

A different approach to community working: The 3Cs initiative at HMP Guys Marsh

Based at HMP Guys Marsh, Ian Walters is the Governing Governor, Beccy Archer is the Treatment Manager and lead for the 3Cs, and Carl and Dion are two of the current 3Cs Champions. They are interviewed by Flora Fitzalan Howard, Evidence Lead in HM Prison and Probation Service and co-editor of the Prison Service Journal.

FFH: What is the 3Cs? What was the idea behind establishing this group?

BA: 3Cs stands for Culture, Change and Community. It is our process for embedding a rehabilitative culture and improving active citizenship.¹ We try to make this collaborative by having prisoner Champions who lead on this, and work alongside me and other staff to recognise themes of good practice and issues or areas where we can improve. We have had other initiatives over the years; the 3Cs takes our collaborative approach a step further.

IW: We are really driven to develop how we engage with our prisoners here. The Prison Service is rightly focused on getting its culture right, and to do this we need to actively show that we are looking for and making positive changes. We can only do this as a community, by engaging with the prisoners, our staff and our key stakeholders. By putting people's lived experience of Guys Marsh at the heart of how we work everyone is involved and it is 'done with' rather than 'done to'.

FFH: How long has the group been going? How does it operate?

BA: Since September 2021. We started by advertising and recruiting champions. I try to meet with the champions as regularly as possible, ideally weekly, and there is a monthly meeting with a particular 'theme'; the champions obtain feedback/promote information linked to this theme throughout the month and then we review and set any actions with relevant department leads at the end of the month. It is helpful for us to meet beforehand, throughout the month, so that staff can come to the meeting with answers to reduce delays. We had a difficult spate with COVID-19, which got in the way of getting some actions

completed, and the Champions being able to get around the site and speak to people. But we are hopeful that we are moving out of that now, and that Summer and Autumn will be better times for our group.

IW: It is helpful to have senior managers involved in an initiative like this, but I also believed strongly that it should not be me (as the Governing Governor) directing what was happening. Instead, it is about getting the right people for the issues involved. For example, for a given issue it could be the Head of Operations, or the CM² in visits, or colleagues from our Business Hub who are the right people to be in those discussions and doing the problem-solving. My role then is to encourage and to enable that to happen.

FFH: What attracted you to be a 3Cs Champion?

D: I have previous experience in rehabilitative culture roles such as Enabling Environments and Events Management as well as being a Listener. I think I can help people to change, and more so in this environment where there are short-term prisoners. As someone who has served 17 years in custody, I've witnessed a lot of change and gained a lot of experience. This means I can try to steer others to learn from my mistakes and lead a legal, pro-social, acceptable way of life. The 3Cs helps us do this for people in a big way; we can touch so many people. That has been really beneficial for all of us. The dream is to make a real difference, a true impact to change futures for the better.

C: I am a people person, and I like to see the best in people. The first time I was in prison, the experience was hard. No one came up to me and explained things, like general apps, or where to get your canteen. So for me to be able to speak to so many people and share

1. For more on the topic of Rehabilitative Culture see PSJ editions 235 and 244.
2. Custodial Manager.

information with them, it makes them feel better and they more able to be positive while they are in jail. It makes me feel better in myself too. The role attracted me because I like helping my fellow peers.

FFH: How is this initiative different from what was done before, or from the usual ways that forums in prisons might run?

D: I was a wing rep and a Listener in another establishment, and it was mainly wing-based. Here it isn't wing-based, it is everywhere and involves everyone. We get to speak to everyone as a whole, and get ideas from them all, and share our own ideas across a community.

BA: Historically, we have had prison councils and the like; we found they became an opportunity where every month the same people were there and often talking about the same issues, and this could be repeated the following month. We wanted to move away from this to be more action-orientated, focussing on a theme each month, focussing on what was working and what was not, and then looking at solutions.

FFH: When I attended your meeting on the theme of families many months ago, I was really struck by the amount of decision-making and planning that happened in that hour. It was not just talking about problems, it was about actively solving them and making a difference. It was so productive and constructive.

BA: That's something we want to get back to, as I feel we have drifted a little. We [the 3Cs] would meet weekly, and then feed the issues into the different departments, so those colleagues then came to the monthly meetings with solutions ready and ideas in mind, rather than hearing about the problems for the first time in the meeting and having to go away to think about actions.

IW: That is one of the unique differences between the 3Cs and perhaps more traditional councils or consultation groups. We are getting feedback all the time through our Champions, and this shapes what the topic of the next meeting is, and who specifically is invited to help work through related problems. The more traditional forums are quite hierarchical and usually involve an SO³, CM or SPO⁴ speaking to prisoners. But, by involving people who are directly

involved in the processes being discussed, even if they don't traditionally work with prisoners face-to-face, can be really effective. We got some fantastic insight when the Business Administrator from our Business Hub attended the meeting to discuss problems with complaints and apps. They may not have usually been invited to a traditional forum, but they were very happy to, and this enabled great work to be done.

Our 3Cs groups is flexible in its focus too. Before the pandemic some of the issues in focus were about everyday life at Guys Marsh; for example, in the meeting you came to Flora, one of the issues we resolved was about the men being able to keep hold of pictures their children had drawn during visits. During the pandemic, and then as life has started to return to normal, we have had to adapt to dealing with larger pressing priorities. For example, currently we are concerned with getting men into work and reinitiating the regime, after two years of operating in such a restricted way. And, as the regime began to be unlocked, we started seeing an increase in violence and bullying, so we turned our attention to better understanding that so we can try to get ahead of it.

FFH: What has been your experience so far about the way the group works, what makes it succeed and what challenges you face?

D: I have only been part of the group for a few months. Beccy is one of the reasons I

joined, because I heard great things about her, and about how she leads this; her positivity and outlook and how she brings all the staff together as one, like from Healthcare, Education etc. She contacts them and invites them to be part of the meetings and gets people involved.

C: Over the months I have been involved, Beccy has helped me through a lot. She showed me that I can overcome my own problems and help with other peoples'. She encouraged me to speak to people, to take on a leadership role (which I didn't really want to a certain extent!). It gave me a sense of responsibility where I can feel a part of something, and the group listen to me, and I get something from this personally too. It has been a good experience working with my peers; we have lost a few people over the last few weeks, but we have managed to keep it together.

During the pandemic, and then as life has started to return to normal, we have had to adapt to dealing with larger pressing priorities.

3. Senior Officer

4. Senior Probation Officer

IW: We have also worked hard to help staff (especially our middle and senior leaders) to understand what the 3Cs is trying to achieve by connecting national and local priorities 'the what' with our 'big 6' pillars⁵ that represent 'the how' focussing our work at Guys Marsh to achieve those priorities. Making it clear to all how the 3Cs supports so much of our work has helped people to see its value and buy into it.

FFH: COVID-19 must have been really difficult for the group. Were you able to meet at all? How did you manage to operate?

BA: We did a couple of meetings by telephone conference, where the guys would dial in from their in-cell phones, so we could keep that going. But for the men to access their peers, and getting actions done, when people needed to prioritise things related to the pandemic, although understandable, was a problem for us. We kept it going as much as possible but also were able to be realistic and reflect on what was possible in that moment; focusing more on what we could do than what we couldn't.

IW: In-cell telephony was a good means of keeping in touch with the Champions. However, this meant Beccy needed to repeat conversations many times, rather than coming together to collectively discuss issues. This made streamlined and effective working much more difficult.

FFH: What have been some of the 3Cs successes? What are you really proud of?

C: We raised £320 for Ukraine. We went round to the men, making them aware of the war, and how we could help, and then had forms ready to take money from their accounts (not me personally, obviously!) and give it to a good cause.

Also, lots of the men know more about the 3Cs now than they used to. It's been word of mouth, and we go to the units often. I am a positive person, and I know a lot of the people here. When people see a little change, or you talk about what can be done, people gravitate to you and ask questions, and I can then help. People see that help and they see results from the 3Cs. I'm not saying everything gets done in the 3Cs; but some things we do get results from and people see

that. And a lot of the men feel more comfortable speaking to and feeding information to [the Champions], and trust that we will pass this on during meetings, and try to make the situation better.

BA: The filtering process that the Champions do really helps. They can highlight where the same things or issues or messages are coming up, including across different units, and so in the meeting it helps us to streamline and prioritise issues to focus on.

IW: Since the 3Cs began we have started producing a newsletter that keeps people better informed of what the group have been doing. Some other examples of activities done since its inception include a really worthwhile survey of our residents to understand how procedurally just a whole host of

processes feel to them (such as use of force, the incentives scheme, the DIRF process⁶). The 3Cs group helped to write our rehabilitative culture strategy this year too, which we had not done as collaboratively before. And more recently there has been work done with staff and prisoners across Guys Marsh to explore why people might bully others and what this behaviour looks like, which then fed into our strategy to tackle bullying, debt, drugs and violence. Over time the 3Cs has worked on issues or topics that range from improving insight into issues, addressing long standing issues that affect all of the community,

shape policies and processes, and tweak and refine 'business as usual' type work.

FFH: Has there been anything, since the formation of the 3Cs, that has not worked so well, or you felt you needed to change direction?

BA: There have been lots of teething issues, and some are ongoing. I think this will always be a working in progress. As your population changes, as your staffing group changes, Governors change and so on, it will always be something that develops. At the beginning we didn't have a theme each month like we do now. We started with focussing on the seven pillars of rehabilitative culture, but we found that was too broad and difficult to narrow down to actions we could take. So, we switched to areas or themes, some of which have included equalities, Business Hub, and families. This has made more sense to people and has

We kept it going as much as possible but also were able to be realistic and reflect on what was possible in that moment; focusing more on what we could do than what we couldn't.

5. Leadership; Rehabilitative Culture; Procedural Justice; Decency; Diversity & Inclusion; Our Team.

6. The process for reporting discrimination (DIRF: Discrimination Incident Report Form).

worked better. We are now thinking about the structure of our Champions too. Initially we had someone from every unit, but that can be difficult to keep people working together as it is a big group, so instead we are questioning if we are better off having a smaller group of Champions who work more collaboratively together, rather than people working individually on their individual units. It is trial and error, and an adaptive, flexible and fluid approach.

IW: We had a clear understanding of what we were trying to achieve from the start, and that the 3Cs was not to be a traditional prison council or forum for the day-to-day issues that are covered in other meetings. But we realised quickly that the rehabilitative culture pillars were too theoretical and abstract as we were not identifying tangible ideas for action that could make a difference. When we started being more concrete but simpler in our focus it became easier for staff and prisoners to work together to decide what changes would help.

FFH: How have staff responded to the 3Cs group? Do they see the value in it like the residents do?

D: For sure. Yes, they have bought in. The SO here earlier, I invited him to come yesterday. The staff come to meetings, they are on board, and they like it. I ask them questions too, about what they want to be different on the wing. And they are honest with me which is good. Advertisement and good communication within the prison is key; the more we promote this work and their input, the more people will come to be invested in us as 3Cs. We have good attendance from Governors which shows that the SMT are invested in what we are trying to achieve.

C: When we first started, staff possibly didn't understand what the group was or take it seriously. But now, when [Champions] go on the units they recognise who we are. Sometimes they say to other prisoners that they should speak to us as well, knowing that we know what's going on.

BA: We have started thinking recently about having staff 3Cs Champions to represent their groups too. These people can be another voice for the 3Cs group, offer support to each other, and be a resource for the men in addition to me. There is work to be done getting more people on board. There is always a fear

with prison initiatives that it will create more work. What we have really tried to communicate is that this is not about creating more work, but instead making the work that is already being done easier and more enjoyable, and contributing to a better and more rehabilitative culture.

IW: We have needed to break down some barriers in how we work, to enable the Champions to do their work effectively. For example, making sure they have the freedom to access different units which isn't what always happens in traditional operations of a prison. We need to do more to engage staff with the 3Cs, but we recognise that in the last couple of years people have been consumed by COVID-19. But the fact that more staff are coming to the meetings is telling, and that experience can be positive and eye-opening for them.

FFH: Who is the ideal 3Cs Champion? What kind of person makes this work?

C: I think to be a 3Cs Champion you need to have some dedication to what you do, be a people person as you have to speak to lots of people, obviously you have to be of good behaviour, have knowledge of what is going on in the prison, have a bit of confidence, and you need to be a good listener. You need to be able to understand what people mean, especially when they might not find it easy

to communicate that.

D: I think also people who conduct themselves in the best way, who are inspiring and role models for our peers. People who are well respected by staff and prisoners alike; charismatic, dedicated, motivated and trustworthy, wanting the best for our community.

IW: Often in prisons the representative roles are given to the same people; the people who are better behaved, are probably on Enhanced,⁷ and already have better relationships with staff. We want the 3Cs to be an opportunity too for those who do not necessarily fit that mould. It is really important to us that everyone has the chance to contribute, including those who might usually feel overlooked. We have had some success and struggles with this; for example, we had a Champion who was excellent but then lost his position due to challenges with substance misuse. We are not giving up though, and want him to re-join the group when he can.

Advertisement and
good
communication
within the prison is
key; the more we
promote this work
and their input, the
more people will
come to be invested
in us as 3Cs.

7. The highest level of the Incentives Scheme.

FFH: Looking to the future, I understand you are going to be focussing on health, wellbeing and decency next. What are the other priorities or themes you have in mind to tackle?

BA: In July we are going to focus on resettlement and we are organising a fair on this; quite a lot of our population have quite short sentences so there are often a lot of questions about resettlement. In September we are going to take time to review ourselves. We want to evaluate what has worked and what has not, get feedback through forums, and then think about how the 3Cs wants to adapt and go forward.

D: Mental health is a big issue that we need to look at too.

C: And OMU;⁸ everyone in our community wants to have more engagement with OMU.

IW: As mentioned before, getting us all back into a different regime, getting used to working in larger groups, and the prisoners going back to work, is a priority for us. One of the things I am keen the 3Cs helps with in the next few months is understanding the blockers to achieving this, and how we get past those.

FFH: What advice would you give to another prison who were thinking about setting up a similar group to the 3Cs?

BA: If I could go back, I would have done more consultation with staff and the men about what they wanted initially, as I think this would have helped us manage some of the teething issues we had. More consultation about where the gaps were, and what people really wanted, could have made it more streamlined from the beginning.

C: Try to get the community involved in what is going on. The more people have a say, the more they feel they are involved, and that they are doing something. I try to encourage people to participate as it helps get you through your sentence a bit easier. My job is to make people realise they can do it. Once you start sharing your experience, it opens people up to realise they can do it too, and it encourages people. A while ago I didn't think I could do something like this, but now I know that I can, and it has boosted my confidence.

IW: Don't be afraid to be agile, or to fail; just fail fast and get on with it! My prior experience in project management work has helped me to feel comfortable with the fact that some things we try might fail, but that's ok and we learn from this. You will get some small wins, and some big wins, and also some failures, but that's not something to be afraid of. In the Prison Service we tend to have a pattern of working: we pilot something in a couple of prisons, and then roll the initiative out everywhere and mark that as an achievement. But the landscape has changed, especially after COVID-19, and is changing rapidly with competing priorities being faced too. So, I think not being afraid to try new things, and to change focus and direction when needed; something might have been important two months ago, but now something else needs more attention, so switch and focus on that. And also, I'd advise others to break from the hierarchical traditional approach to consultation, by including people from all parts of the establishment; it might surprise you to see how willing people really are to get involved and make things better.

8. Offender Management Unit