

# Trusting the Process: The Integrated Model of Prison Engagement

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**Engaging and magnifying the voices of people in prison brings real benefits within a correctional environment. Achieving genuine and sincere engagement requires intent, motivation and commitment, as new avenues to problem solving can be realised and fulfilled. This not only brings benefits to those who live in prison but can contribute to embedded cultural change and a sense of community through the co-production of solutions. The ambition of cultural transformation involves all aspects of a prison environment, providing the resources to create safe, decent, hopeful, and optimistic spaces, for people to grow. It is the combined and integrated focus on relationships, systems and processes, management, activities, and environment, which can bring benefits to the prison community and the wider public, through its impact on reducing offending.<sup>1</sup>**

Penal Reform Solutions (PRS) worked with the Service User Involvement Team at HMPPS to provide

accessible, helpful guidance to prisons, creating a roadmap dedicated to engagement. PRS is an organisation that promotes penal reform through cultural change and works in prisons, schools, and the community, sparking social action with a dedicated focus on relationships. The PRS team comprises people with lived experience of the Criminal Justice System, as well as academics and correctional practitioners, who work collaboratively to provide consultancy, training and growth-centred work to reduce social harm and promote social good.

In 2021, PRS carried out this engagement work at HMP Hewell, as part of the Growth Project. The Growth Project is a cultural change initiative based on the key principles of growth, which were co-produced with staff and residents, following a research project in three Norwegian prisons, examining which aspects of prison practice support personal and professional growth in prison staff and residents (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Principles of Growth



1. HM Prison and Probation Service (2018). *Rehabilitative Culture Handbook: Preventing Victims by Changing Lives*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications> (Accessed: 30 May 2022)

The Growth Project is an evidence-based initiative which takes a whole-systems approach, including all members of prison community, including residents, families and staff. This article will present the work that was collaboratively created by the Growth Team following group discussions with residents and staff at HMP Hewell, in collaboration with the HMPPS Service User Involvement team in 2021. This article will introduce the evolving Integrated Model of Prison Engagement, using HMP Hewell as a case study to provide real examples of the Model in action.

### Relational Practice and Engagement

Relationships are the key to cultural change and genuine relational connection can drive positive

engagement strategies and delivery. To fully understand the theoretical framework that underpins this work, the Dynamic Model of Therapeutic Correctional Relationships will be outlined. The Dynamic Model of Therapeutic Correctional Relationships remains central to the work of PRS and this project.<sup>2</sup> This model acknowledges the continuous flow of relationships and how two people in prison (e.g. the resident and practitioner) negotiate between the desire to relate, and the desire for agency. These two people are identified here as two circles that sit on a line, which represents the degree to which two people bond.

This Model (see Figure 2) is a visual representation of how, when a bond between two people is 'close enough', a space emerges that can facilitate personal

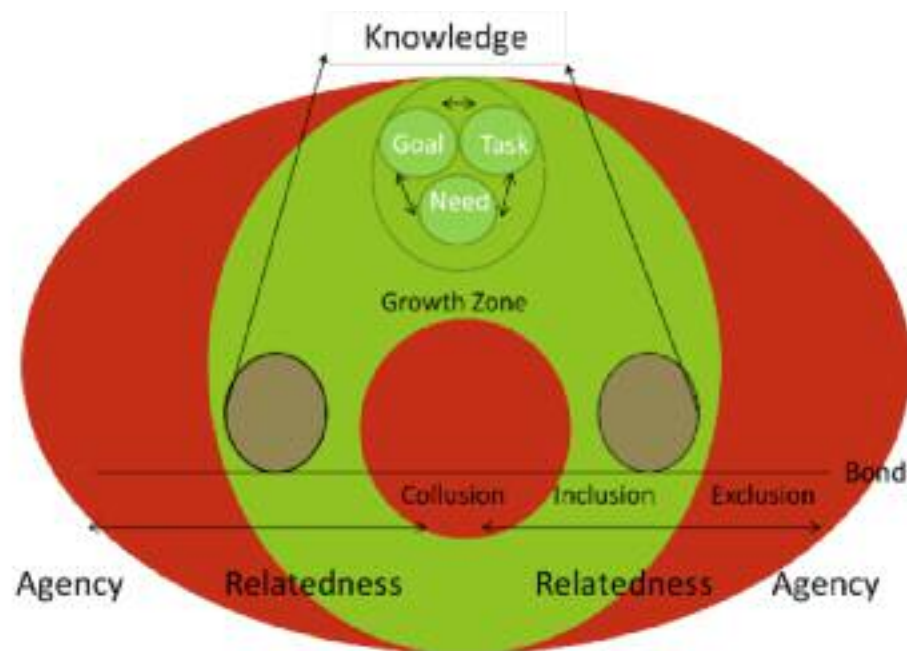


Figure 2: The Dynamic Model of Therapeutic Correctional Relationships

growth and honest conversations. To secure this relationship, there needs to be appreciation of a shared goal, the tasks required to achieve the goal and an acknowledgement of the needs of each person. This safe space is identified as a 'green' space, stated in Figure 2 as the Growth Zone. When this position is achieved, greater knowledge is realised between those that are active in the working relationship. This Model also acknowledges that a bond between a practitioner and person in prison can be 'distant-far.' In this position, exclusion is more likely, and an environment takes hold which is not conducive to positive change. Similarly, if a bond is 'distant-near', collusive relationships move the attention away from a shared goal associated with desistance and towards a goal that meets individual needs only. To achieve an inclusive and engaged

community, creating 'green' relationships rather than 'red' relationships provides the right conditions for cultural, personal and professional growth. This Model proposes that both staff and people in prison need to be in an engaged, respect-driven, mutual space for relationships to be viewed in an authentic and deep way.

### Introducing the Integrated Model of Prison Engagement

The Integrated Model for Prison Engagement will be incrementally developed within this article, to support correctional environments in building a progressive road map to support engagement. Invariably with engagement work, subcultures are

2. Lewis, S. (2019). *Therapeutic Correctional Relationships*. London: Routledge.

present in prisons due to an erosion of trust, creating a fragmented 'them and us' culture between multiple groups (e.g., residents and staff, frontline staff and management, people within departments and between departments). Engagement work focuses upon mechanisms and processes that level the playing field and create a more cohesive culture. However, a prison culture can darken the voices of all members of a prison community, leaving them silenced and inactive. This work illuminated that when staff are 'in the red', they do not have resources to embrace resident engagement, since they perceive their voice to be unheard. Actively listening to all voices enhances a sense of value, meaning and community and challenges the notion that both staff and residents are a

commodity and undeserving. In summary, it states that everyone matters and has something to offer and actively demonstrating this brings change.

This process requires openness, courage and a relentless effort to re-imagine engagement. It means involving the 'difficult' people in the same way as one might involve those who sit on councils or committees. This takes time and patience, a commitment to the process and relinquishment of power and ego, to achieve something greater than anticipated.

The process of engagement was originally established at HMP Hewell and is shown here in Figure 3. This articulates the key processes that were focused upon at HMP Hewell to use engagement and relationships as a vehicle to drive cultural change.



Figure 3: The Process of Engagement

The Model of Prison Engagement focuses on the process of change,<sup>3</sup> rather than the outcome, which will emerge in time, over the course of engagement work. It adopts a whole-systems approach, which centres around inclusion, rather than creating a divide between service users and practitioners, which typically encourages a 'them and us' culture. The prison is

represented here as a sphere, with its key elements labelled below (see Figure 4). The focus here is to consider how prison can reach its potential by fully occupying the entire space of the green sphere through deep, wide, inclusive action that grows a positive growth-centred culture.

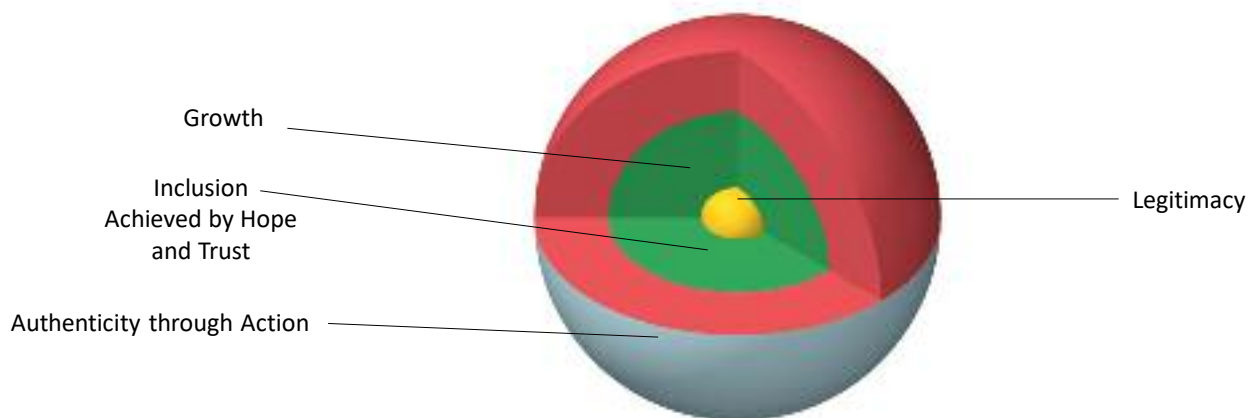


Figure 4: The Integrated Model of Prison Engagement

3. Prison Reform Trust (2019). *What do you need to make the best use of your time in prison?* Available at: [http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/PPN/What\\_do\\_you\\_need\\_to\\_make\\_best\\_use\\_of\\_your\\_time\\_in\\_prisonlo.pdf](http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/PPN/What_do_you_need_to_make_best_use_of_your_time_in_prisonlo.pdf) (Accessed: 30 May 2022).

To examine this process in greater depth, the following steps were co-created with the Growth Team at HMP Hewell.

### **Step 1: Build legitimacy**

#### ***Do people believe that engaging staff and residents in prison is the right thing to do?***

Legitimacy (Figure 5) was defined here as the degree to which staff and residents understand engagement, its importance and its benefits.



Figure 5: Legitimacy

Legitimacy is the core to any change process. It focuses on people believing that something is worthwhile and important. A healthy prison depends on the stability and acceptability of the prison environment and legitimacy of the prison regime in the eyes of the residents.<sup>4</sup> If this is absent, it is clear in the actions and plans around engagement, and all efforts will appear disingenuous and superficial, even if they are not. This can be difficult at present, as COVID has depleted the energy of those who work and live in prison. People may be increasingly willing to engage, share and speak honestly about the problems (and solutions) associated with culture, if it comes from a place of credibility. Legitimacy is not built through words, but through experiences of legitimate action:<sup>5</sup> actions that are aligned to robust values, which are culturally embedded through the walk, rather than the talk.

A high level of legitimacy is conducted through visible person-centred action, that has been actively embedded within a culture.<sup>6</sup> An establishment that has successfully embedded legitimacy tends to be positively perceived, in relation to the extent to which individuals are willingly to comply, to accept authority and to support the decisions made by prison authorities.

To build legitimacy at HMP Hewell, digital work was co-produced by the Growth Team. A digital film

was produced by PRS and residents and staff at the prison, to communicate the importance of engagement. This work created a talking point for the community and highlighted the benefits of engagement for both staff and residents, as well as the benefits for residents following release. This encouraged the community to see the bigger impact of engagement and magnifying the voice of residents (this video can be accessed here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRNiztnXd\\_k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRNiztnXd_k)). The Team also focused on small changes that had the biggest impact, and these changes were discussed with the wider community, to involve people informally. This phase focused on regular conversations that were somewhat new to the prison, to disrupt the current culture and explore new cultural options.

### **Step 2: Nurture trust consistently**

#### ***To what extent do people demonstrate their trust in others, consistently within their practice?***

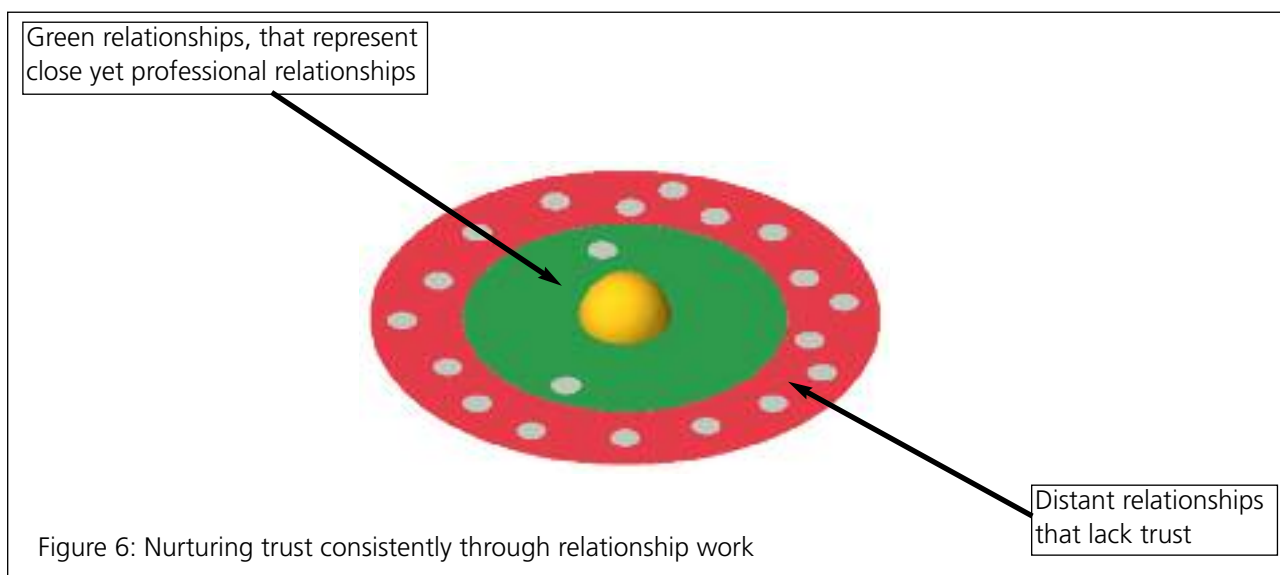
Trust was defined as the degree to which the prison community is close enough to trust one another, to develop a community together. This can be broken down to the closeness people experience within the prison community and the degree to which relationships are 'green' (positive) rather than 'red' (negative). Within this diagram (featured in Figure 6) trust is the inner green circle that connects legitimacy with a trusting environment, where people feel they have a voice.<sup>7</sup> In general, staff and residents sit in this outside space, exhibiting distant relationships, owing to feelings of burnout, pessimism, desensitisation, and stress. As mutual respect is built, they move closer towards the centre, occupying this trusting space, through a collective mission. This process focuses on the need for people to feel listened to, and therefore speak.

As noted in the Dynamic Model of Therapeutic Correctional Relationships, a shared goal is necessary to fulfil a Growth-orientated environment, with members of the community understanding the vision and what role they play within it. This space is also characterised as a safe space, which allows courageous actions to occur. For example, a security department increasing their appetite to say 'yes, let's try it' rather than 'no' or a community member (staff or resident) being given greater freedom, to drive change culturally.

4. Jackson, J., Tyler, T., Bradford, B., Dominic, T., & Shiner, M. (2010). Legitimacy and procedural justice in prisons. *Prison Service Journal*, 191, 4-10.
5. Deegan, C. (2006). Legitimacy theory. *Methodological issues in accounting research: theories, methods and issues*. (pp. 161-181). London: RMIT University.
6. Archel, P., Husillos, J., Larrinaga, C., & Spence, C. (2009). Social disclosure, legitimacy theory and the role of the state. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 22, 1284-1307
7. Dietz, G. (2004). Partnership and the development of trust in British workplaces. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 14(1), 5-24.

Trust is not only about building credible and reliable relationships, which are close enough to connect, but focuses greatly on the importance of self-orientation.<sup>8</sup> This can be defined as the extent to which people feel that they are on each other's side. It is the intent of action that is important here, which relies on the premise that actions take place for the betterment of people and not for any personal or corporate gain, or public relations exercise. Building trust requires regular conversations around relationships, gaining the solutions from the community and creating consistent actions that demonstrate trust. The aim of this process is to create a trusting relationship whereby people experience professional, yet close relationships across

the prison. The Dynamic Model of Therapeutic Correctional Relationships highlights that red and green conditions can impact on healthy and unhealthy relationships respectively. With this in mind, Step 2 aims for people to situate themselves in the green zone, which provides a safe space where they can find trust and build genuine rapport. Figure 6 shows the difference between green relationship and distant far relationships, where there is little or no trust. If relationships rupture through inaction or a disregard for an individual's voice, they enter the red zone, which can lead to setbacks and delays in the engagement process and a greater wariness in others overall.



At HMP Hewell, a collective vision was created and communicated to the whole community at the initial stages of the Growth Project. This vision was 'Growing together and taking pride in everything we do'. Three key values were reinforced, to guide those in the prison community to explore how pride was represented at the prison. These were: 'be kind, be fair and be honest'. Residents were empowered to make decisions around issues that could have a positive impact on the prison culture, for example, extending the opportunities for phone calls to families. Actions were set by members of the community rather than staff alone and digital work and training was used to reinforce the vision and the importance of relationships and engagement.

**Step 3: Generate fuel AKA hope**

**To what extent are people energised in your community and where does the energy lie?**

Hope is defined here by the degree to which staff and residents are energised, motivated and driven.

Hope is defined as a cognitive and motivational state that involves a mutual interaction between people who share the same goal.<sup>9</sup>

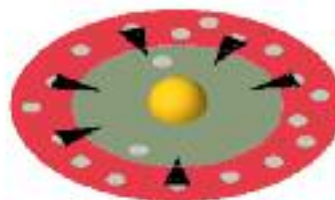


Figure 7: Generating Hope

Hope is the fuel that pushes engagement and culture forward. It is represented here as the black arrows, encouraging the movement of people into a trusting space. Hope creates energy and allows people to consider a brighter future, mobilizing them to act on ideas they have previously had, but not necessarily expressed. Hope is the optimism that expects a positive outcome or product with the belief that individuals are honest and sincere, and actions provide a sense of

8. Tyler, T. R. (1990). Why people obey the law. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.  
 9. Snyder, C. R. (2000). Hypothesis: There is hope. In C. R. Snyder (Ed), *Handbook of hope: Theory, measures and application* (pp 3-21). New York: Academic Press.

confidence, generating more hope.<sup>10</sup> Through trust, hope is developed and so trust progressively deepens in parallel with other processes to build momentum and a thirst for change.<sup>11</sup> Figure 7 highlights how by generating hope, relationships can move from the red zone into the green; generating the fuel that creates optimism to drive forward the development of new practice and work towards developing new positive climates.<sup>12</sup>

Hope was achieved at HMP Hewell through training opportunities, growth supervision for leaders and development sessions with the Growth Team (which included staff and residents). Small achievable tasks were focused upon, with a concentration on communication and celebrating change. Inclusive celebration events took place and individual relationships were built with different departments across the prison, sharing understanding, concerns and most importantly, solutions.

Generating hope requires a whole systems approach,<sup>13</sup> in which both operational and non-operational staff operate with balanced authority, compassion and respect for residents to create a clear mission, strongly encouraged by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to help achieve a cultural shift.<sup>14</sup> At HMP Hewell, there was a conscious effort to involve all departments and acknowledge the challenges they were facing and how these could support the vision of engagement. Involving staff in celebrations and acknowledging good practice brought with it a new energy and sense of belonging, which only improved the feeling that there was hope in the future.

#### **Step 4: Extend inclusion out**

##### ***Who has the loudest voice and how can this be balanced out?***

Step four can be defined as the degree to which engagement practices are inclusive, far-reaching, and equal throughout the prison community, including prisoners' families. Inclusion is seen as a universal human right and therefore the aim of inclusion is to embrace all voices and perspectives, irrespective of race, gender, disability, medical or other need.<sup>15</sup> This involves active listening and the appreciation that difference brings numerous perspectives, which only enriches the generation of cultural solutions. There was a focus on

providing equal access and opportunities to all and addressing discrimination and intolerance through educational work, to increase awareness.

Inclusion within the prison community contributes to building a sense of belonging and more meaningful relationships throughout the whole establishment. The concept of inclusion brings those within a community together, which helps to maintain sustainability in change as a collective approach is adopted. Inclusion here focuses on getting the prison community into a more trusting space (Figure 8) in order to engage everyone and draw on their experiences and knowledge.

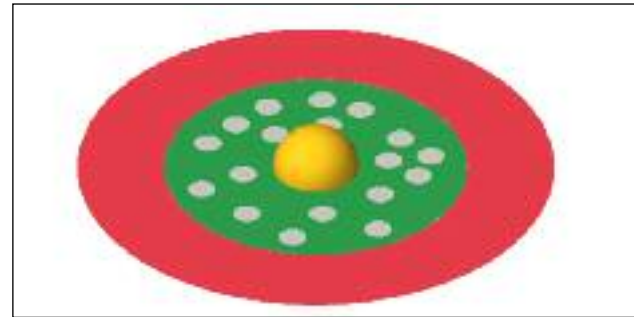


Figure 8: Inclusion

At HMP Hewell, work continues across the prison to understand different perspectives. This encourages members of the community (residents, operational staff and non-operational staff) to have their say and participate in the change process.<sup>16</sup> Growth forums are starting to take shape, whereby residents and staff work together on small achievable tasks that encourage them to attend to the levels of respect, trust, hope and meaning. Digital work continues to be produced around vulnerability, diversity and self-harm and the Growth Team actively involve those who are often neglected, gaining their feedback and collaboratively considering new solutions.

#### **Step 5: Commit to Authenticity through Action**

##### ***How deep is the level of involvement of people and how might deeper, more genuine efforts be communicated consistently?***

This step is defined as the degree to which people are genuinely involved in key stages of service design, development and delivery and the extent to which they

10. Lewis, S. (2019). May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears. The importance of reciprocal hope in prison growth. *Prison Service Journal*, 244, 17-25.
11. Fromm, E. (1968). *Revolution of Hope*. New York: Harper & Row.
12. Prison Fellowship. (2021). *Hope in Prison*. Available at: <https://prisonfellowship.org.uk/get-involved/churches/hope-in-prison-church-resources/> (Accessed: 29 May 2022)
13. Liebling, A., & Arnold, H. (2004). *Prisons and their moral performance: A study of Values, Quality and Prison life*. Clarendon Studies in Criminology. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
14. Liebling, A., Laws, B., Lieber, E., Auty, K., Schmidt, B., Schmidt, E., Crewe, B., Gardom, J., Kant, D., & Morey, M. (2019). Are Hope and Possibility Achievable in Prison? *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, 58(1), 104-126.
15. Donnelly, J. (2013). Universal human rights in theory and practice. *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice*. Cornell University Press.
16. De Leeuw, S. (2017). Medicine Inside: Prisons, participatory research, and practising with hope behind bars. *Canadian Family Physician*, 63, 146-149.

influence service design, development, and delivery. Authenticity is represented here as the depth of our engagement with people (Figure 9). If engagement is only conceptualised through 'tick-box' exercises, the knowledge gained remains shallow and of less worth, than if people can genuinely listen and act on concerns with intent. The aim here is to capture as much knowledge as possible, with depth, to bring about sustainable change and understand the evolving needs of the community.

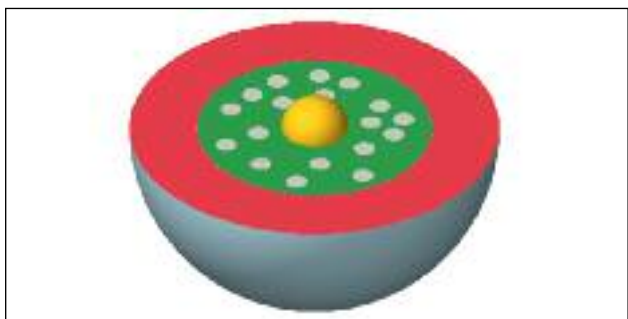


Figure 9: Commit to Authenticity

At HMP Hewell, persistence has helped the community to grow a sense of authenticity. This includes regular meetings, activities and new initiatives that have the same vision attached to them. If issues are raised, there is an increasing appetite to alter and adapt practice, leading to greater engagement and a sense that every voice counts. Focus remains on this step through regular meetings and discussions becoming increasingly reliable and actions being achieved and celebrated. Reinforcing authentic action through celebration has brought heartfelt appreciation, which reinforces the message of a shared collective effort. Challenges remain at the prison to create reliable practice as the regime opens and competing demands are at play. This is managed through patience and understanding, rather than frustration and blame, focusing efforts on the things that can change at that moment in time, rather than delaying change altogether.

### **Step 6: Activate Growth**

#### ***Are all the foundations in place to drive change and if so, what tells you this?***

This step is defined as the degree to which people are involved in their growth, the growth of the prison community and societal growth more broadly. Growth is created under specific conditions (see Principles of Growth) and having built legitimacy, trust and hope,

personal and professional growth can flourish. Growth is represented here as a new part of the model. A creation of something new, through co-creation and co-innovation. This expands knowledge and leads to deeper insights, which are bespoke to a prison community (Figure 10). Growth focuses on individual identity as well as collective identities, whereby a community can define itself by its achievements as well as the distance travelled.

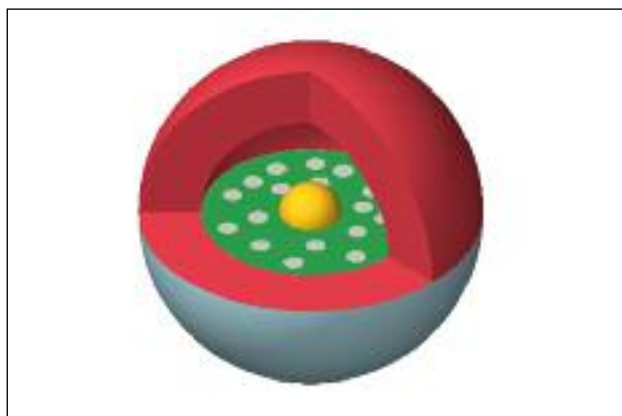


Figure 10: Creating a Growth Environment

The purpose of Growth is to allow individuals to develop on their own, as well as in a group, which will eventually benefit all by building a rehabilitative culture, to ultimately reduce social harm within prisons and the wider community.<sup>17</sup>

### **Challenges**

As a result of implementing the Model of Prison Engagement into practice, there have been numerous challenges. Culture challenges have been identified as a threat in some environments where individuals have adopted the notion 'if residents are involved, staff are less important' and this has strengthened the distant-far position and the 'them and us' culture between staff and residents. There was a perception that not all residents were deserving of involvement and working to encourage a range of voices has threatened aspects of legitimacy, due to a perceived lack of fairness. Explaining the value of voices that may initially be judged as undeserving has been essential throughout the project and more work is needed to continue to highlight the importance of all voices, rather than the select few.

Implementing prison engagement takes time and consistent effort, particularly when action is slow, as this can lead to feelings of frustration and impatience. Continuing open conversations has presented as

17. Lewis, S. (2018). Culture Club Assemble! The powerful role of multi-agent relationships in prison habitation In A. Pycroft and D. Gough (Eds). *Multi-Agency Working in Criminal Justice: Theory, Policy and Practice* (2nd Ed). Bristol: Policy Press.

challenging at times, when staff and residents are simply exhausted and frustrated due to barriers associated with finance, resources, and time. Some staff and residents remain dismissive, cynical, and negative towards the idea of change, which has highlighted the need to maintain unconditional positive regard. Acknowledging and accepting that members of the prison community are at different stages in their mindset and journey is needed, removing the temptation to exclude and resort to 'red space mentality'. In essence, returning to the premise that everyone matters needs to remain central.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of the Integrated Model of Prison Engagement was to develop a simple and straightforward approach that enables prison

communities to assess the prison environment and establish the extent to which engagement techniques can be used to develop a positive prison identity and generate a positive climate and culture. The Model focuses on the Principles of Growth, which imply there is a continuous process with no final destination, as each prison adopts a growth mindset and re-writes their own narrative, in a collaborative and inclusive approach. For this Model to achieve the objectives of being co-productive and engaging, staff and residents must share the vision and appreciate the need for a long-term investment in people, to ensure change takes root and is sustainable. A shared, collective vision, pointing a clear pathway to this vision and passion for change, will deepen engagement throughout the prison estate with the ultimate focus on the 'basics', namely relationships.