

'Feeling Safe in an Unsafe Place'

Improving well-being through the use of Trauma-Informed spaces

Scarlett Thomas was a Prison Officer at HMP Liverpool and is now an ambassador of the Unlocked Graduates Programme.

Previous research has reliably shown that rates of mental health issues amongst prisoners are significantly higher than for those in the general population¹. There is also wealth of data demonstrating that prisons are not synonymous with safety. In the 12 months to December 2022, there was a 21 per cent increase in serious assault incidents, and the number of self-harm incidents has increased by 5 per cent in the 12 months to September 2022. Many of these figures represent individuals with pre-existing trauma, for example, 24 per cent of adult prisoners are care leavers, and 41 per cent observed violence in their homes growing up². Similarly, prison staff can also be victims of trauma, with research illustrating how officers can experience poor mental health and vicarious trauma as a result of events witnessed in prison^{3,4}. This project aimed to create well-being by building a Trauma-Informed Care Practice (TICP) safe space in a Category B local jail. The report demonstrates through literature and studies how re-traumatisation for staff and prisoners is not a rarity in the prison estate and therefore, it is important to create an environment that does not inadvertently remind individuals of their trauma⁵ but rather understands that people are a product of their environment⁶. Therefore, using the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership⁷ the researcher and volunteers created two TICP spaces conducive to TICP design. The two spaces were built successfully and have produced a myriad of

positive outcomes for staff and prisoner well-being that will be outlined throughout this report.

Reflections from my own practice

I'm on day eight of a long stretch. I feel physically sick as I pull up into the car park. I walk along the wall, by the time I get to the prison gates I've already been heckled by the public, shouting 'you rat'. I attempt to brush it off, but I can feel anger building inside me, thinking 'what a thankless job this'. Before I have time to overthink this, I'm back to the landings. An arena of sounds, the clashing of gates, the banging of cell doors, observation panels being smashed, and the incongruously casual shout for exercise amid the chaos. I feel myself becoming more institutionalised as the days go on. The sight of self-harm has no shock factor anymore, the word 'slag' is just a follow-up to 'miss' when I say the word 'no', and for a girl who had never been in a fight, violence seems to have found comfort in the rhythm of my every day. I remember the words of a prisoner 'it's just an Amazon factory for humans here, we're a part of it and so are you'. I remind myself that prisons are there to keep the public safe, but I couldn't help feeling complicit in a system that didn't match my moral code. Locking vulnerable and mentally ill men away into a concrete box whilst saying 'mental health staff are busy today, but they said put an app in on the kiosk'. I asked my staff 'are you okay?' knowing that the answer 'I'm fine' was just how we've taught ourselves to reply to cope with the fact that things really

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2. Halliday, M., & Hewson, A. (2022). *Bromley briefings prison factfile: Winter 2022*.
3. Kinman, G., Clements, A. J., & Hart, J. (2017). Job demands, resources and mental health in UK prison officers. *Occupational Medicine*, 67(6), 456-460.
4. Woodfield, R., Boduszek, D., & Willmott, D. (2022). Latent profiles of PTSD, anxiety and depression and association with trauma exposure within prison personnel. *European Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*, 6(3), 100268.
5. Menschner, C., & Maul, A. (2016). *Key ingredients for successful trauma-informed care implementation*. Trenton: Centre for Health Care Strategies, Incorporated.
6. Choitz, V., & Wagner, S. (2021). *A trauma-informed approach to workforce: An introductory guide for employers and workforce development organizations*.
7. Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2010). *The five practices of exemplary leadership* (Vol. 237). John Wiley & Sons.

aren't fine. I was edging towards the end of the day when I had to deliver the news to one of the men that his father had passed away. Deliver this news where? Outside of his cell? In the tiny room at the end of the landing surrounded by windows so that everyone could witness the distress pending? I walked this broken man back into his cell, locked the door, and locked his emotions within the 5.5m² cell and allowed him to grieve. Delivering the news of death or even hearing of death always hits my emotions hard. Despite it being over 4 years ago, a part of my consciousness remains trapped in 2018, the year that cancer knocked on our door and took my nana Jean away. I just wanted somewhere to go to feel calm and be kind to myself. It was then that I told myself that no prisoner or staff member will be left vulnerable to their emotions on the landings. I don't know how to fix them, but I know how to help. I decided that I was going to create a place of safety in this unsafe place for staff and prisoners to go when they need it most.

Literature Review

Trauma experienced by individuals in prisons

Prisons hold a well-established place in the public dialogue, but how we describe them does not always roll off the tongue so easily. The media can sensationalise it, academics study it, but only housed within it — prisoners and staff — can accurately depict it. Levenson and Willis describe every stage of the prison experience as traumatic, as the events that encompass a prison sentence from arrest, awaiting trial, and having a paucity of autonomy can erect feelings of fear and helplessness⁸. A general health questionnaire distributed across 12 prisons found that levels of distress were high, with prisoners on induction wings

and those who are un-sentenced experiencing the most distress⁹. This is mirrored by statistical research in the UK which highlights that more than one in five self-inflicted deaths in the last five years occurred in the first 30 days of arrival in prison and almost half of these deaths were in the first week¹⁰. Additionally, studies surrounding Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) illustrate how adults who are exposed to four or more ACEs, were eleven times more likely to have been incarcerated at some point in their lifetime¹¹. These studies demonstrate that prisons are not only creating trauma, but they are a catalyst for previous trauma to re-emerge.

Trauma experienced by prison officers

There is an abundance of literature highlighting how prison officers can experience trauma too. As a result, the myriad of negative emotions that house themselves within the prison walls can begin to house themselves within the officer too. Research conducted with French correctional employees describes how officers work in an environment in which they are regularly exposed to extreme distress and potentially traumatic events such as suicide, self-harm, and violence¹². Working in an environment that poses such a

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risk can have serious effects on staff well-being and create feelings of fear and uncertainty. A side effect of such high levels of stress is that many officers experience emotional exhaustion and burnout¹³. Many also experience compassion fatigue, resulting in staff becoming disengaged emotionally from prisoners and describing themselves as being emotionally detached¹⁴. Such coping strategies can be perceived as a reaction to the vicarious trauma that is experienced daily by staff and is understood as 'managing their crisis'¹⁵.

8. Levenson, J. S., & Willis, G. M. (2019). Implementing trauma-informed care in correctional treatment and supervision. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 28(4), 481-501.
9. Liebling, A. and Ludlow, A. (2016) 'Suicide, distress and the quality of prison life', in: Y. Jewkes, J. Bennett and B. Crewe (Eds.), *Handbook on Prisons*, Abingdon: Routledge
10. Ministry of Justice. (2021). Safety in custody statistics. Quarterly update to September 2020. England and Wales.
11. Bellis, M. A., Hughes, K., Leckenby, N., Hardcastle, K. A., Perkins, C., & Lowey, H. (2015). Measuring mortality and the burden of adult disease associated with adverse childhood experiences in England: a national survey. *Journal of public health*, 37(3), 445-454.
12. Boudoukha, A. H., Altintas, E., Rusinek, S., Fantini-Hauwel, C., & Hautekeete, M. (2013). Inmates-to-staff assaults, PTSD and burnout: Profiles of risk and vulnerability. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 28(11), 2332-2350.
13. Kinman, G., Clements, A. J., & Hart, J. (2016). Work-related wellbeing in UK prison officers: A benchmarking approach. *International Journal of Workplace Health Management*, 9(3), 290-307.
14. Arnold, H. (2017). The psychological and emotional effects of prison on prison staff. In *The Routledge International Handbook of Forensic Psychology in Secure Settings* (pp. 283-299). Routledge.
15. Miller, N. A., & Najavits, L. M. (2012). Creating trauma-informed correctional care: A balance of goals and environment. *European journal of psychotraumatology*, 3(1), 17246.

Unfortunately, in an us vs them environment, this adds a layer of well-documented tension between care and control, whereby officers through vicarious trauma, lean towards control as a protective tool. In addition, as an officer's well-being and professionalism can improve relationships with prisoners, the negative emotional effects officers are experiencing neglect the possibility of new relationships being formed.¹⁶ Additionally, research has highlighted how if TICP is introduced into prisons, it would be prison officers who would play a major role in minimising triggers¹⁷. In this scenario, staff and prisoner relationships are the day-to-day fabric of both trauma recovery and of re-traumatisation. For example, since 2015, across the women's estate, prison officers are a part of the Becoming Trauma Informed (BTI) initiative which seeks to embed trauma-informed practice in prisons through staff training and the delivery of trauma-informed interventions. This highlights the vital role prison officers have in assisting prisoners with trauma and rehabilitation, as well as prioritising their own well-being.

Prison Environment: How space can induce trauma

As officers and prisoners must inhabit the same environment, it is possible that shared experiences will foster a form of community cohesion which is not conducive with TICP. This harsh emotional environment mirrors the punitive physical environment. Prisons are, by design, disempowering places where rules are rigidly and unilaterally applied by authority figures. Previous research describes how the oppressive architecture of prisons can induce trauma, as trauma theorists demonstrate how trauma lingers in the body and can be triggered by what survivors see, hear, feel and smell^{18,19}. Consequently, prisons are not an appropriate environment for programs such as the Healing Trauma intervention to occur, as a distressing space may act in juxtaposition to its goal of elevating trauma. Therefore, further efforts must be made to create a TICP physical space. Losing one's liberty is

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considered the ultimate punishment, therefore, by creating an infrastructure that punishes further is not aligned with a rehabilitative thought process. Additionally, it is suggested that environments can act as a catalyst in re-offending whilst in prison. Therefore, if prisons are kept to a low standard, for example, with cell windows smashed, the way one behaves may be influenced by this. Deprivation theorists agree with this, stating that if individuals are subjected to a restrictive environment, they adapt to their new surroundings by satisfying their needs using maladaptive behaviour. From this, many environmental psychologists and scholars call for further research into the links between prison architecture and prison misconduct²⁰.

Prison buildings cannot on their own turn people's lives around but by using the latest building techniques and improving the way people use the interior and exterior spaces, they can support wider culture change.²¹

Seeing as there seems to be a correlation between the built environment and people's wellbeing, it seems as though the prison system has misunderstood what creates a positive environment for staff and prisoners. One study explored the effects of the physical environment associated with confinement, such as metal staircases, bleak colours, and bars on windows — all of which can be sobering reminders of one's imprisonment and the accompanying lack of liberty. However, in contrast to this, the TICP model can reduce the institutionalised atmosphere in prisons, lessen stress, aggression, and violence, and generally increase prisoners' and staff wellbeing²².

Approach Taken and Outcome

The available literature clearly indicated that there is a need for the prison environment to be more aligned with TICP. This was supported by consultations

16. Liebling, A., Price, D., & Shefer, G. (2010). *The prison officer*. Routledge.
17. Vaswani, N., & Paul, S. (2019). 'It's Knowing the Right Things to Say and Do': Challenges and Opportunities for Trauma informed Practice in the Prison Context. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, 58(4), 513-534.
18. Petrillo, M. (2021). 'We've all got a big story': Experiences of a Trauma Informed Intervention in Prison. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, 60(2), 232-250.
19. Van der Kolk, B. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Mind, brain and body in the transformation of trauma*. penguin UK.
20. Lahm, K. F. (2008). Inmate-on-inmate assault: A multilevel examination of prison violence. *Criminal justice and behavior*, 35(1), 120-137.
21. Karthaus, R., Block, L., & Hu, A. (2019). Redesigning prison: The architecture and ethics of rehabilitation. *The Journal of Architecture*, 24(2), 193-222.
22. Jewkes, Y., Jordan, M., Wright, S., & Bendelow, G. (2019). Designing 'healthy' prisons for women: Incorporating trauma-informed care and practice (TICP) into prison planning and design. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16(20), 3818.

conducted at HMP Liverpool, which was undertaken in order to determine whether this opinion was shared by prisoners, officers, governors, and other agencies working within the prison. The overarching aim of this project was to create safe spaces on the induction wing at HMP Liverpool that were designed and influenced by TICP, so that staff and prisoners could go to an environment that would reduce feelings of stress and anxiety as well as acting as place that, unlike jail, would not induce trauma. Two TCIP spaces were created and designed after a successful application for funding from Unlocked Graduates. The staffroom is in full use and available for all staff thanks to the help of staff and prisoner volunteers. The prisoner/staff well-being space has been fully renovated and designed; it is currently in use for those in crisis. In the six months following creating these spaces, all staff members working on the wing have utilised the rooms, as well as over 70 prisoners for ACCT assessments, multi-disciplinary

meetings, key work sessions, and talking to those in crisis.

As can be seen in figures 1-4 below, particular attention was paid to spatial layout and visual interest, without sensory overload. Both rooms create physical safety by having no obstacles surrounding the entrance to and from the door with few barriers so that individuals inside the room are not crowded by objects. The choice of limited furniture for this space, as well as the use of colours that contrasted with the wing, sought to alleviate any negative emotions associated with trauma so that individuals occupying this space feel safe. Furthermore, although the rooms meet the criteria for a TICP space, it is important that individuals using the room feel as though the values and behaviours practiced in the space adhere to TICP principles too. For example, both spaces aim to create a sense of normality and diminish any feelings of institutionalisation.

Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4: Pictures of the spaces created using TICP principles



Discussion

This discussion will outline the progress of the TICP projects so far, examining how their results compare to existing literature surrounding TICP in prisons, as well as explaining any positive findings. Current and possible limitations of producing this project will be outlined and

complimented with further recommendations for HMP Liverpool, and His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) as a whole. As this project is a pilot study for further TICP spaces to be created across prisons, it will focus solely on the experiences the researcher had in creating this space. It also seeks to describe the future vision of this project, on a larger

scale that is still aligned with TICP. The spaces successfully challenge the cultural punitive stereotypes through design, as many TICP themes have emerged since the creation of the spaces, such as staff members on the wing discussing how the room encourages feelings of safety and comfort, whilst also feeling valued and respected²³. It is accepted that soft furnishings such as couches and rugs create a sense of well-being and erect feelings of relaxation. This supports the goal of the space having a homely feel to it, as many staff members will spend more time in a working week in the prison than at home, and for prisoners, it creates a sense of normality whilst they are away from home.

This project recognises the important correlation between environment and well-being. Additionally, it acknowledges comments made by the HMPPS Evidence-Based Practice Team that the *'quality of the immediate prison environment has both immediate and longer-term consequences for safety and wellbeing'*. Additionally, the Prison Service Instruction (PSI)'s guidance on Early days in custody - reception in, first night in custody, and induction to custody (PSI 07/2015) was also considered upon the creation of this space, as it highlights how the first nights in custody is 'one of the most stressful times for prisoners' whereby 'many self-inflicted deaths and self-harm incidents occur within the first 24 hours, the first week and the first month'. The PSI recommends that extra emphasis placed on tackling safer custody issues during the first 24 hours and beyond is likely to produce most benefit in this early period. This project aimed to adhere to this and even offer further support by ensuring that individuals who do find themselves in crisis, can be helped in a space that mirrors TICP.

Stories shared by staff and prisoners highlight that the room has been successful in its aim of promoting trauma-informed care. For instance, staff and prisoners will have a cup of tea and talk when informed by safer custody or the chaplaincy that a prisoner is in crisis or in receipt of bad news. The clean and comfortable environment allows successful morning and afternoon briefings, in addition to a place to have lunch and

generate good conversations for staff. Feelings of well-being have also been promoted and encouraged, as on notice boards staff advertise well-being events, and signpost each other to relevant agencies for help, such as Mental Health Allies. Such outcomes mirror previous research which found that environmental improvements provide a better work environment for staff as well as reduce staff stress^{24,25}. Prison Officers are a part of the 'forgotten service' and receive little recognition for all their hard work. It is hoped through creating a space for the staff they would feel valued for working in an emotionally demanding job.

Outside agencies utilising the space on the wing for group sessions have been successful, for example, drug charity Change Grow Live (CGL) hosts weekly meetings in this space. As therapeutic environments aid recovery, it is just not feasible to expect individuals to

become healthy in an unhealthy environment. The consistency of a safe space has been commented on by staff and prisoners involved, as well as them feeling removed from the noisiness of the wing with the opportunity of having private conversations without fear of judgment. Additionally, it is advocated that all the communities using this space adopt 'universal precautions'

when working with prisoners²⁶. Universal precautions encourage professionals to assume a trauma history is present with all individuals we interact with and interact with them in a trauma-informed manner. This is now the case at HMP Liverpool, as all prisoners can access the TICP space, they do not need to acquire any special privileges such as being enhanced or explain their trauma to staff. All that is required is for the space is treated with respect so other individuals can continue to make use of it. This was paramount to the project, as research highlights how sometimes, an individual is not even aware that [they] have been experiencing trauma until weeks, months, or even years have passed.

Limitations

An obvious limitation of this project is that the two rooms have only recently been developed and therefore, due to the short nature of their existence,

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23. Vaswani, N., & Paul, S. (2019). 'It's Knowing the Right Things to Say and Do': Challenges and Opportunities for Trauma informed Practice in the Prison Context. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, 58(4), 513-534.
 24. Breaugh, J. (2021). Too stressed to be engaged? The role of basic needs satisfaction in understanding work stress and public sector engagement. *Public personnel management*, 50(1), 84-108.
 25. Ricciardelli, R., & Power, N. G. (2020). How "conditions of confinement" impact "conditions of employment": The work-related well-being of provincial correctional officers in Atlantic Canada. *Violence and victims*, 35(1), 88-107.
 26. Racine, N., Killam, T., & Madigan, S. (2020). Trauma-informed care as a universal precaution: beyond the adverse childhood experiences questionnaire. *JAMA pediatrics*, 174(1), 5-6.

robust data has not yet been collected and the impact of the rooms has not been evaluated. However, as mentioned previously, this project seeks to be a pilot for further TICP spaces across HMPPS. In these spaces, across a larger time frame, both qualitative and quantitative data can be collected. It is hoped from this, that staff will be able to mirror the Healing Trauma workshops being performed across the female estate and act as BTI lead to help individuals with trauma in a purpose-built TICP space. However, Covid-19 has created limitations on such activities, as they have been unable to be implemented, or delayed. For instance, prisoners suggested practicing well-being through yoga and guided meditation in this space. This would present the opportunity to measure well-being, as improved emotional regulation can decrease violence, in addition to enhancing positive emotions such as relaxation. Literature suggests that practicing mindfulness in prisons has a myriad of advantages, such as more effective cognitive control and emotional regulation²⁷.

The researcher's lack of previous experience and knowledge of how to create a trauma-informed space in a prison created further challenges, as did the lack of existing TICP spaces for prisoners at HMP Liverpool. Although literature exists on TICP in jails, a huge gap exists surrounding TICP environments in male prisons due to the disparity in how much attention is given to differences in gender²⁸. However, given the fact many researchers highlight how 'trauma is gendered'²⁹ and thus must be approached as such, more research on male estates would have been advantageous to this study.

Recommendations

Through the development and creation of the TICP spaces at HMP Liverpool, a set of recommendations have been produced aimed more broadly to HMPPS. It is hoped such recommendations can be acknowledged and, if applied successfully, help create a TICP culture more widely within HMPPS.

1. This research suggests that the Prison Service Instruction (PSI) Early days in custody - reception in, first night in custody, and induction to custody (PSI 07/2015) should be amended to incorporate a focus on TICP. The PSI is successful in highlighting the importance of prisoners' welfare upon arrival into prison, and in demonstrating the vulnerability of prisoners in

their early days of custody. However, it is recommended that the PSI acknowledges that entering prison in itself is a traumatic/re-traumatising experience. Therefore, HMPPS should ensure that spaces such as reception and the induction wing not only meet 'decency standards' (PSI 17/2012') but be trauma-informed through design.

2. Additionally, if it is agreed that all staff should be trained in Becoming Trauma-Informed. It is recommended that all Custodial Managers and Governors are trained in TICP so that staff in their care feel comfortable approaching them with any queries. Therefore, prisons should aim to establish environments whereby the values of TICP are mirrored through built design.
3. Future research should monitor the success of TICP spaces and potential other spaces that will be created by firstly monitoring the popularity of the space, and secondly, examining important data that emerges from the presence of the space. For example, it is recommended that data such as the number of ACCTs present on the wing be monitored prior to the space being opened, this would offer an indication of whether the spaces has helped improve prisoners' well-being. Additionally, metrics such as analysing the number of Control and Restraints used on prisoners could be analysed, if decreased, this could give an indication that staff and prisoner relationships have improved as well as less violence on the wing.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the aim of this project was to produce a space that was sympathetic to TICP and provide the male estate with an opportunity to produce eventual evidence that demonstrates that TICP is beneficial to this population. In addition, the researcher produced the project based on their own experiences as a prison officer and hoped that this project would benefit colleagues who experience any form of trauma or stress as a side effect of the job. The project always kept leadership and TICP at the centre, whilst embodying resilience and reflection throughout. It is hoped that a future direction of this project will be that every prison has an environment where one can feel safe in an otherwise unsafe place.

27. Auty, K. M. (2019). The benefits of mindfulness-based interventions in the criminal justice system: A review of the evidence. *The Routledge Companion to Rehabilitative Work in Criminal Justice*, 453-467.

28. Vaswani, N., & Paul, S. (2019). 'It's Knowing the Right Things to Say and Do': Challenges and Opportunities for Trauma informed Practice in the Prison Context. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, 58(4), 513-534.

29. Malik, N., Facer-Irwin, E., Dickson, H., Bird, A., & MacManus, D. (2021). The effectiveness of trauma-focused interventions in prison settings: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 15248380211043890.