessing support in relation to the bewildering and often emotionally fraught experience they had found their experience after their prison release to be. The immediate experience following

release from prison was commonly overwhelming, with some residents describing how seemingly everyday matters such as a walk to a local shop or closing and opening doors with a key had been accompanied by significant anxiety, particularly for those who had served sentences of several years. Bridge House staff were considered to be understanding about the challenges and emotional turmoil new residents often found themselves in.

Organisational records show residents stay for an average of just over a year (381 nights). The table below categorises former residents' length of stay.

**Residents' length of stay at Bridge House, November 1993 – June 2011**  
**(n=61)**

<b>Length of stay</b>	<b>Number of residents</b>
Less than two weeks	6
Between two weeks and six months	16
Between six months and a year	14
Between one and two years	15
Between two and three years	5
Over three years	5

Beyond the immediate period post prison release, residents had felt able to access support at particular difficult points. These could be several months on from their release and regarding challenging circumstances which were quite different from the initial needs they had presented with and which residents themselves had not necessarily anticipated. Examples included supporting residents during their participation in the probation managed therapeutic course for sex offenders, whilst they had undergone diagnosis and treatment for various physical or mental health issues, or during divorce proceedings. Many felt stranded in terms of social support outside Bridge House and it was recognised that these would have been difficult times to live independently and in isolation:

*[Bridge House] was a little world and you could go outside into the bigger world but come back and there were people there and just having a general*



*noise in the house, someone moving about or sit down and watch TV [...] you have the chance to go out into the bigger world but also to come back into that safer environment because I think people would ruminate. I would certainly ruminate too much if I'd been on my own.*

Resident

In some cases residents described a dawning realisation that the plans and expectations they had had about their lives post release whilst in prison were very different from the realities of life that had emerged outside prison; that they were not going to return to a version of the life they led before their conviction:

*I knew it was going to be a difficult transition into society, it's difficult for anyone who's done six years inside let alone given the nature of the offences that I and the other guys at Bridge House have, so I knew that was going to be tricky but I was still quite naive about how tricky it was going to be.*

Resident

A place to “restart”, “rebuild”, “get on the right path”, “get back on my feet”, “a new start” and “move forward” were all terms used by interviewees to describe how they had found Bridge House. The importance of residing somewhere with supportive staff was in part attributed to the significant contrast they had found between this and the general hostility towards them and sometimes debilitating fears those with convictions for sexual offences had about the world around them. Being in an environment where they considered they were treated as “human beings” was experienced as “an immense relief”. Several spoke positively about their feeling as a contributing member of the household, for example, by having responsibility for various aspects of maintenance, to prepare a room for a new resident, to help a new resident to settle in, or to cook a communal meal. These may seem relatively small investments in residents’ capabilities, but they made a significant impression on residents:

*If you go to a probation hostel, it's a place where you are mistrusted, treated with suspicion until you can prove yourself to be trustworthy, and it's certainly not a home, it's a place where you're made to temporarily live, it's a bed in a building. Bridge House is a place where they invest trust in you unless you show that you can't be trusted, and it's an environment which is more like a home than a house. Very, very big contrast between the two.*

Resident

*I think when you've done a crime, you go to prison, you come out [of prison], you feel in some ways, what is there for life now? Where's my life going? And [being at Bridge House] helps you realise that there is life after prison [...] So in some ways they sort of taught me that yeah, I may have lost my family, but that's not the end of it, life goes on, you can rebuild it.*

Resident

Hope for the future, as expressed in the last quote, is well established as having an important role to play in 'successful' resettlement and reintegration processes for ex-prisoners and that 'symbolic and actual means of hope support efforts to change' amongst this group (McAlinden, 2009: 5-6). This is also a value that, as a representative from a partner organisation remarked, it is unlikely those with convictions for sexual offences will have access to through mainstream support processes given the significant stigma and restrictions that face this group:

*Nobody else is doing it [providing resettlement to those with convictions for sexual offences] because everyone else would just rather we forget these people.*

Partner organisation

Some Public Protection Unit (PPU) representatives agreed there were potential benefits to a specialist voluntary housing provider supporting resettlement outcomes for those with convictions for sexual offences, but that this must be complementary to criminal justice agencies' primary concerns with surveillance and restriction. PPU agencies also had to be confident that the staffing, monitoring and restrictions demanded of all approved premises were robustly in place at Bridge House. At the time of the research the PPU had requested better monitoring and surveillance protocols be in place at Bridge House and be shared by the whole staff team following uncertainty regarding matters such as the enforcement of prohibited access to computers for residents. Consequently a formal agreement to address these matters was being negotiated between Bridge House and PPU agencies.

## Move on to independent living

The majority of recorded departures from Bridge House were planned (62 per cent)<sup>3</sup>. Nearly all planned departures were to long-term accommodation or a ‘positive move on’ according to organisational records, with a minority leaving for temporary accommodation or for a probation approved departure. Unplanned departures (38 per cent) included individuals leaving the House of their own accord, their being evicted for not complying with the House rules, or in three cases, returning to custody<sup>4</sup>.

Planned move on from Bridge House must be considered appropriate regarding the management of possible future risk to public safety, and this was not a matter for residents and Bridge House staff to decide. The PPU must agree it is appropriate for an individual to move from Bridge House, a staffed hostel with a curfew, to a more independent living situation with less scrutiny. The PPU were also responsible for approving a move on property, considering matters such as the property’s proximity to a school, whether the building’s communal areas are used by vulnerable populations, or in some cases, whether a warden supervised property is preferable.

All the former residents interviewed had moved from Bridge House to a sole occupied property. The SST adopts a staged accommodation model with other ex-prisoner groups, whereby individuals move from a hostel to a smaller group shared living arrangement with floating support from the SST and then to independent living. However, for Bridge House residents such a staged accommodation model would not be acceptable from a risk management perspective. One PPU representative stated that ideal move on circumstances from Bridge House were when an individual no longer required staffed accommodation from a risk management perspective but was still subject to a supervisory licence so that the PPU were able to monitor the individual’s progress in independent accommodation.

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<sup>3</sup> 34 of the 55 residents for whom the type of departure was recorded in the SST database had a planned departure.

<sup>4</sup> Residents returned to custody for failure to comply with licence restrictions, drug offences or violence offences. No resident was recorded as having been convicted of further sexual offences.

All the former residents interviewed were in receipt of housing benefit and in all but one case chose to access social housing, principally because it was considered to provide a more stable tenancy than a private landlord. Bridge House had a notional annual quota of four local authority accommodation places, two in sheltered housing and two in standard social housing. However, in practice the local authority's housing stock was oversubscribed, and, according to one member of Bridge House staff, this was increasingly the case. The single person properties that residents usually required were considered to be a particularly hard pressed resource within the local authority.

Bridge House staff acted as an intermediary between residents and the local housing department, submitting housing applications and being a contact in the process of obtaining accommodation. For some of those interviewed this had been a relatively straightforward process, with a suitable place found in around one month. However, as this move on from Bridge House was dependent on restricted access to an oversubscribed resource it is perhaps unsurprising that move on could be a lengthy process and that residents were often resigned to a perceived stark choice, "accept it [the first available property] or come off the council waiting list". At the time of research, move on was taking around 6 – 9 months from the point of submitting an application, a frustrating process when a resident felt ready to move on and wanted "my own space".

It was generally appreciated by residents that the demand for social housing outstripped supply and hence waiting to live independently was to be expected. However, a number questioned whether Bridge House could have a greater presence and role when negotiating residents' access to social housing. Concerns were expressed that Bridge House's approach to move on was resigned to accepting that a housing place came up when it came up. Perhaps such an approach is understandable and realistic given the dependence on an oversubscribed resource. However residents feared that without advocacy and proactive contact with the housing department their claims to housing were at the bottom of a heavily burdened list.

The potential for Bridge House to offer support at the physical point of departure was also raised. The experience of a number of residents who had left Bridge House suggested current arrangements were dependent on the willingness of staff and a volunteer to give up their non-work time to help residents to move. In one case this had resulted in a resident transporting their belongings alone, one suitcase at a time, from Bridge House to their new accommodation. In a similar vein, some former residents suggested support regarding furnishing their flats and making them hospitable would be a useful addition to the support they received from Bridge House. There were recognised resource constraints to what Bridge House could offer to those moving on. Providing access to a network of second hand furniture supplies was suggested by one former resident as something that they would have found helpful and which would not require ongoing staff support.

## Chapter 3: Community reintegration

### Isolated ‘lepers’: the experience of community reintegration

*We (Bridge House residents) often refer to ourselves as modern day lepers, and it feels very much like that. ‘Oh go away, get a bell, go and live in that little cave down there, don’t come near us.’ That sort of mentality, and you feel that very real. We crave companionship and friendship as much as anyone else.*

Resident

Coming to Bridge House was synonymous with starting again in terms of relationships and social contacts for most residents. In all cases, men were living in a new area and usually described bringing few social attachments with them to the House. New residents typically had little contact with their families and in some cases, no significant contact with those they had known from their life before prison. Some were unable to contact their family members because their sexual offences had been committed within the family and all contact with family members was at the families’ instigation and through the probation service. Friends were described as having “stepped back” at the point of conviction and imprisonment, or as having decided not to maintain contact after their prison release, with, as one resident recalled, their view being that they “had done their bit, you can make your own way now.”

Feelings of isolation, loneliness and of being ‘cut off’ from both meaningful friendships and a sense of community characterised the accounts of those whom Bridge House had supported and were considered universal descriptions of those with a conviction for sexual offence by those with experience of working with this group:

*Companionship for companionship’s sake is something I’ve really missed. Being able to see somebody who it’s safe for me to be around, perhaps they’re aware that I’ve been in prison, so I don’t have to sort of skirt around and be evasive.*

Resident

*All of the blokes in the House at some stage or other get very depressed because they're isolated.*

Worker

*I think a lot of [men who have a conviction for a sexual offence] are very sad. They don't have lots of friends; they're not able to make friends. [...] I always think they carry around with them so much shame which makes it harder for them.*

Partner organisation

Overcoming isolation was not something which necessarily improved over time for those with a conviction for a sexual offence. Achieving new relationships was not unknown; some of those interviewed had developed a significant new relationship or were aware that other residents had done so. However most described leading an essentially solitary existence with few social networks. The following interviewee describes what life was like from them several years after their departure from Bridge House and since the end of their being subject to licence conditions:

*Apart from [church], life is boring and I try to sleep quite a lot [...] I'm literally on my own, and that is a scary thing. You do tend to become really inward and to draw back into yourself.*

As well as the inaccessibility of previous relationships, the process of developing new relationships was typically fraught for those with convictions for a serious sexual offence. It was accompanied by questions about disclosure of offences, of when to disclose, what to disclose, who to disclose to, and how to do this.

With the exception of relationships which placed men in direct contact with children (such relationships were avoided and discouraged by all interviewee groups) no easy answers were offered to managing disclosure in new personal relationships. All the men considered that any close relationship would, at some point, involve disclosure but that this was a “fragile, cautionary” process. Transparency about relationships was encouraged by MAPPA bodies and Bridge House staff, as secrecy was a recognised enabler of their previous harmful behaviour and to be avoided. However, there was also agreement between the interviewee groups, including public protection representatives, that there were circumstances where personal

relationships were concerned, in which it would be too soon for those with convictions for a sexual offence to disclose. When a new relationship involved no contact with children, disclosing in the initial stages of forming a friendship was considered to risk those with a conviction for a sexual offence of being effectively ostracised from potential avenues for healthy relationships and social connections.

However, not disclosing an offence soon enough was considered by the men to risk their being seen as behaving suspiciously by public protection agencies who may decide to directly disclose to the person if this is deemed an appropriate measure to protect potential victims. For interviewees it was common to have experienced rejection because of their status as a sex offender and disgust or shunning were often anticipated reactions to revealing their convictions to new people. Experiencing and contemplating these scenarios reinforced a sense of being a social outsider. For some, whilst isolation depressed them, it was preferable to risking the potential pain of rejection:

*You make yourself very vulnerable when you start to reveal these sort of things about yourself, it's a very difficult time. [...] There's always the risk that if you do disclose, you've made yourself vulnerable. Say I'm going to trust you with this, and then you get a smack round the face as if to say, 'goodbye I want nothing to do with you.' Which reinforces all those negative feelings about the sort of person people say you are. You know, it's a very very painful, emotionally very painful thought, and the risks of **exposure and of rejection** and things like that.*

Resident (emphasis added)

As the above quote also indicates, in addition to an emotional cost, the risk of public exposure and, underlying this, a fear for safety, were also raised. 'Worse case disclosure scenarios' were envisaged, such as someone they told passing this information on to others – with malicious intent or not - which could result in their being attacked, and, when they were a resident at Bridge House, an anxiety that a disclosure of their identity could have ramifications for the safety of the hostel. In this sense for some, every person who knew about their conviction carried a perceived risk to their personal safety. Thus choosing to “keep themselves to themselves” was a self-imposed decision some had come to.



## The implications of public protection guidance

*For me [being isolated is] the most difficult thing at the moment. Which is why I keep saying to my probation officer I feel that I'm isolated, which I think is not a good thing. And she agrees, but how do you fix it? [...] And I said well you only socialise by going where there are people, which is church or a club or something like that. But the restrictions are so tight sometimes that you wonder how they expect you to reintegrate.*

Resident

The social networks and relationships of those with convictions for sexual offences are subject to close scrutiny by the public protection arrangements for managing sex offenders in the community. Indeed criminal justice agencies' role and practice in managing the social relationships of those with convictions for sexual offences was recognized as distinctive to this group of ex-prisoners:

*[Sex offenders are] subject to more scrutiny than any other group. They've got MAPPA, but I supervise people coming out of prison for violent offences and you don't have [a dedicated Police team] actively involved as you do with the sex offenders. [Sex offenders] are just the hardest [to reintegrate] just because the nature of the offence is usually around relationships and sex.*

Public protection representative

As outlined in the introduction, there has been a proliferation of criminal justice interventions which intend to manage risk of further offending by sex offenders in the community over the last two decades. Licence and order conditions for those with a conviction for a sex offence directly restricted some potential avenues for social activity. This included prohibiting specific activities, the exclusion of particular places, and a curfew on time outside of the home. Such conditions had clearly identifiable constraints on the social networks and opportunities deemed appropriate for a particular individual and tended to be well understood by the individuals subject to them.

In addition to monitoring compliance with these restrictions, the social networks and relationships formed by those with a conviction for a sexual offence are the explicit subject of information gathering and sharing between agencies, as well as factors considered in public protection risk assessment tools and in the risk management

decisions made by professionals working within this framework. It is therefore unsurprising that whilst those with a conviction for a sexual offence experienced public protection arrangements as a generally dominant influence over their lives, it was the implications of these arrangements for their social networks which drew the most significant reflection, by all groups of interviewees.

“Like walking on egg shells” was one interviewee’s description of the period during which they were subject to licence conditions which, if breached, could result in their recall to prison. Beyond the licence period, when most interviewees were subject only to sex offender registration, the PPU was still perceived as the dominant force in their lives. For example, on more than one occasion a former resident had decided to continue to live in the local authority area Bridge House was based because they were aware of what to expect from local public protection professionals. They predicted that moving to a new area may result in intensified scrutiny and consequential impediments because they would be starting again in terms of their relationship with the local PPU.

National MAPPA guidance requires public protection representatives to scrutinise the movements, networks, relationships and decision making processes of those with a conviction for a sexual offence (NOMS PPU, 2009). Given the nature of sexual offending, particularly when victims have been children, relationships understandably form a key and sensitive part of the arrangements to manage the risk of future sexual offending. Ex-prisoners themselves understood and largely accepted the need for their behaviour and relationships to be monitored and subject to restriction. However their experiences of the consequences of current MAPPA arrangements for managing sex offenders’ social networks suggest tension between risk management interventions and concerns with bringing about rehabilitation in the longer term.

Current public protection guidance makes clear that agencies involved in the management of sex offenders in the community must not only aim to prevent future sexual offending, but also must aim to avoid recognised behaviour which may lead to sexual abuse. Grooming behaviour – the preparation of an individual for abuse prior to any physical sexual harm necessarily having taken place – is specifically

mentioned in public protection guidance. There is the expectation that public protection agencies may restrict 'leisure activities to limit grooming behaviour', with leisure clubs, churches and employment specifically cited as potential places grooming may take place (ibid: 182 and 68).

The significance of this for community reintegration is that it takes place in a context in which social settings are problematic from a public protection perspective. In addition, not only are the actions of ex-prisoners with a conviction for a sexual offence of concern to MAPPA professionals, but also the possible *intention* of these actions. The intense and pervasive consequences of this suspicion for those with a conviction for a sexual offence are clear from the following interviewee's account:

*If you see a mum struggling with pushchair on some steps, with total innocence you would say 'I'll help you down the steps'. We're told quite categorically never ever do that, because well; 'what would she think if she knew what you'd done? Are you doing it because you want to become friends with her, so you can get at her kids?' And it's dealing with all these sort of ideas and thoughts which can very easily make you quite **withdrawn and very cautious and very suspicious of a lot of other people** around you. Am I allowed to do it? [...] If you want a trip to the seaside; 'why do you want to go? It's the summer, the kids are off school, they're all going to be on the beach. No, I don't like it, don't want you to go there.' If you want to go swimming. 'Oh is that because people are in swimming trunks and bathing costumes? What happens in the changing rooms?' Everything, the motive behind it is questioned and it's always an ongoing slog just to try and show that I'm not looking to reoffend, I don't want to reoffend, I don't want to go back to prison. So this statutory climate of an ethos of suspicion is very real. Resident. Interviewee's accounts of public protection representative's responses are un-italicised. (emphasis added)*

Being treated with suspicion by the PPU is inescapable for those with convictions for sexual offences. As a member of Bridge House staff remarked:

*The moment that [Bridge House residents] plan their day they are working against obstacles. Who might be there? What do I have to take? Who do I have to tell? Things like that and it's occurring every day. [...Residents are] working on situations of intent and are you really demonstrating for [the PPU that] you have changed and how can you prove that?*

Worker

The seriousness of sexual harm is such that the stakes are high for public protection professionals managing residents. As one resident saw it, this framework favoured a cautionary interpretation of public protection arrangements by agency representatives. There was also evidence that some residents had self-imposed restrictions about who they saw (particularly avoiding regular relations with other ex-residents) or had not taken up a former hobby on the basis that although this was not officially restricted, restricting their presence in social settings was easier:

*It does have an impact [beyond the end of licence period] and that is an added pressure and an added concern just in the back of your mind all the time, sort of [the police] won't like this'. And I've seen it with a couple of [ex Bridge House residents] that I'm still in touch with [...] They are thinking 'right well I don't want to do this because [the police] will get upset, [the police] won't like it.' And I'm thinking, hang on a minute, do it anyway [...] unless you commit a further offence they can't nick you.*

Resident

Yet interviewees from all interview groups were also aware that social isolation and a sense of being 'cut off' from others were potential risk factors in sexual reoffending and that establishing healthy relationships and accountability to others are protective factors in reducing reoffending - a matter well recognised in public protection materials (Criminal Justice Joint Inspection, 2010: 43; NOMS PPU, 2009: 125).

Amongst those interviewed the suspicion which underpinned the MAPPA framework was a matter of contention. This could be attributed to the significant differences in ethos regarding responses to sex offenders in the community. Specifically, whether these were governed by rehabilitative (a belief in the capacity to change and to meaningfully and appropriately contribute to society) or retributive (sex offenders are devious, highly manipulative and incurable – they can only be managed) understandings. The implicit conclusion of retributive understanding was that those with convictions for a sexual offence are safer on their own and the most responsible thing someone in this position can do is to isolate himself because all social interaction carries some risk that he'll find a way to commit further sexual offences. Those from a rehabilitative perspective found this questionable:

*[Rehabilitation] doesn't mean anything to an individual when they don't feel love, they don't see happiness. So how can you say that 'I'm rehabilitated?' They don't see the value of it in terms of the quality relationships that they are lacking. Worker*

It would be an over simplification to suggest interviewees neatly fitted into one or other of these positions. Whatever position an interviewee took or implied regarding this, it was always in the belief that it had the same ultimate benefit of ensuring greater public safety.

### **Bridge House approach**

Bridge House staff considered social reintegration of great consequence to the men's successful rehabilitation and stability. However, their experience of supporting those with a conviction for a sexual offence left them in no doubt as to the scale of challenges the men faced in forming and developing social networks. Their experience suggested that for some they supported these challenges would not be overcome. They could predict that life after Bridge House would be an extremely lonely, depressing existence for some they had supported. Achieving healthy new relationships was, one member of staff said, "one of those things that we haven't got an answer to."

Whilst living at Bridge House, those with convictions for sexual offences described being less isolated in the sense of having staff support and living with others. However, welcome though this was, it was not in itself a way of overcoming their isolation and their challenges in forming new relationships in the longer term. Key workers, volunteers, and Bridge House staff were considered by those supported by Bridge House to be 'friendly not friends' – a distinction consciously made by some Bridge House staff interviewed too. Fundamentally for the men, these were formal relationships, something quite different from the companionship the men struggled to form:

*What you're aware of is in mentoring sessions and key work sessions, in many ways it's a formal setting, you're there for a formal purpose. It's not as if you're developing deep friendships, so a lot of what is said is said out of necessity. There is trust, but you appreciate you're not going to go down the*

*pub and have a drink with them after work, you're not going to know where they live or anything about their family life. The reason we're meeting is quite clear, quite set, so it's a very different type of relationship to what many of us crave, and that's a friendship.*

Resident

Whilst in some cases friendships had formed between residents, reservations were generally expressed about the desirability of forming meaningful friendships at Bridge House by the men themselves as well as by public protection representatives. Both questioned whether it was healthy for residents to fall back on these relationships because of the challenges of social settings and meeting new people. For residents, it could reinforce their perceived status as 'unaccepted outsiders' to society, essentially different from others and that their status as someone with a conviction for a sexual offence defined them. The PPU were concerned about collusion amongst residents in the longer term and therefore strongly discouraged contact between Bridge House residents after their departure from the house. Thus whilst it is understandable that some residents came to rely on each other for friendship during their time at Bridge House, these relationships did not provide residents with paths to acceptable, long term community reintegration:

*I don't want to have a long term friendship with people in the house if you see what I mean. You're always told [by police and probation] it's not advisable to have friendships with other sex offenders, they think you're plotting or something. I get on well with [name of fellow resident]. But he probably feels the same way as me; he's going to be moving on so he doesn't want to get too involved.*

Resident

*[Sex offenders forming new relationships is] always an issue but what can you do? I mean I don't want to put him into a ghetto just with offenders. I think it is important to have a non-offending peer group. I also think that he's capable of establishing and maintaining that in a safe way in due course, but at the moment most of his social interaction is necessarily with people at Bridge House.*

Public protection representative

As a Christian organisation, providing residents with the opportunity to join a local church was considered an important component in what Bridge House could offer.

Bridge House had a long standing link to an active local church. Residents were not required to attend this or any church by the SST. However, faith was an important part of Bridge House's approach and residents were actively encouraged to 'try out' the local church. For some this church was considered to be the only place where they felt accepted. The church could be the lynchpin of some residents' week as it provided the opportunity to volunteer, in some cases on an almost daily basis, to practice their faith, and to meet others. As one resident put it, being a member of a church was the opportunity:

*To have a **normal** human being come and sit with you, it's the exception to the rule, but it does make you feel more valued and appreciated than just being sort of left isolated.*

Resident (emphasis added).

However, at the time of research, both the relationship between residents and this church and the partnership between Bridge House and the church were subject to fundamental change as a result of recent PPU guidance to the church. All ex-prisoners with a conviction for a sexual offence had recently been required to sign a 'contract of behaviour' with the church (see Appendix B: p.87 for a copy of this agreement). Those subject to this contract described the conditions as including:

- Their only attending a particular adult-only church service.
- When they attend this service, to sit in the back church pew rather than fill up a row by sitting next to another member of the congregation.
- To not approach other church members to start a conversation but to wait to be approached by a church member.
- To inform a church representative when they arrive and leave the church premises.
- To inform a church representative of any meeting which takes place outside the church with another church member. These meetings are to be approved in advance by a church representative. The church may decide they cannot meet another church member or may decide that an approved member of the church must also be in attendance.
- Men are discouraged from dating another member of the church.
- To not attend another church in the parish.

That the church requires a contract to be in place for those with a conviction for a sexual offence is complying with MAPPA guidance which advises all religious communities to seek a contract of behaviour from those with convictions for sexual offences (NOMS PPU, 2009: 72). The church had attempted to balance their belief in forgiveness, hope and rehabilitation for those who have committed a sexual offence, with a responsibility for the safety of their community and compliance with public protection arrangements. Those with a conviction for a sexual offence who attended the church accepted the need for monitoring, and considered this was appropriately and sensitively handled by the church.

Despite this, and even with the perceived best of intentions by the church, the implication for the men was to some extent feeling stigmatised in an environment they had hoped to be straightforwardly accepted. Moreover these indefinite civil measures were experienced as more pervasive than the licence conditions which were enacted over a defined period. The following interviewees describe the implicit consequences they had experienced because of the recent changes at the church:

*I am controlled in a very nice and unobtrusive manner but I am nonetheless controlled. [Metaphorically speaking] 'Okay let him in, don't let him through there though, keep him in this bit.'*

Resident

*The number of times I've come out from service and had a cup of coffee and then sat on my own. I can't approach others because that may be seen as me trying to solicit friendships maybe with people who may have got families or not [...] And from time to time it feels bad because they always fill the front of the church first and I'm sitting at the back on my own, which actually raises your profile and draws attention to you, which is very uncomfortable.*

Resident

The church had also recently accepted PPU advice to not allow any Bridge House residents to attend the church in addition to those who already attend. The police had advised that there was a limit to the number of people with convictions for a sexual offence that could safely be managed at one church. At the time of the research, Bridge House had yet to establish a satisfactory alternative church arrangement. A current resident who wanted to attend a church was attending



another local church on an interim basis, an arrangement which meant he was able to attend a church service but he was not a member of a church community. This was at best acknowledged by Bridge House staff as an unsatisfactory and temporary arrangement for the individual. The blanket imposition of these restrictions without reference to individuals' risk, their indefinite nature and the consequences they had for individuals' right to worship are problematic from a human rights perspective.

It is significant that a representative from Bridge House had not been involved in the discussions regarding the arrangements between the church and Bridge House residents. This had been a matter decided by the diocese, the police and church representatives. Indeed Bridge House staff's knowledge about the risk management arrangements in place for those they supported and the requirements regarding the monitoring of new relationships was questioned by several of the public protection representatives interviewed.

No member of Bridge House staff had received formal training about current public protection arrangements for sex offenders. Local public protection representatives' perception that Bridge House staff had inadequate knowledge about public protection, limited Bridge House staff's ability to be actively involved and influential at the important moment of the church renegotiating its arrangements for residents. Without training and guidance on public protection arrangements some Bridge House staff had felt there had been circumstances in which they had been unable to adequately inform and support men negotiating the difficult terrain of their reintegration.

Circles of Support and Accountable (COSA) has emerged since the mid-1990s as perhaps the most well recognised reintegrative approach to responding to sex offenders in the community. Developed by a Quaker community in Canada, COSA is based on a circle of four to six trained volunteers supporting a 'core member' (sex offender) with the intention to provide:

*a supportive social network that also requires the Core Member to take responsibility (be 'accountable') for his/her ongoing risk management.*  
(Circles UK website)

In principle COSA has much to recommend it to those Bridge House supports. A UK based pilot for COSA achieved the respect of local public protection agencies and is nationally recognised by NOMS as a reintegrative approach that is able to appropriately monitor risk (HTV Circles, 2008; NOMS PPU, 2009: 90) suggests some cause for optimism about COSA's potential to combine reintegration with restriction. However the resource implication involved in the COSA model has proved a significant challenge to the SST incorporating this approach. Establishing COSA at Bridge House had been talked about for at least six years and Bridge House had established a relationship with a Circles umbrella body to provide the necessary training to COSA volunteers. However at the time of research one resident had one volunteer who was referred to as a Circles mentor. The capacity to recruit and support adequate numbers of dedicated volunteers was considered the major barrier to establishing COSA at Bridge House. Indeed over the last decade, Bridge House staff were only aware of two people who had volunteered at Bridge House.

## Chapter 4: Employment

### ***Very close to unemployable? Barriers to gaining employment***

*[The government] don't like admitting that some people are unemployable, in fact their argument is no-one's unemployable and I think sex offenders in general, particularly some sexual offenders, come very close to being unemployable.*

Resident

The reportedly first study to consider sex offenders' access in to employment in 2004/2005 found those with convictions for sexual offences experienced '*more barriers or higher hurdles to gaining employment*' than ex-prisoners generally (Brown et al., 2007: 32).

The employment of those with a conviction for a sexual offence is necessarily circumscribed by legal restrictions which govern the workplace settings and occupations available to this group. Following their release from prison, residents of Bridge House may be subject to licence conditions which effectively prevent many employment opportunities for the period of their licence, a day time curfew or prohibited internet access being examples. Such conditions may be in place for months or even years depending on the individual and perceived level of risk. In the longer term as registered sex offenders individuals may be prohibited from working with those under 18 years old and from employment and workplace settings which would involve contact with, or access to information about, vulnerable populations. The Public Protection Unit (PPU) may also assess the suitability of an individual's work arrangement and may raise concerns about the possible risks to public safety posed by a particular work setting or occupation, even if it is outside those that are prohibited.

It also cannot be assumed that all Bridge House residents are possible future employees. For health reasons (including anxiety related disorders) or because of an individual being of or near pensionable age, some residents were not seeking employment.

The employment status of those supported by Bridge House was not routinely collected by the SST. However, based on a staff member's recollections of the 39 residents who had arrived at Bridge House between March 2002 and June 2011, 16 were known to have gained some form of employment, for some period of time. This was usually informal employment such as working on a market stall, labouring or part time retail work. Combining this wider picture with the experiences of those interviewed regarding seeking employment, suggests that whilst those Bridge House supported are not wholly excluded from employment, there are considerable limits to the employment opportunities that appear to be realistically available to those with convictions for sexual offences, with un- and under-employment a feature of the post prison experience for those Bridge House supported.

With the exception of one interviewee, who worked for the SST, none of the residents and former residents interviewed were in paid employment at the time of interview. As has been mentioned, some residents were not seeking employment and at the time of interview this was the case for two interviewees. However, it was also the case that job seeking had proved to be an extremely difficult and frustrating process for those that had sought employment. Indeed compelling job application and employment outcome figures were cited:

*I had two box files full of job applications, failed job applications mostly, I got to interview about three times I think.*

Resident

*I've actually applied for over a thousand jobs since I've been out [of prison], and registered with 40 online agencies. I'll get anything between 30 and 60 emails a day from agencies, people speculatively looking at my CV online. So it's not as if I'm not trying, but not once have I even got to an interview stage.*

Resident

Several of those interviewed described having spent several years attempting to gain acceptable employment. Their experiences suggest the odds were stacked against those with convictions for sexual offences finding meaningful employment.

Returning to the sector that they had worked in prior to conviction was not considered an option by those interviewed. In some cases their previous employment

was prohibited because of the legal restrictions on the employment they could undertake. The nature of these restrictions for some had effectively ruled out working within the sector of their previous employment, not just the specific job they had held. Even when not formally prohibited, returning to a skilled industry, such as ICT or electronics, after a prison sentence was considered impossible because the skills and experience they had were now considered out of date by employers. At the same time, some had been told they were overqualified candidates for lower skilled or entry level positions in the industry.

As a result those at Bridge House often found themselves seeking an acceptable form of employment in a field in which they did not have any paid employment experience. It was considered inevitable therefore that they would be seeking a lower skilled job in this new industry rather than a similar position to the one they had had prior to their conviction. Applying for basic office administration positions and building maintenance work were examples of job opportunities interviewees had thought may be amenable to their circumstances and acceptable for them to occupy.

To enter employment, residents were aware they usually had to be prepared to disclose their criminal record and the nature of their conviction to an employer at some stage. Revealing the offence they had committed was a source of anxiety for some of those interviewed. In some cases this anxiety was considerable:

*Going to a job with people, it terrifies me. Sometimes I get frightened of leaving my own home.*

Resident

Large employers in particular had been avoided because of a lack of confidence about confidentiality arrangements for personal information which may risk extending the number of people who would know about their conviction in their local area.

Those who had sought jobs through 'formal channels' of employment agencies, job centres and responding to adverts had found it near impossible to succeed beyond the application stage. Indeed it was telling that the employed residents and former residents that interviewees were aware of had tended not to have found a job through

a formal application process but rather through personal connections or by chance had informally picked up work. From what they had been told by potential employers or what they had perceived from their experience, residents identified the following reasons why they had not succeeded in gaining employment despite submitting considerable applications:

- Their relatively older age.
- A lack of paid experience in the area they were seeking to be employed.
- An employment gap on their curriculum vitae as a result of serving a prison sentence. Even when applying for a job which did not require a criminal record disclosure at the application stage, this gap was considered to be difficult to camouflage to an employer.
- When applications forms did require the declaration of any criminal convictions, some suspected that declaring a criminal record, even without disclosing the nature of their offence, was used by employers to reduce the possible shortlist of candidates to interview. Employers were generally considered uninterested in employing someone with a criminal record when there were candidates who did not have convictions. This was something many residents found understandable and is an experience confirmed by a study of employers' attitudes to employing those with convictions for sexual offences (Brown et al., 2007).

Given their experiences of often considerable employment rejection, it is perhaps unsurprising that many of those interviewed were despondent and unhopeful about their ability to gain meaningful employment in the future. Some had reached the conclusion it was unrealistic for employment to ever be part of their lives. The possibility that perhaps they may never find fulfilling employment left a significant gap in their lives. The lack and inaccessibility of meaningful employment was keenly felt as a loss of self-worth and value by residents:

*I'd say the main thing is [when you have] employment, you've got back that self-respect and if you're working you feel part of the community, you feel as though you're putting something back and I've never been [unemployed before my conviction] I've always done my bit. At this time I can no longer do that, it's quite painful really. Resident*

*Occasionally I get disheartened and a bit despondent and often feel angry that I've not had the opportunity to show what I can achieve and what I can do [...] I need to work. It's not just about money, work's about other things as well, you know, sense of belonging, feeling valued, self-esteem, all this sort of stuff that you get from work.*

Resident

The employment market being highly inaccessible to those with a conviction for a sexual offence in general was recognised by a PPU representative interviewed. She considered this may reinforce ex-prisoners' sense of being an 'unwanted outsider' in society:

*I think employment, the need for disclosure plays a big part in [that] really, how they see they fit into society, I think it might be that a lot of them are of the view that well, they're not really going to get work, so they don't really have any sort of motivation.*

Public protection representative

### **Bridge House's approach**

The importance placed on employment by the SST is captured in the organisation's self description of its vision to provide ex-prisoners with 'a home, a church, a job'. Yet employment of residents was considered an ambition often beyond the organisation's reasonable reach by workers at Bridge House. As a member of Bridge House staff explained, the barriers those with convictions for sexual offences face regarding their employment were overwhelming and intractable:

*[Residents not gaining employment] is a big disfavour we have. Not because we don't do anything, it's just we can't do anything.*

Worker

Residents found Bridge House supportive regarding their ambitions for employment and the difficulties they had experienced in this regard. However, residents did not consider coherent, tangible support regarding employment had been offered at the House:

*The House didn't really play a role in [a resident who had gained employment]. Which is sad because the catch line is home, a church and a job, and you can see it on some of the flyers and things. They provide a home and I think they do that very well. They're not so clever at providing a job.*  
Resident

*I think they basically had two promises they'll find you accommodation and they'll help you find work. The accommodation fine [...] I think the one was they promised to help you find a job and there was never really any help.*  
Resident

*I think it's a bit like going back to live with your mum. If they can help you they will, but my mum wouldn't know how to get me a job, but she'd be there as someone to listen.*  
Resident

The employment intervention made by Bridge House was not considered to extend beyond advice about seeking employment and referral to the local job centre or employment agencies. For residents, a meaningful avenue to gain employment was considered to be a separate matter from such steps, which in practice they experienced as amounting to no more than a bureaucratic exercise of seeking employment, and all in all, a frustrating process.

Bridge House cannot be responsible for the quality of other agencies' work. However, the focus of Bridge House's employment work on providing supportive advice and referrals to statutory and voluntary employment agencies was not considered by residents to meaningfully engage with the considerable barriers they continued to face regarding gaining employment. Residents were clear; if Bridge House wanted to support residents' employment outcomes, it would require a significantly different approach. One focused on the 'demand' side of employment, for example, educating and building a network of employers able to appropriately employ those with convictions for sexual offences, or having a member of staff with a specific responsibility for establishing employment opportunities for residents.

In recognition of the narrow employment opportunities open to residents a number of 'work around' strategies were undertaken at Bridge House as alternative ways to address residents' need for purposeful activity. Residents had been encouraged to



undertake further education, or take up acceptable hobbies such as painting or writing whilst at the house. For several residents interviewed, volunteering at the church affiliated to the organisation had given an opportunity to provide a meaningful contribution which they had highly valued by residents. In some cases this volunteering was a substantial time commitment of some five days a week. The SST also actively encouraged residents and former residents to volunteer for the organisation, undertaking roles such as building maintenance, support with bible study groups, or ICT work. To this end residents had found Bridge House supportive and enabling in creating purposeful activities to address the void left by the lack of employment in their lives.

The possibility of the SST establishing a social enterprise which Bridge House residents could engage in had been extensively explored in 2007/2008. This was an ambitious plan and an interesting proposal in the face of perceived reticence of employers to employ those with a conviction for a sexual offence. However, the plans had failed to come to fruition. Having the necessary resources and capacity were considered to be the major barriers to developing this beyond an ambitious idea. At the time of the research voluntary opportunities at the SST had proved difficult to sustain after residents moved on from Bridge House. Some interviewees had been unable to take up volunteering opportunities because of PPU concerns about collusion between former and current residents. Representatives from the PPU questioned whether it was healthy for former residents who had moved on from Bridge House to maintain their connection with an organisation working closely with those with convictions for sexual offences.

## Chapter 5: Staffing at the hostel

### Relationship between staff and residents

Both residents and staff considered the nature and quality of the relationship between Bridge House workers and those who lived at Bridge House of vital importance.

Workers' Christian faith and their desire to contribute to Christian informed charitable work were important motivations for their engagement at Bridge House. Several staff members had come to Bridge House through their association with other SST projects. The personal investment staff made was evident to residents. The compassion of staff and their generosity with their time was considered "way beyond any job description" and that "their care is real, absolutely real and there's no amount of time they won't spend with you however long it takes, whatever the problem is." It was believed this extended to some members of staff personally subsidising communal meals at Bridge House and in one case providing monetary support for a flat deposit.

The relationship between staff and volunteers and those who lived at Bridge House was informal, responsive and supportive. The following descriptions by a member of staff and a resident were typical:

*We've got a documented history of the personal areas about why they are in that house. As much as we take that on board and that forms the basis of key working, also we're trying to tap into that person who is not known by a system. What sort of thing does he like? Your aspirations? Where would you like to live? What their hope is. So you are discovering a new person that is not known within the [criminal justice] system and [...] they feel that they can then talk to you as a person about those issues outside the probation reports, all that kind stuff. Then they can [talk] at length sometimes when discussing really the terms of their convictions and so on.*

Worker

*It wasn't sitting around in the office talking about your support plan. It was having a mug of coffee and just having a conversation about, 'okay where do*

*you see yourself in a few months' time? And how do you need to get there? Have you got your ID sorted yet? Have you opened a bank account yet? ' [...] Although it's done in a nice informal way you're getting advice and help on just setting your life up.*

Resident

Staff considered the nature of these interactions unusual in residents' lives. As has been previously described, those with convictions for sexual offences tended to be socially isolated and felt 'cast away' by society. In addition, due to the nature of their offence, residents had a number of public protection professionals in their lives who had a responsibility to manage them through the lens of risk management. Staff considered that these relationships were necessarily circumscribed in their ability to respond to an individual by their focus on scrutiny and imposing restrictions. It was in this context that staff emphasised the value of the relationships they attempted to build with residents. These were considered by staff to prioritise the individual person, their life and the challenges they experienced regarding resettlement by listening to residents and offering practical, emotional and spiritual support. As the following staff member explains, building these relationships was considered an honest starting point enabling them to support residents' rehabilitation and resettlement process, and ultimately for those they supported to achieve change:

*When you've built that trust up with them over a certain period of time, they'll open up to you more and they start to tell you what's going on in their mind. They're very open, they're very candid, quite surprising sometimes what they come out with, but [talking is] a release for them.*

Worker

Residents felt that the desperation and the emotional fraught state they had often experienced was well understood by staff at Bridge House, and that this had been an important aspect of their post prison experience they had been able to share and talk about with Bridge House staff:

*They were very understanding of when people were down because there were some days when people were just not able to cope.*

Resident

*It took a long time to feel I was safe out here [out of prison]. And the staff were very sensitive, very open, allowing me to talk about how I felt and what was going on for me, trying to work strategies that might help. And also reassuring me that I wasn't doing anything wrong, that the strategies I was using to deal with my fears worked.*

Resident

Residents considered staff had always been accessible and available to them whilst they were at the house. Residents 'popped in' to the office to see day time staff, had some staff members' mobile telephone number should they need to talk outside the staff members' work hours, and night-time staff often stayed in the communal living area until residents retired for the evening. Conversations between staff and residents ranged from everyday discussions about a television show or current affairs, to how residents saw themselves, guilt and shame, family relationships or matters of faith.

*I pretty much gave him my life story and [staff member said], 'anything you want to talk about let's just chat about it.' And it's more a friendship it became and it was just chatting about any whatever's bothering me and he was there just as an ear.*

Resident

Residents experienced it as of immense benefit to share emotionally difficult matters with what felt to be a caring, supportive individual interested in their welfare, that this had "helped the clouds go away", a euphemistic description of residents' depression, crippling anxiety, and sometimes acute self-harming.

Some residents remarked on the extended possibility for openness and honesty their relationship with Bridge House staff had opened up. This was something they put down to the confidence and sense of security they had that an individual member of staff at Bridge House would support them:

*[Staff member's name] became someone I could trust, someone whose advice I valued, someone I knew wasn't out to get me, that really genuinely was looking for my best interests, and it was nice to have someone, some company around me like that, where I could talk openly and honestly without fear of being misinterpreted or anything like that. There have been*

*a couple of occasions where I've felt upset or shocked [and been able to talk to them about it].*

Resident

However openness between staff and residents was not without qualification.

Residents had no control over what happened to the information they told to Bridge House staff and how this might be shared with other agencies. Residents were aware “there’s nothing confidential” at Bridge House. Some said they were “careful” about what they said or felt they could not be “completely open.” This was in part because they had to think through the consequences of how the information they shared with Bridge House staff could be perceived by public protection officials if the information was fed back during the regular information sharing meetings Bridge House representatives had with public protection representatives.

*I think there's the knowledge [amongst residents] that Bridge House work with the police and the probation. So there's a certain element of fear that anything you say could be misconstrued or passed back and it's personal.*

Resident

As a result, there were circumstances in which residents did not feel able to tell Bridge House staff about incidents that it would have been beneficial for staff at the House to be aware of. For example, a resident chose not to tell Bridge House staff about the unwanted sexual advances they were experiencing from a fellow resident whilst living at Bridge House. These advances had been unpleasant rather than intimidatory. The resident did not feel able to share this with staff at the House because they were concerned about the possible implications for Bridge House and for the individual they would be accusing if this information was then shared more widely.

There appeared to be varying practice amongst staff regarding information sharing practices. Some staff explained to residents when they planned to share particular information with public protection representatives. Other members of staff considered the de facto position was that any information residents shared with them could be part of an open flow of information between Bridge House residents, SST staff, and public protection agencies. The relationship a Bridge House resident had

with a staff member was damaged because information the resident had shared had been passed to their probation officer without the staff member explaining that they had felt they had to pass this information on. Following this incident the resident had reassessed the information they shared with Bridge House staff:

*There's a little bit more secrecy goes on, [...] there isn't the confidence there at the moment that we would have had [in the past] to go and turn round to [staff] and say 'oh I've screwed up'. Because you'd then have the fears as to what the repercussions might be. You don't feel as if [the staff member would] walk beside you but perhaps he'd push to the side and abandon you.*  
Resident

Some residents had felt they were able to be more open with night-time staff rather than daytime staff and with the mentors some had outside Bridge House. In part this was because these people were considered to be more distanced from engagement with public protection arrangements and therefore offered more informality and greater confidentiality than the daytime Bridge House staff:

*The impression we had on the shop floor, if you like, was that [night time staff were] part timers and they're almost one of us, so yeah there was a lot more informality [with them].*  
Resident

Residents were positive about the practice of having an individual member of staff assigned as a key worker. The key working role was commonly considered by residents to be the provision of an individual who took a specific interest in their welfare and the challenges they faced regarding resettlement, and who could be 'a port of call' during their time at Bridge House. At its best, this relationship was described by residents as having combined a caring role and practical support with engagement in a forward looking process which had enabled them to think about their future in often more positive ways.

Key work sessions currently tended to take place in local cafes as there was no space for these meetings to formally take place within the house and were intended to take place once a week or fortnight. Both staff and residents considered such an arrangement was limiting, as it was not conducive to what could be sensitive

conversations, confidential information and establishing the focused one-to-one resettlement work that some Bridge House staff aspired to provide. The limited staff capacity of Bridge House also meant there had been periods when it had not been possible for all residents to regularly have these meetings due to periods of staff absence through illness.

At the time of the research one staff member had a notional half-day a week allocated to support former residents. The dedication of this staff member was praised by former residents for the additional personal time they routinely volunteered to support ex-residents. However, this did not compensate for the lack of formal resource and approach to support for individuals after their move on from Bridge House. After leaving Bridge House former residents had a staff member's telephone number to contact if they needed to. Previous attempts to provide more formal transitional support to ex-residents had proved difficult. A regular 'open session' for former residents to come to Bridge House with the intention to "sort any problems out [...] provide some companionship" was considered too problematic to continue by local public protection agencies because of concerns about reinforcing an offender identity and network by bringing people with a conviction for a sexual offence together. Nor would it be appropriate from a risk management perspective for former Bridge House residents to be housed in 'semi-supported' accommodation, where they would be housed with other former residents and a floating support presence.

The former residents interviewed commonly wanted or considered that they would have benefitted from, more support with the practical and emotional aspects of living independently. All felt there would be support from staff at Bridge House if they requested it, that "I always knew I could phone". However, as a scarce resource, some considered support from the SST after their move on focused on those who proactively contacted Bridge House and that they "would say I'm fine [if someone from Bridge House telephoned] even if I wasn't."

## Relationship between Bridge House and public protection agencies

*I see Bridge House as an organisation [that's] reaching out to a group of people and trying to assist them but they're coming up against the criminal justice system and some really professional bodies; the MAPPA arrangement, the police, probation. So it's kind of a clash between charities and public sector.*

Public protection representative

The relationship Bridge House had with local public protection agencies impacts upon the arrangements at the House as well as its continued existence.

Representatives from public protection agencies must be confident in the SST's management of Bridge House for it to remain an approved premises for those convicted of sexual offences.

As the time of research the relationship between local public protection agencies and Bridge House was a particularly live issue. A written protocol was in the process of being formalised regarding Bridge House's relationship to the local statutory Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). The development of a protocol between the public protection agencies and Bridge House had been triggered by public protection representatives' recent concerns about aspects of the SST's provision. Concerns were reported about a lack of appropriate boundaries between staff and residents and regarding the enforcement of rules and restrictions in the House. These concerns had perhaps amplified public protection representatives' calls for a formal protocol with Bridge House. However those interviewed considered there were long standing issues regarding the clarification of statutory public protection representatives and Bridge House staff respective roles in relation to residents and public protection agencies' expectations of an accommodation provider for this group.

Those interviewed from public protection agencies and from Bridge House acknowledged the SST's role and agenda regarding Bridge House residents was distinct from that of statutory bodies. Public protection representatives considered that as a voluntary housing provider Bridge House could have potential benefits in comparison to a probation hostel. Bridge House was considered to be a "longer term



care option” than a probation hostel where there was likely to be greater emphasis on resettlement processes:

*I certainly have a powerful impression of [Bridge House as] an organisation that is dedicated to rehabilitation and to helping people to change and move on.*

Public protection representative

However despite these potential perceived benefits, liaison and joint work between public protection agencies and Bridge House was acknowledged by those interviewed to not be working as effectively as it could be. In addition to supporting residents in resettlement and rehabilitation processes, representatives from local public protection agencies expected Bridge House staff to be able to contribute towards the assessment of residents’ behaviour for risk management purposes by sharing information and knowledge about residents. Information regarding residents’ relationships and movements was considered to have a particularly important contribution to make to an informed risk management approach.

It is clear from interviews with public protection representatives that Bridge House staff were considered to struggle to meet these expectations in practice.

Representatives from public protection agencies and from Bridge House met monthly to share information about residents. No one interviewed from either public protection agencies or from Bridge House considered these meetings currently adequately fulfilled this purpose in practice. Representatives from public protection agencies questioned Bridge House staff’s ability to adequately contribute relevant information to these meetings given the absence of any formal training or professional qualifications regarding the risk management of sex offenders:

*I find it quite tricky to get information about how things are going for certain people [...] I know [residents are] being supervised but sort of evidencing that it's really good quality is a bit difficult for me.*

Public protection representative

*We work with very different agendas, as a probation officer I'm very much risk focused and risk relevant but in my experience I've found that the staff at Bridge House sometimes have the agenda of 'assist and befriend' and in my*

*view they don't always see the wider picture in terms of risk needs and that potentially affects what they say to the offenders about decisions that I may or may not have made about risk related issues.*

Public protection representative

An awareness of risk had been central to all public protection representatives' training, approach and practice tools to supervising sex offenders. Working with an organisation that did not similarly embed risk management in its approach clearly concerned a number of public protection representatives. Without an appreciation of risk, they could not see how Bridge House staff would be able to recognise the supervision and monitoring they believed was necessary when working with this group:

*A person who could be the most serious sexual offender might be great to have around the hostel because they're helpful, pleasant. But in terms of risk, they're really high risk, so [Bridge House] sees a different side.*

Public protection representative

Specific instances of concern regarding these matters were highlighted by several public protection representatives interviewed. It was also evident that many did not feel well informed about Bridge House's approach and day-to-day work. "A bit of an unknown" was the description of Bridge House given by one. As a voluntary sector hostel, public protection bodies were inevitably more distanced from Bridge House in comparison to their knowledge of statutory probation-run hostels. As such perhaps when concerns emerged about practice at the House these issues were not tempered by an informed picture of practice at Bridge House and hence quickly escalated in seriousness for public protection representatives.

Bridge House was not attempting to imitate a probation-run hostel for those with a conviction for a sexual offence; rather it intended to provide housing support distinct from the statutory model in terms of its faith orientation and its emphasis on supporting longer term resettlement. There was a tension for some Bridge House staff between complying with the demands the public protection agencies placed on them for information, enforcing restriction, and supervising residents and maintaining a distinctive practice as somewhere offering something different to a

probation hostel. A matter recognised by the following public protection representative:

*I don't know whether we sometimes expect too much of [Bridge House]. It's not like a probation hostel, a probation hostel is really part of the criminal justice system and I just see Bridge House is more voluntary [...] sometimes I think are we asking too much of them. I work for the public sector, the government essentially and we're trying to draw them in.*  
Public protection representative

Given a closer working relationship between public protection agencies and Bridge House was being negotiated, there were underlying concerns that a lack of confidence in the SST amongst public protection agencies, if not robustly addressed, would compromise the future of Bridge House or erode its space for the faith based resettlement it intends to provide so that it effectively becomes no more than a voluntary organisation run probation hostel.

### **Other staffing issues**

It was generally agreed amongst Bridge House workers that the formal structures in place for staff and volunteers needed to be improved. As an approved premise Bridge House must have one social work or probation qualified staff member and this was compiled with. However staff had routinely not received a formal induction, supervision, training or access to professional guidance whilst working at Bridge House. This included those with significant responsibility regarding key work and for residents' welfare and mental wellbeing. Public protection representatives considered the paucity of formal training and unclear oversight structures for staff was highly undesirable given the seriousness and complexities that work with this offending group was considered to involve. Several Bridge House staff considered training in working with those with convictions for sexual offences would be beneficial to their roles:

*We still don't have any workers who are specifically trained to work with sex offenders, which I think is a bit of a mistake.*  
Worker

*My one serious complaint about Stepping Stones there's been no training at all [... which] I think is rather inadequate.*

Worker

*When I was doing my [probation] training we weren't allowed to supervise people convicted of sexual offences, you had to co-work a case, I didn't even co-work a case and I didn't even supervise that client group [when I was doing my training]. And I know [Bridge House] have student social workers there, that I gather they're spending sort of alone time with this group and that just kind of surprises me, that contrast. We were not allowed to spend that time with that client group unless we'd done our training and had lots of experience and [then with] management and oversight. [Bridge House is] run with people who are still training and I don't know how much they know about the criminal justice system and MAPPa and things like that.*

Public protection representative

Poor communication between staff was a commonly perceived problem at Bridge House. Most workers were part time, some with other work commitments alongside Bridge House and there was no forum for staff to come together to communicate about residents, and about the issues and challenges they faced in their work. This was particularly an issue for night-time staff whose shifts did not necessarily overlap with day-time staff. Some had felt unable to respond to residents' support needs because they had not been informed about significant issues such as their drug treatment regimes or about the expectations on staff to support residents with these needs. This resulted in significant matters regarding responding to residents sometimes being left to an individual's discretion to deal with. It was alleged a member of the night-time staff had been sacked because they had formed a friendship with a former Bridge House resident. This incident had left another member of staff unclear about the expectations for their work as they had not been informed previously to not to keep in personal contact with residents and they had not had formal training or guidance about acceptable boundaries with residents.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions and implications

This research was undertaken with the intention to inform understanding about the transition from prison for those with a conviction for a sexual offence and influence the development of good quality practices to support the longer term resettlement of this group.

Achieving resettlement outcomes for this group is of public interest. It has been recognised as contributing both to reducing further offending as well as to being connected to individuals' wellbeing and basic human rights.

The transition from prison for those with a conviction for a sexual offence was characterised by the following issues.

### **1. The gap between leaving prison and acquiring the resources for resettlement is considerable**

At the end of their prison sentence, those with a conviction for a sexual offence were stranded or adrift in resettlement terms. Unlike perhaps some other ex-prisoner groups, those with convictions for a sexual offence were typically not returning to a version of the life they had had before prison. Rather life after prison was profoundly different for this group. Individuals had to contend with new circumstances of monitoring and restriction, which continued indefinitely for some. There were usually few resources from their life before prison to build on: previous relationships and employment were usually inaccessible, friends had '*walked away*'. In short;

*The pillars of life that people need to change have either broken or been removed in their life, and so they find it very hard to deal with life.*

Worker

### **2. The nature of the barriers to realising resettlement outcomes were such that progress regarding resettlement was not straightforward to achieve**

Progress towards stable housing, renewed social relationships and meaningful employment is not straightforward to attain for this group. Bridge House offered

stable accommodation, in most cases, until move on to independent accommodation took place. However, residing at Bridge House did not resolve all the barriers to achieving resettlement and reintegration that faced those with convictions for sexual offences. Living with isolation, feeling a stigmatised outsider and seemingly little prospect of gaining meaningful employment were common issues, and were not overcome for all.

This is unsurprising given that the different vulnerabilities and interests in this group's journey from prison are complex. For example, a standard interpretation of public protection responsibilities to manage the risk of further offending potentially linked any social interest to sexually harmful intentions.

The hostile external environment those with conviction for sexual offences face, the associated anxiety about disclosure and protecting personal safety, the difficulty accessing generic ex-prisoner resettlement support, and the exclusion brought about by a statutory approach which prioritises restriction and monitoring, all inhibited progress with resettlement and reintegration. These seem likely to be common barriers faced by organisations pursuing resettlement outcomes for this group, rather than matters amenable to being straightforwardly overcome. Rather the challenging resettlement picture presented here poses a wider question for the arrangements governing the management of those with convictions for a sexual offence in the community. Given the issues raised by this research, what distance is it realistic for those with a conviction for a sexual offence to travel from prison to the community? And what are the merits and costs of prohibiting progress with these matters?

### **3. Supporting this journey is a particularly challenging area of provision for the voluntary sector**

As a voluntary organisation pursuing resettlement outcomes for ex-prisoners with convictions for a sexual offence, Bridge House is required to have a closer relationship to probation and the police than would be the case for other areas of ex-prisoner provision. Moreover Bridge House had to be able to assure statutory organisations of its professionalism. In comparison to the considerable oversight public protection agencies felt that work with those with convictions for sexual

offences involved, Bridge House was struggling to meet the demands for professionalism and formality statutory organisations expected from them.

To meet both the expectations of public protection agencies and defend a space to pursue resettlement outcomes is a demanding task for a voluntary organisation and an uncomfortable position for an accommodation provider to occupy. If the framework for voluntary operated supported accommodation becomes such that these organisation are seen as simply extensions of surveillance and restriction, this is likely to impede the very qualities of hope for the future and support for individual resettlement that the voluntary sector has been shown to be well placed to provide.

### **The development of the Stepping Stones Trust's work with those convicted of a sexual offence**

The research also raises a number of specific implications for the Stepping Stones Trust to develop its work for those with a conviction for a sexual offence.

Bridge House was overwhelmingly considered a safe, supportive environment by those who resided there. The benefit of this, and the associated hope and opportunity to rebuild their lives that the SST provided should not be underestimated. Residing at Bridge House enabled stranded individuals to have the time and space to contend with a life profoundly different from that which they had had prior to their conviction. It was support for individuals to cope with the difficult challenges of stigma, isolation and insecurity that Bridge House was well placed to enable, rather than to necessarily be able to overcome all the challenges to achieving 'successful' resettlement in terms of gaining meaningful employment, and renewed social networks. The following are suggested as areas to develop the Stepping Stones Trust's work with those convicted of a sexual offence.

- **Formal structures for staff and volunteers**

Without formal processes for staff and volunteers such as an induction, guidance, supervision and training, significant matters were left to individual staff members' discretion. This was problematic for the support the SST offered to residents and for developing effective relationships with representatives from public protection

agencies. It restricted some staff members' ability to confidently advise residents about the sensitive issue of reintegration in a restrictive environment. At the time of the research statutory agencies' also had serious concerns about staff professionalism at Bridge House. This compromised Bridge House's ability to be an effective advocate for reintegration and resettlement considerations in public protection decisions regarding residents. Putting in place arrangements for staff group communication, and formal staff support would be helpful mediums to work through the sometimes difficult issues which confronted staff. This included how to establish clear parameters regarding relationships with residents, ensuring information amongst the staff group enables consistent support to residents, managing the disclosure and sharing of information about residents externally to the SST, and how to develop the outcome focused key working model some staff aspired to provide.

Greater staff training and awareness about the MAPPA guidance which governs those with convictions for sexual offence in the community and about practice regarding working with those with a conviction for a sexual offence would aid Bridge House's relationship with other agencies involved in residents' lives, particularly the PPU, as well as enable the organisation to best support residents.

- **Support to residents following their move on from the hostel**

With a small staff team, Bridge House is able to offer a fairly static resource, necessarily focused on current residents. As such there was no framework to support residents following their departure from Bridge House, with the exception of a small amount of one staff member's time. It has been established that residents' support needs are not necessarily resolved upon their departure from Bridge House. Work with former residents would also need to have clear purpose and a formal structure if it is to enable former residents to progress in their journey towards 'successful' resettlement and to be acceptable from a risk management perspective.

Developing Circles of Support and Accountability for residents may lend itself to being a form of support which could effectively 'move on' with residents from the hostel to independent living. However, Bridge House's experience over several years suggests that without additional resource, as a small organisation it may lack the



capacity necessary to support the considerable task of recruiting and supervising the number of volunteers required to sustain this approach. In addition, as an intensive intervention, Circles may not be appropriate for all those who come to Bridge House. Thus alongside developing Circles, establishing a formal approach to support post residents' move from Bridge House, with clear expectations about what is being provided, would be of benefit to those whom the SST supports.

- **Developing residents' access to meaningful employment opportunities**

Referral to employment agencies and advice to residents about employment will not be sufficient to overcome the considerable barriers to employment those with convictions for sexual offences face. A dearth of acceptable employers prepared to employ those with convictions for sexual offences is a significant barrier to address for the SST to improve the employment outcomes of those it supports. Research about improving employment outcomes for ex-prisoners generally suggests building good relationships with individual employers and educating employers about the employment ex-prisoners can persuade some mainstream organisations to employ those with criminal convictions (Pleace and Minton, 2009). There are particularly sensitivities regarding the appropriate employment of those with a conviction for a sexual offence and the scale of the challenge to employ those with convictions for sexual offences should not be underestimated. But the development of work to generate educated employers, confident to provide acceptable employment opportunities to those with a conviction of a sexual offence, could considerably improve employment prospects for those whom Bridge House supports.

Any development of significant new work would require further funding to be secured beyond the current arrangements which support approximately two full time members of staff. However, the future funding climate for voluntary sector housing and resettlement work with those convicted of a sexual offence is subject to new arrangements which will be determined over the next year and which potentially significantly affect organisations like Bridge House.

Bridge House's main funder is Supporting People, a government programme administered at a local authority level to fund and monitor housing related services for vulnerable people. At the time of writing, the funding arrangements for Supporting People are planned to change from their distribution of a grant and then monitoring of organisations compliance to the grant criteria, to Supporting People directly commissioning housing providers. As part of this process all Supporting People funded projects will be subject to review in the coming period. In an austere financial climate demand on accommodation support resources are likely to increase whilst many local authorities face tough financial settlements. Supporting People is not immune from potential reductions in funds. Questions of comparative cost, accessibility and benefit to the local community are likely to be asked of housing services such as Bridge House as difficult funding decisions are made.

There are also plans for new arrangements for the government commissioning of resettlement work under a 'payment by results' model. However, it is proposed that resettlement services for ex-prisoners subject to MAPPA arrangements are excluded from this model in recognition of the inadequacy of judging such services by reconviction rates and because the management of future risk of harm for this group is considered to have priority (MoJ, 2010: 44). Given this context, the basis for funding resettlement services to ex-prisoners with convictions for sexual offences in the coming period is unclear.

### **“A life sentence really?”**

The current achievement of Bridge House lies in its provision of a humane form of safety for its residents. The journey from prison for those with a sex conviction is governed by statutory arrangements for managing this group in the community. It is commonly agreed that public safety is paramount in these arrangements. However, by imposing restriction and surveillance on those with a conviction for a sexual offence in the community without effective reintegration, individuals may physically no longer be in prison but their circumstances of dependence, isolation and exclusion continue. Adopting such an approach in the name of improving public protection may paradoxically produce circumstances in which achieving greater public safety ultimately can be compromised.

A diminished life without opportunities to find meaningful work or form relationships cannot be considered as reintegrated. In reorienting its activities to meet the complex challenges outlined, any voluntary sector body can only go as far as our current public protection arrangements allow. Many hundreds of people with sex convictions leave prison each year with little informed public debate about the merits and costs of the arrangements governing this group, and the contribution such practices make to support individuals to lead better, more complete and safer lives.

## Postscript

The trustees and I would like to thank Roger Grimshaw and Helen Mills of the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies for their hard work and perseverance in completing this piece of work following an initial approach in April 2007 to assess the impact of our Beyond the Wall project in HMP Wormwood Scrubs. The ethical issues posed by the comparatively small number of subjects, together with the problem of establishing a control group within the Prison Service (an issue faced by all small to medium sized enterprises working in this field when they attempt to evaluate their work) were such that, following several abortive attempts, it was decided to carry out an impact assessment of another of Stepping Stones Trust's rare but replicable projects rehabilitating people released from imprisonment for a sexual offence.

This is a very interesting and well written report. We acknowledge the shortcomings highlighted and indicate below how these have and are being addressed since the research was carried out in early 2011 but would also point to the fact that the report recognises that, overall, the standard of care (as described by the residents) is very high and notes, as one of its main points, the general lack of suitable accommodation for sex offenders.

The report refers to three areas where Stepping Stones Trust could improve the way it carries out its work with sex offenders with regard to finding employment for residents, the professional relationship with the Public Protection Unit and the lack of training for staff.

Contrary to expectations and whatever their perceptions, the majority (72%) of residents, who have left Bridge House since 2008, are in some kind of employment. Whether this is despite, or because of, the support from Stepping Stones Trust, the environment and expectation in the house provides the encouragement for the residents to seek and obtain employment. This percentage has risen over recent years and is likely to be accelerated even further through the recent incorporation of Stepping Stones Trust Enterprises Limited enabling residents to set up their own businesses.

Since the research was carried out, Stepping Stones Trust and the Public Protection Unit have agreed a written protocol for referrals to, and operation of, Bridge House which, along with the training of staff, will improve, though not eliminate, police anxiety regarding the management of risk in places like Bridge House. Stepping Stones Trust can only point to the fact that, though not statistically significant because of the small numbers involved, none of the residents who have left the house since it opened in 1993 have been reconvicted for sex offences which illustrates the lasting effect of the home in enabling residents to overcome their past behaviour.

All relevant staff, including those on night duty, have now undertaken a one-day sex offenders awareness day facilitated by Richard Foot, formerly of the Churches Child Protection Agency, covering risk management in the setting of a therapeutic home. To reduce potential funding issues, a request has also been made for access to statutory training provided for probation officers though nothing has yet been offered.

Stepping Stones Trust has received notice that the Supporting People grant for Bridge House (currently £73,000 pa) is being terminated on 31 March 2012. The letter states termination was solely due to budget cuts and the decision does not reflect the standard of care and support provided by the Bridge House staff. The letter also states that the criteria for assessing grants to housing providers included whether local authority residents were being housed. This ignores the fact that the original purpose for the grant was to provide a regional, if not national, resource for the housing of offenders who, by the very nature of their offence, often cannot be housed and rehabilitated in their original local authority area.

In the light of this report, Stepping Stones Trust wishes to continue and, if possible, expand its work with those with convictions for sex offences and will seek to raise donations to cover the loss of the grant.

**Mick Holloway (CEO, Stepping Stones Trust) October 2011**

## **Appendix A: Criteria to be offered a place at Bridge House**

Residents must:

- Not be subject to MAPPA risk level three (for whom a 24 hour staffed hostel is required which Bridge House does not provide).
- Accept responsibility for the sexual offence they have been convicted of; they cannot be a 'denier'.
- Be judged at low to medium risk of reoffending according to OASys and other risk management assessment tools which may be consulted.
- Be a practicing Christian or want to live in an environment of Christian spiritual support.
- Be willing to accept House rules including no alcohol or drugs in the house, no visitors to the House except in exceptional circumstances and with the SST's prior agreement and no guests in residents' bedrooms.
- Not have a conviction for arson or be considered to pose a high risk of violence towards other residents or staff.
- Not be addicted to an illegal substance.

The hostel is not appropriate for those with a serious mental health illness.

## Appendix B: Agreement between Bridge House residents and local church (annoymised)

Dear

Welcome to CHURCH. We are so pleased you want to join the fellowship here at CHURCH. Here is what we as a church commit to do for you:

- welcome you into our community
- encourage you in your walk with God
- support you in need
- train you in your gifts
- pray for you on any issue
- match you with a mentor for regular one-to-one support and accountability
- when the time comes, send you onwards with our blessing

For your safety and welfare, and that of all the other members of CHURCH, you will agree to observe the following pastoral conditions.

1. I will never allow myself to be in a situation where I am alone with children/young people.
2. I will attend meetings and discuss my position with the church leadership when required.
3. I will not seek to place myself in areas where children's activities are in progress or any other areas designated by the church leadership.
4. I accept that it will be necessary for certain people to be aware of my circumstances and it may be necessary for someone to accompany me within certain areas of the church.
5. I accept that CHURCH pastoral leadership will provide me with support and pastoral care.
6. I understand that if I fail to keep to these conditions I may be barred from attending the church and that the leadership reserve the right to contact the statutory agencies if my conduct causes concern.
7. I will maintain confidentiality about my convictions.
8. I will attend the XXX service, as agreed, and not associate with any young people.
9. I will make myself known to the pastoral staff on arrival at the 6 pm service and sit in an area under the supervision of a member of the pastoral staff team.
10. I will not seek out or engage with children or young people under the age of 18 years either individually or in groups, in the church or before or after the service, or make any contact with children or young people outside of the church.
11. I will not attend any other events at churches in the parish, including social functions, or accept invitations to homes of people with or without children, without express permission in advance.
12. I will not undertake any positions of authority or responsibility or duties of any kind in the parish, nor any work, paid or voluntary, with children under 18 years.

I understand that this agreement is designed to protect both children/young people and myself and that it is agreed by all parties for that purpose.

**Information and confidentiality**

The following people have been made aware of the contents of this agreement and will maintain confidentiality over all information relating to you.

Senior Pastoral staff:  
Parish Safe Guarding Officer:  
Diocese Safe Guarding Adviser:  
PPU:

Any special considerations or comments for individuals should be noted here:

You have a right to respect and confidentiality at all times, and sensitive information will be shared only to the extent necessary to protect you and others in CHURCH

This agreement will be reviewed at regular intervals, at every six months.

In the event of you moving to another church, we will inform the Diocese and your new senior church leader giving details of this agreement.

Thank you for indicating your agreement to the conditions above. We trust and pray you will feel at home at CHURCH and grow in your knowledge and love of God.

Agreement between:

\_\_\_\_\_

and Church leadership dated:

\_\_\_\_\_

I agree to the conditions above in respect of my pastoral care as a member of Church

Signed:

\_\_\_\_\_

Signed:

\_\_\_\_\_

(for Church)

Name:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_



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