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Editorial

Transitions into, within, and out of imprisonment

Dr Ruth Parkes *is a Senior Lecturer in Social Work,* ***Dr Laura Kelly-Corless*** *is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology and* ***Dr Abigail Stark*** *is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Lancashire.*

This special edition of the Prison Service Journal brings together contributions exploring the concept of transitions into, within, and out of prison. While there is a vast body of research on the experience of spending time in various prison environments, many individuals will move between different prison locations or institutions during the course of their sentence. The vast majority also experience movement into the community to probation supervision and potentially Approved Premises (AP) at some point — a transition that is crucial to the rehabilitative priorities of HMPPS and poses particular challenges for certain groups of prisoners. Additionally, even during time spent in one institution, individuals may experience important transitions in personal identity or role.

The articles in this special issue draw on research from academics, people working within the prison system, and those with lived experience to explore a range of transitions. These contributions consider not only what these transitions look like from a policy perspective, but what they feel like in lived experience. Issues covered include movement between or from different prison environments, change or transition in identities and roles within prison, the challenges of transition from prison to community for particular groups, and interventions for supporting key transitions. The ideas behind these papers were initially presented at a conference hosted by the University of Lancashire's Centre for Criminal Justice Research and Partnerships and funded by the British Society of Criminology Prison Research Network. The success of the conference and resulting discussions demonstrated a need for greater focus on this aspect of the lived realities of people in prison.

This special edition opens with an important article from **Daria Przybylska**, which looks at women's experiences of open prisons in England and Wales, and examines transitions into and through these environments. The article explores the impact of population pressures on the social dynamics and resettlement function of two open establishments, situating discussion within the context of the recent and ongoing government early release strategy. Daria argues that population pressures have led to a dilution of open prisons' resettlement function.

Alex Fishwick's article explores transitions from mainstream prison wings to Substance Use Disorder Therapeutic Communities in England and Wales, using sensory and liminal lenses to do so. Drawing on a combination of personal reflections and literature, the article explores how this transition is more than a physical movement between spaces - it is also a point of potentially significant identity transition, impacted by the sensory codes of prison culture and post-detoxification.

Focusing on individual transitions while within a prison environment, **Abigail Stark** explores how a sense of meaningful citizenship can be subject to transition during time in prison. Taking influence from youth studies literature, and drawing on research with men imprisoned in England and Ireland, the article considers how citizenship identification might fluctuate during imprisonment, maintain continuity with former experiences, or indeed change meaning while inside.

Laura Kelly-Corless and **Dan McCulloch** explore the transition from being a prison officer to being imprisoned, something which has attracted extensive media coverage, but about which little is known academically. They focus on the case of Ashley—a deaf individual who experienced prison from both positions. Throughout, they show how Ashley's deafness and their previous role as a prison officer shaped their time in custody, and how moving between these roles offered insight into the parallels and differences between them.

Jennifer Stickney, **Emma Holmes** and **Chris Gunderson** detail the background, development and early testing of the HMPPS Settlement Model in two remand prisons. The article explores the potential value of the model, which is focused on structured keywork and personalised regime plans for supporting people at key points of transition in their sentence. Particular attention is given to how the model can support safe settlement into custody, and contribute to work satisfaction for those involved in keywork.

Darren Woodward's accessible article foregrounds the experiences of men convicted of sexual offences as they navigate life in and out of probation service APs. The paper explores the stigma and associated risks of living alongside those convicted of

non-sexual offences, highlighting the loss of identity they experience outside of the 'sex offender' label. The article offers a note of hope, showing how the men celebrate small but concerted efforts to rebuild a meaningful life as they reintegrate into the community.

Finally, **Kirsty Teague**, **Nicholas Blagden** and **Lynn Saunders** offer a fascinating insight into the transformative impact of the Safer Living Centre (SLC), an initiative of the Safer Living Foundation (SLF), which aimed to support the reintegration and desistence of men convicted of sexual offences. The theme of resilience is explored, illustrating how the basic human right to respect and dignity can be supported by the presence of a 'safe haven' for the men. The SLC is shown as a place where skills and self-esteem can be developed or rebuilt, and a 'moral community' formed.

Whilst HMPPS policy on transitions has typically focused its attention on supporting the transition between the youth and adult estate, the papers in this special issue illustrate that there are other points in the custodial journey and other aspects of personal identity which require careful consideration, to ensure transitions are safe, well supported and better understood.

‘It's all meant to be about resettlement’: Deconstructing the function of women’s open prisons in England & Wales

Daria Przybylska *is a PhD candidate at the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge.*

Open prisons are establishments for individuals whose risk is low enough to be managed in a minimum-security environment. Their primary aim is to gradually facilitate resettlement and reintegration into the community. Until recently, open prisons have received limited attention from researchers or policy-makers in England & Wales. Empirical studies of women’s open prisons in particular have been largely absent in the UK; exceptions have included Dr Sarah Waite’s study of staff-prisoner relationships and my PhD research, on which this article draws.[1] One important consequence of this inattention has been the apparent taking-for-granted of open prisons’ function as places of (a particular kind of) transition and resettlement. However, recent changes to the process of progressing to open conditions, which have emerged largely in response to population pressures within the closed prison estate, deserve further exploration. Drawing on data from a study of women’s open prisons in England & Wales, this paper explores the impact of these developments on women’s open prisons and their resettlement function. In particular, it foregrounds the perspectives of women held in open prisons, and of those working there, on transitions *into* and *through* open prisons, and how this affects the dynamics and function of these establishments.

The Study

Between 2023-24, I conducted a qualitative study of the nature, purpose, and experience of women’s open prisons in England & Wales. A key focus of the study included exploring the purpose and function of open prisons, and how this was perceived by incarcerated women. Ethical approval for the research was granted by the Cambridge Institute of Criminology’s Ethics Committee where I am currently based and by the HMPPS NRC National Research Committee. Fieldwork took place at HMPs Askham Grange and East Sutton Park – the only open prisons for women in England & Wales. I collected data over a period of six months through ethnographic observation, informal conversations with staff and managers, and semi-structured interviews with 42 incarcerated women across the two establishments. All interviewees provided written informed consent after we discussed the nature, objectives, and potential outcomes and outputs of the study. I also spent extended periods of unstructured time in the prisons, ‘hanging out’, having informal conversations, and observing and participating in daily activities. This was not only essential for building rapport, but also for witnessing first-hand the individual and organisational impact of the population pressures which prisoners, staff, and managers frequently brought up in our conversations.

Context and literature review: Overcrowding and the function of open prisons

Overcrowding has been a persistent problem for English & Welsh prisons for many years, but has reached a critical point more recently.[2] This has forced emergency strategies to arise to manage population pressures, one of which has been the Temporary Presumptive Recategorisation Scheme (TPRS). Introduced in March 2023, just months before fieldwork for this study began, this scheme accelerated the decategorisation and transfer of determinately-sentenced prisoners who met specific criteria and were 12- weeks away from their conditional release date.[3] Concerns have since emerged from practitioners about

1. Waite, S. (2023). "*Their ethos is all about building trust": An Exploration of Staff-Prisoner Relationships at a Women's Open Prison.* [PhD thesis]. Leeds Beckett University; Przybylska, D. (in progress) [PhD thesis]. University of Cambridge.
2. UK Parliament. (2024). *Government plans to ease prison capacity pressure and manage the needs of vulnerable prisoners.* Available at: https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/government-plans-to-ease-prison-capacity-pressure-and-manage-the-needs-of-vulnerable-prisoners/ (accessed 14 February 2025).
3. Ministry of Justice. (2023). *Temporary Presumptive Recategorisation Scheme.* Available at: https://insidetime.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/TPRS_rulebook.pdf (accessed 11 June 2025).

the detrimental implications of the TPRS policy on the culture and function of open prisons.[4] For instance, staff have identified rising levels of non-compliance, with reports of increasing 'drug use, bad behaviour and organised criminality' attributed to more 'unsuitable candidates' entering open conditions.[5] Notably, though, this is not the first time open prisons have been relied upon to alleviate population pressures in the closed estate. This positions open prisons not merely as institutions focused on resettlement, but as a contingency for the closed prison estate.[6]

Historically, open prisons emerged to better prepare prisoners for 'freedom' than was deemed possible under the restrictive regime of a closed prison.[7] This was to be achieved through fewer in-prison restrictions, a more porous and normalised regime, and encouragement of pro-social interactions with the outside community.[8]

There has been a long-standing understanding that this would be of particular benefit to people serving longer sentences who might need more time to (re-)build resources and re-adjust to the outside world.[9] This original purpose – of gradual resettlement and reintegration – has persisted, as open prisons today continue to function as places of transition between custody and community. Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL), which allows prisoners to leave their establishment for specified periods of time for resettlement purposes, including maintaining family/social ties, voluntary work or employment, education/training, or finding housing, is crucial to open prisons' function.[10] In the longer-term, all of this is also intended to reduce the risk of recidivism.[11]

Alongside this gradual transition, however, open prisons are now host to a different kind of transition, one that is – by distinction – brief, as an increasing number of women spend only a few months or even weeks in an open prison before release. This may be appropriate for the needs of women serving shorter sentences for first-time and non-violent offences, who do not require strict supervision under very secure and restrictive conditions. Nonetheless, it has important implications for all living and working in women's open prisons. In the following section, I turn to the study findings to show that these mechanisms cannot be understood without contextualising how – and *when* – women transition from a closed to an open prison.

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Findings

Transitions to open conditions

According to the women interviewed for this study, the meanings afforded to progressing to and being in an open prison varied depending on individual needs and circumstances. Specifically, a time-based distinction emerged in terms of how long it took women to move from closed to open conditions, at what point in their sentence this occurred, and how long they had left until their release date. This generally depended on women's sentence length and on their risk assessments (e.g., risk of harm to the public, risk of abscond). On this basis, a distinction could be made between long-term and short-term stays, which was determined by (a) the overall length of women's sentences and (b) the

4. Dearden, L. (2025, January 4). Fears of unrest as PM considers open prisons for more offenders. The Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jan/04/fears-of-unrest-as-pm-considers-open-prisons-for-more-offenders; Ministry of Justice. (2025). *Independent Sentencing Review: Final report and proposals for reform.* Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-sentencing-review-final-report.
5. See footnote 4: Dearden, L. (2025).
6. Jones, H., & Cornes, P. (1977). *Open Prisons. Routledge & Keegan Paul*.
7. Paterson, A. (1951). *Paterson on prisons: Being the collected papers of Sir Alexander Paterson.* F Muller; Menis, S. (2019). A History of Women's Prisons in England: *The Myth of Prisoner Reformation.* Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
8. See footnotes 8 and 9: Jones, H., & Cornes, P. (1977); Menis, S. (2019).
9. O'Brien, C., & Guy, T. (2025). The confines of 'Invisible Walls': An exploration of life sentenced men in an open prison; Rennie, A. (2024) The impact of release on mandatory life-sentenced prisoners' identities. [PhD thesis]. University of Cambridge.
10. Ministry of Justice. (2019/2022). Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) Framework. Ministry of Justice.
11. Goodley, G., & Pearson, D. (2023b). Risk management in open prisons: A critical analysis and research agenda. Probation Journal, 70(4), 367–384.

amount of time they had to spend in open conditions relative to their total time in custody. For example, two women could be serving a 3-year custodial term, but one of them progressed to open conditions after 6 months and would spend over 2 years in open conditions (i.e., long-termer), while the other only moved to an open prison 3 months before her Conditional Release Date (CRD) (i.e., short-termer). While the exact amount of time that qualifies as a long-term stay is hard to ascertain, based on participants' testimonies, ideally, it would be at least 9 months or more.

Throughout the fieldwork, prisoners and practitioners alike reiterated that increasing numbers of women were arriving in open prisons shortly after coming into custody, often after only spending a few days/weeks in a closed prison, and leaving shortly after, i.e., *passing through.* Many of them were serving very short sentences. Participants expressed mixed views about this development, which saw some women transferring to open conditions very quickly, without *working towards it.* Most (though not all) women whose transition was rapid welcomed it, but did not find it particularly momentous. In contrast, long-termers viewed transitioning to open conditions as progression and an achievement, which required them to "jump through a lot of hoops" (Simone),[12] such as completing targets on their sentence plan and maintaining a record of good behaviour. Other women simply had to wait until they had three years of their sentence left until release, as per policy at the time.[13] Several long-termers who described the effort it had taken for them to progress criticised short-termers being moved to open conditions without having faced the same demands or obstacles:

> "I had to work so hard. […] I don't agree that prisoners who have been in prison for two weeks in closed have got their open. I get that... There's that three-year mark. […] So, anyone who's got less than three years, they can apply for open conditions. But how can you be open conditions if you've only just come into prison?" (Priya)

> "I've heard this lady, she was […] in closed prison for two weeks before she got here. I'm like, […] I don't even wanna say it, but I just thought, they're actually taking the piss. They really are, because why? […] I thought open prison breaks at a halfway mark." (Amani)

For some long-termers, then, this difference in pathways into open prison devalued this transition and the effort they had put into progressing. This sometimes led to a sense of unfairness, frustration, and even contempt for short-termers. Not all long-termers felt this way, though. Molly, who saw her transition as a great achievement, was not fazed by this, exhibiting trust in the system:

> "... for lifers […] you do have to work to get here. It's not given to you on a plate. […] some people get it given on a plate, which I totally get […] But it doesn't affect me, because I always think it's about risk. It's like, they're obviously trusted enough to be in an open jail. Otherwise, they wouldn't be in an open jail." (Molly)

Paige, meanwhile, speculated that if she had personally struggled to get to an open prison, she might share other long-termers' frustration and bitterness:

> "I feel like if I'd had to wait about six, seven, eight months to come here, and then someone is just rocking up just because they needed spaces and they're only here for two weeks, I feel I'd be hard done by, maybe [laughs]."

Evidently, it was not just the timing of the transition that shaped women's orientations. The *process* and *experience* of the transition – whether it was challenging or straightforward – also mattered. The picture that emerged from women's accounts, then, was that open prisons became host to both a *gradual* transition for women who spent extended periods of time in open conditions, and a *brief* transition for women who were there for a short time.

Crucially, women and staff identified ROTL as the primary resettlement tool. While the prisons provided in-prison resettlement services, such as help with obtaining ID documents or practicing conviction disclosures, resettlement was largely conflated with ROTL. As such, women who were not (yet) accessing ROTL felt they had negligible resettlement opportunities.

Perceived purpose of open prisons

Significantly, most women and staff identified resettlement, alongside reintegration, as the main

12. All names used in this article are pseudonyms.
13. Ministry of Justice. (2011/2021). PSI 39/2011 – *Categorisation and Recategorisation of Women Prisoners.* Ministry of Justice; since April 2025, this has been replaced by an updated *Security Categorisation Policy Framework (2025),* which has changed the timeline for eligibility for open conditions from 3 to 5 years left to serve.

purpose of open prisons.[14] Women described open prisons as aiding their transition from custody to community, emphasising opportunities for (re)building financial and material resources, mainly through paid employment in the community. Additionally, for many women, maintaining family ties in the community via ROTL was near or at the top of the list of benefits of open imprisonment, and a key resettlement aim: "I think the main purpose that I've got out of this is sort of maintaining my relationship or my family ties to people" (Mia).

However, despite a consensus that open prisons should be about resettlement, not all women believed or felt that this was currently being effectively delivered: "It should be resettlement and reintegrating back into community. But I think you've got that many things, hurdles, to jump over before you get to that" (Laura); "It's all meant to be about resettlement. It's all meant to be about doing what is best for you for your release. I wouldn't say 100% I believe that" (Bridget). Indeed, women and staff alike identified a gap in the availability and delivery of resettlement services in the women's open estate.

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Accessing resettlement opportunities

Since resettlement opportunities were almost exclusively perceived in terms of ROTL, it was significant that accessing ROTL took time: women had to wait a certain period between arriving in open conditions and applying for ROTL, during which various 'checks' were conducted to assess ROTL suitability. Many women found this confusing and redundant given that, as they pointed out, they had already been de-categorised and deemed suitable for open conditions. How long this process took depended on individual circumstances and resource availability; on average, women waited between two and three months to begin ROTL. These average waiting times meant that an increasing number of women who arrived in open conditions for short periods of time – a few weeks or a couple of months – would likely be released before they were approved for ROTL. Nadiya illustrated this point:

> "I feel like I'm not here long enough to sort of gain from what they offer, like the ROTLs, and […] how you would progress when you go home, because I think that's rebuilding everything that's gone on having been in prison, and it has an impact on everybody's mental health in here."

Several long-stay women acknowledged that they "reaped all the benefits of being here" (Abby), which women on short stays would not get to access in the limited time they had:

> "I think there's a timescale on [open prison]. So, the last time I was here, I was only here for seven month. It wasn't long enough to do anything. It wasn't long enough to get anything out of being here. And I enjoyed it, yeah, but I got frustrated because I couldn't progress. I think if you've got that time to be able to get here, get your ROTLs, get out to paid work, build a future. I think that is everything. […] So, open conditions gives you the option to live a normal life, if you've got the time for it. I think it's stupid to have girls coming here for three months." (Bridget)

This further illustrates the importance of timing in women's penal trajectories, which determined what kind of resettlement opportunities they could access and for how long – and, crucially, whether this included ROTL.

This was accompanied by a spatial dimension: sometimes, being transferred to an open prison meant being moved further away from their home and their loved ones. This issue is especially pertinent for women given that there are only two women's open prisons. This could exacerbate women's feelings of frustration and disappointment. In fact, even if the distance was similar, the transition to a new prison could be emotionally, psychologically, and socially destabilising.[15] Consequently, a brief transition could be counterproductive to resettlement, even if women

14. The two terms were often used interchangeably by participants.
15. Waite, S. (2024). 'A whole new world …': Exploring transcarceral habitus and women's transition from a closed to an open prison. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice, 63*(1), 82-97; Micklethwaite, D., & Earle, R. (2021). A Voice Within: An Autoethnographic Account of Moving from Closed to Open Prison Conditions by a Life-Sentenced Prisoner. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice, 60*(4), 529–545.

appreciated completing their sentence in a less prison-like environment: "It's better than in closed" (Nadiya). Moreover, not all women in this study felt they needed support with resettlement, often because their sentence was relatively short, and they described having considerable social and economic capital that they believed would cushion the negative impact of their sentence on their lives: "I haven't been away that long. I feel like I don't need reintroducing, so that I find a bit frustrating as well" (Patricia). This included financial and material resources (some women were middle-class, home-owners, business-owners) and relational resources – personal and professional networks as well as ties with loved ones who continued to support them.[16]

Population pressures: 'push' and 'pull' factors

As mentioned at the start of this article, the main reason for this growing number of short-termers in the (women's) open estate is overcrowding in the closed estate.[17] This was frequently discussed throughout the fieldwork at both establishments, illustrating the salience of this issue for those living and working there. Notably, the women were acutely aware of the open estate being used for the purpose of what staff often referred to as "crowd control":

> "I think my understanding from those sort of situations was that closed prisons were overcrowded. And the people who were the least risk level were the ones that were sent here because we had space." (Abby)

In addition to this 'push' factor, in the case of the women's open estate there was also a 'pull' factor: both HMPs Askham Grange and East Sutton Park have been under threat of closure since 2013, with the closure notices never having been formally rescinded.[18] Both establishments had also been under capacity and struggling to fill spaces for a number of years. Some participants speculated – or spoke from experience – that this was because women did not want to come to open conditions after hearing negative accounts from other prisoners.[19] Whatever the reasons, participants believed that open prisons were consequently forced to accept more women simply to fill the empty spaces, partly to avoid being shut down. This was often linked to the minimum number of prisoners required for the prisons to run:

> "I think the open prison, from my understanding, needs to have a certain amount of people in here. So, I feel like the criteria, if you want to call it criteria, has maybe changed. And maybe people that probably wouldn't have been accepted before are being accepted now." (Paige)

This was reiterated by staff at both prisons; notably, at one of the prisons, I was told that, on a few occasions in previous years, they had to hold women back from accessing ROTL because they needed them to stay and help run the prison. Although necessitated by a lack of alternatives, this strategy undermined the open prisons' primary function of facilitating resettlement via ROTL. In this light, then, the frequent turnover of short-termers through the open estate became a steady source of labour. It allowed women eligible to access ROTL to continue doing so, while the task of keeping the prisons running fell onto those women who could not access ROTL anyway due to existing time restrictions. Ostensibly, this addressed both the 'push' and 'pull' population pressures, at least until better, long-term solutions emerged.

Implications for (the experience of) resettlement

The combination of 'push' and 'pull' factors created the right conditions for changes in terms of how – and which – prisoners transitioned to open conditions. Specifically, it enabled the acceptance of more women, more frequently, for shorter periods of time, even when they might not benefit from the open regime's resettlement function as much as long-termers. Conversations with the incarcerated women, staff, and management revealed this was now happening at an unusually high rate, and had several implications.

First, having such a transient population – as opposed to a more stable population of women with longer periods to serve in open conditions – affected the social dynamics, largely in a detrimental way. Some long-termers highlighted the importance of a harmonious existence and the unspoken rules they adhered to in order to foster a calm and stable environment. Certain short-termers with near release dates, who were described by long-termers and some staff as "the wrong calibre" or "not open prison material," were seen as having failed or refused to adjust to this social arrangement, causing issues among

16. I develop this argument in more detail in my PhD thesis.
17. Daddow, D. (2023). *Preparation for release from open prisons: A comparison of short and long–stay prisoners.*] MSt dissertation]. University of Cambridge.
18. BBC News. (2013, October 25). *Askham Grange and East Sutton Park women's prisons to close.* Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-24669657.
19. Henson, C., & Lievesley, R. (2025). Understanding the 'walk of shame': exploring the experiences of individuals with sexual convictions who have been recalled from open conditions in England and Wales, *Psychology, Crime & Law, 31,* 1-25.

the prisoner community: "and there's people doing short sentences, when they come here, that doesn't bother them, because they're only in for a few weeks. They come here and they roll, they, they sort of aggravate the long-term people" (Cynthia).

This issue is magnified for people serving indeterminate and life sentences, for whom the consequences of becoming collateral damage to social insatiability initiated by prisoners on determinate sentences, who they see as having less to lose, are more severe.[20]

Another social implication related to the jealousies that could emerge among short-termers as they witnessed long-termers regularly accessing ROTL: "But it can be very emotionally challenging for people that are in here watching other people going out all the time. I think you're always gonna have that element of jealousy in people" (Bridget). This jealousy could sometimes lead to women deliberately interfering with each other's access to ROTL, for example by (falsely) reporting rule-breaking, which could result at least in a ROTL suspension until the case was adjudicated. Priya admitted that she usually kept her ROTL dates secret from other women to minimise the risk of someone "Putting intel on ya and then you're losing everything. […] Easily done. Especially in open. Jealousy is a bitch." The infusion of short-termers, then, was seen by some long-termers as a disruption to the social stability they sought to cultivate. This was either because short-termers were perceived as not sharing the same investment in a harmonious community due to the brevity of their stay, or as seeking to actively undermine it precisely because they could not share in the benefits, again, due to time restrictions. Thus, women's access to and experience of resettlement was indirectly influenced by the changing nature of the prisoner population and shifting social dynamics.

Second, regular transitions of short-termers in and out of the open prison might alleviate immediate overcrowding concerns, but also interfere with the progression of women on longer sentences because of limited spaces. This was recognised not only by prisoners but also by senior staff and managers, who shared concerns that too many women on longer sentences were missing out on the benefits of open imprisonment, as spaces in the open estate were instead occupied by short-termers, at a high rate of turnover. This revealed the fine balance between mitigating population pressures and providing adequate, needs-based support. Third, a changing population means different needs that now have to be addressed, which has implications for the operation and management of open prisons and their population. Crucially, having more women who were not in the prison long enough to meaningfully access resettlement could be challenging and demotivating for staff: resources needed to be allocated to managing this growing short-term population, but very little could be offered to them. Moreover, as one manager explained, intra-prison risk escalated as more short-termers passed through the open prison, increasing concerns about (dis)order and safety. This demands a recalibration of the regime and redistribution (and increase) of resources, both of which have long been weighted towards a more stable population of long-termers. In the meantime, open prisons are more vulnerable to internal disruptions.

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Conclusion

These findings offer a novel empirical contribution to the limited scholarship on women's open imprisonment. Additionally, the findings disrupt some of the assumptions about the resettlement function of open prisons, which has largely escaped empirical scrutiny, especially from the perspective of those living and working in this environment. This article therefore sheds an important light, showing that there currently exists a gap between expectations and reality. Specifically, the article demonstrates that increasing numbers of women *passing through* open prisons have not only *destabilised* the social dynamics of these establishments, but also contributed to a *dilution of their resettlement function.* This dilution, which raises operational as well as ideological concerns, stems from a lower(ing) proportion of women who access ROTL – a core resettlement opportunity – due to their short stays in open prisons.

20. See footnotes 9 and 15: O'Brien, C., & Guy T (2025); Micklethwaite, D., & Earle, R. (2021).

Importantly, some of the findings I discuss here echo those from a recent study comparing men experiencing 'short-stays' and long stays in a men's open prison in England, particularly in terms of the impact of the TPRS policy on the establishment's social climate.[21] Similarly, the Independent Sentencing Review (ISR) published in May 2025 also highlights the interference of population pressures with resettlement, and their destabilising effects on the open regime and social dynamics. While the needs of women and men in prison might differ, as might the specific impact on the men and women's estate, population pressures present a clear threat to the entire open estate and its role in the system. One solution, as recommended by the ISR and by some of my participants, is that, upon entering open conditions, "offenders should have at least 12 months left of their sentence to serve to enable sufficient time for their engagement in resettlement activities."[22] For this to be possible, however, overcrowding must first be alleviated, so that open prisons do not need to be a contingency for closed prisons.

In the meantime, there may be scope for smaller-scale changes that could ease some of the functional and operational problems I have described. For example, initiating risk assessment processes for ROTL before women's transfer to open conditions might enable more women to access this key resettlement opportunity, especially on short sentences. Introducing additional in-prison services that provide women in open prisons who cannot access ROTL with more opportunities for purposeful activity and release preparation could also be valuable. Perhaps this could utilise the considerable talent, wisdom, and expertise of currently and/or formerly incarcerated women, which would not only relieve some of the burden on staff, but also offer advice and support from peers who are best-suited to guide others in the resettlement process through which they have gone themselves, provided they are adequately remunerated.[23] However, all this requires additional resources in a system that is already stretched thin, with staff managing huge caseloads and lacking the resources to provide adequate and meaningful support to prisoners in their care.

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Ultimately, though, many women in prison are serving sentences that are too short for any rehabilitative intervention, but just long enough to severely disrupt their and their loved ones' and children's lives. Fundamentally, then, the priority should remain the reduction of the women's prisoner population and the diversion of women from the criminal justice system.

21. See footnote 7: Daddow, D. (2023).
22. See footnote 4: Ministry of Justice. (2025).
23. See recommendations in: Rennie, A. (2025). *Release from long-term imprisonment: Understanding the experiences of people released from the longest sentences and returning to the community.* Prison Reform Trust.

More than a physical transition: The sensory impact of moving to a Therapeutic Community (TC) from mainstream prison

Alex Fishwick *is a PhD student and part time lecturer at the University of Lancashire.*

This article brings together existing literature from a number of different areas including sensory criminology, drug detoxification, the prison experience and ideas relating to liminality. The core focus of this article is to explore specifically how people experience the transition from mainstream prison to Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Therapeutic Communities (TCs) in prisons throughout England and Wales through a sensory and liminal lens.

Prison therapy to treat SUDs takes various formats, from the traditionally recognised TC to Incentivised Substance Free Living Units (ISFLU) and allocated drug free wings.[1] There are also numerous other TCs such as Democratic Therapeutic Communities (DTCs) that support those with complex mental health disorders or non-custody and non-residential community based TCs that help individuals with a range of issues such as weight loss, anxiety and social isolation. SUDTCs, which are the sole focus of this article are fully residential programmes, usually lasting 12 months and over. There is a distinct hierarchical structure and asset-based recovery ethos which recognises individual strengths and achievements.[2] TCs are considered intense and challenging environments. This is due to being a fully immersive and confrontational experience driven by a set of principles that put the community as the focal driver of change that sparks transformation. Attrition rates are high for SUDTCs as the ability to become open to truthful sensory and emotional experiences may be overwhelming for some residents who have imposed a range of masks and characters to deal with both institutional and substance related experiences.[3]

Transitions in this article will include the physical movement of living conditions from mainstream wings to TCs and personal transitions, as intense therapy creates conditions for personal transformations to occur. This is more than a physical shift in living conditions but also a reconstruction of identity and stark transformation for what it means to be human.[4] Navigating sensory and liminal spaces in the transition of those with SUDs from mainstream prisons to TCs remains under researched and is the main theme of this article.

Aims

This article aims to explore transitions through the eyes of liminality, which is a framework that explains the concept of transitioning between two places or states.[5] While this gives insights into physical prison movements into therapy, it also frames extremely powerful therapeutic transformations that signify the birth of new identities. Liminality creates a bridge between detachment and belonging that aligns with the motives and principles of TC culture that are characterised by reality confrontation, communalism and permissiveness. Liminality is therefore an ideal framework to understand therapeutic transitions.[6] The real-world benefits for residents, practitioners and other professionals that may arise from incorporating a liminal and sensory lens into therapeutic research is significant. This may break down and gives meaning to stages of change that may otherwise be overlooked. Transitions to TCs are therefore multifaceted and profound. This may be a life-or-death opportunity to escape the crippling shackles and

1. Webster, R., Fearns, C., Harriott, P., Millar, L., Simpson, J., Wallace, J., & Wheatley, M. (2024). Accessing opioid agonist treatment in prison in England and Scotland remains problematic–the views of people with lived experience. *International Journal of Prison Health, 20(2), 143*-155.
2. Rawlings, B., & Haigh, R. (2017). Therapeutic communities and planned environments for serious offenders in English prisons. *BJPsych Advances, 23*(5), 338-346.
3. Crewe, B., Warr, J., Bennett, P., & Smith, A. (2014). The emotional geography of prison life. *Theoretical criminology, 18*(1), 56-74.
4. Stevens, A. (2012). 'I am the person now I was always meant to be': Identity reconstruction and narrative reframing in therapeutic community prisons. *Criminology & Criminal Justice, 12*(5), 527-547.
5. Turner, V. (1969). *The ritual process: structure and anti/structure.* Transaction Publishers.
6. Slater, R., & Coyle, A. (2017). Time, space, power, and the liminal transformation of the psychologised "self". *Theory & Psychology, 27*(3), 369-388.

constraints of chronic substance dependency characterised by walls of confinement more torturous than a steel lock and key.[7] With this in mind the aims of this article are as follows.

1) To consider the impact of sensory experience upon transitions from mainstream wings to TCs in male prisons in England and Wales.
2) To explore the transformational process of change that occurs whilst on TCs through a sensory and liminal lens.

Methods

This study is built upon the author's own PhD research which is predominantly focused upon exploring the spatial and sensory areas of TCs while using a liminal framework to give meaning to changes that may occur both on a personal and environmental level. This study is a work in progress and has created the foundation for this article. This article incorporates a mixed approach of literature-based discussions and reflective accounts; this is not a fully autoethnographic approach however it utilises this methodology to engage in reflection.[8]

Positionality

Integrated throughout this article will be ongoing reflections from the author who has a history of incarceration in various prisons in England, 20 + years of SUDs and experience of a drug free wing in prison. The author has not spent time in prison-based TCs but has several years' experience within community TCs. Lived experiences offer novel insights, however, they reflect a single experience and making overarching conclusions about a diverse prison population based on this premise is misleading and potentially damaging. Therefore such personal discussions are to add value through reflection rather than making sweeping evidential claims.[9] Any personal reflections from the author will be highlighted by quotation marks.

Ethics

Although there is no direct contact with individuals in TCs or mainstream prison within this article, ethical alterity recognises and reflects the otherness of hidden populations as human beings that should be addressed with dignity and respect.[10] Reflective accounts used in this study have a moral responsibility to be accurately compiled and not to identify or cause harm and distress to those in prison who may have restricted autonomy, agency and power.

However, personal reflections have complexities that means ethical considerations are not clear-cut but fluctuate depending upon the population, positionality and context of the research. Therefore, in regard to this study the ethical principle of non-maleficence remains as a central tenet.

Continuous ethical reflection has been applied throughout to reduce harm to self and others that can occur through overexposure and misrepresentation.[11]

> Liminality creates a bridge between detachment and belonging that aligns with the motives and principles of TC culture.

Liminality as a transformational framework

Within the context of liminality, therapeutic transformations may be understood as a series of liminal transformations, such as prisoner to resident, SUDs to recovery and desperation to hope. Liminal transitions to recovery-based thinking and behavioural adaptations are often characterised by periodic moments of separation, ambiguity and detachment as old status and attributes are left behind.[12] This is not a singular transition defined by prison-based therapeutic space, but a resident-driven spiritual, emotional and sensorial change of considerable magnitude.

Liminality is a concept of growing interest that was born out of cultural anthropology, the term itself derives from the Latin *limen* which means threshold. Various studies have applied a liminal lens to highlight transitional and spatial significance including Jewkes and Laws, who explored the transient emotional space of

7. See footnote 1: Webster et al. (2024).
8. Sparkes, A. C. (2024). Autoethnography as an ethically contested terrain: Some thinking points for consideration. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 21*(1), 107-139.
9. Xue, H., van Kooten, K., & Desmet, P. M. (2025). A consent for myself/ourselves: designing for responsible use of autoethnography. *CoDesign, 1*-17.
10. Sternagel, J. (2023). Ethics of Alterity: *Aesthetics of Existence.* Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
11. See footnote 8: Sparkes (2024).
12. See footnote 6: Slater & Coyle (2017).

two women's prisons through a liminal framework,[13] and Moran who explored prison waiting rooms as a metaphorical threshold of transition.[14] It was van Gennep, in his seminal work *Les Rites de Passage* that explored the transformative stages of indigenous people as they transformed from adolescence to adulthood that first brought this concept to the public's attention. According to van Gennep this transition has three important phases to it, these phases directly map onto the overall therapeutic experience in custody:[15]

1. Rites of separation: The individual's social status and roles are removed in preparation for the transitional rites of passage to occur. In relation to prison transition this means an uprooting and detachment from traditional routines, hierarchy and prison status in preparation for transformation.

2. Transitional phase: The individual enters a new space, in this case the TC which is characterised by like-minded individuals on the same journey. This phase is a deeply emotional process and represents a space of ambiguity, lack of clarity and uncertainty. It is the elders, or in this case the other residents who guide individuals over the threshold and into a newly embodied status.

3. Reincorporation/Post liminal stage: A new identity position has been reached, and the resident has adopted new attributes and statuses that support them on re-entry into society.[16] The transformed 'self' becomes repatriated with a new social world, however this may also come with a host of new challenges that may include, reintegration support, institutionalisation, fluctuating motivations, housing, peer and substance support.

Liminality is a lens that frames the state of suspension and transformation that occurs on multiple levels as an individual embarks on identity reconstruction. Put simply, the detoxification process and therapy-induced identity changes are transformative processes that cry out for a lens of liminality that is often missing from contemporary literature. In essence the word transition does not do justice to this transcendental experience, out of the pain and hurt a new identity may be formed. Such precious recovery from chronic addiction may or may not be preceded by a series of relapsing conditions, consequently, not everyone's transformational journey is comparable, although the symptoms that led each person to this painful place often are.

Understanding transitions through a sensory lens

The following section will explore the manner in which sensory experience is managed on traditional wings and how this may impact adapting to a new sensory world on the TC. There will also be a consideration of the profound sensory experience that may occur post detoxification. These themes will then be brought together to give insights into the complex identity transitions that occur within prison-based TC programmes. Rhythms and sounds are the heartbeat of prison wings. This is more than the ocular centric preoccupation with sight, it is the connectivity of all the senses that do not arrive in a neat tidy package, but in unison and suddenly. As humans it is an inescapable truth that there is a constant deluge of messages in the form of sensory data, this sensory information is absorbed, processed and acted upon.[17] Therefore, as sensorial creatures the knowledge production and understanding of the world is shaped by unconscious or conscious sensory appreciation.[18] This deep interaction with the environment is especially relevant when discussing prison transitions into therapy. Shingler and Stickney discuss the liminal and sensory state of being free yet feeling constraint post release, which stems from intense state supervision and social scrutiny.[19] This state of not being one thing or another is also felt within the TCs experience, as a new identity is released gradually within

This is not a singular transition defined by prison based therapeutic space, but a resident driven spiritual, emotional, and sensorial change of considerable magnitude.

13. Jewkes, Y., & Laws, B. (2021). Liminality revisited: Mapping the emotional adaptations of women in carceral space. *Punishment & Society, 23*(3), 394-412.
14. Moran, D. (2013). Between outside and inside? Prison visiting rooms as liminal carceral spaces. *Geo Journal, 78*(2), 339-351..
15. Adorno, G. (2015). Between two worlds: liminality and late-stage cancer-directed therapy. *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying, 71*(2), 99-125.
16. See footnote 6: Slater & Coyle (2017).
17. Herrity, K. (2024). *Sound, Order and Survival in Prison: The Rhythms and Routines of HMP Midtown.* Policy Press.
18. Serres, M. (2008). *The five senses: A philosophy of mingled bodies.* Bloomsbury Publishing.
19. Shingler, J., & Stickney, J. (Eds.). (2023). *The Journey from Prison to Community: Developing Identity, Meaning and Belonging with Men in the UK.* Taylor & Francis.

the confines of an institutional gaze. The concept of time and space may also infuse through a sensory lens as an individual disengages with conventional routines and becomes disoriented with the breakdown of traditional ways of thinking, feeling and understanding identity.[20]

The senses give instinctive meaning to new environments, unavoidable in their inherent ability to give meaning to systems of power and control.[21] The link between instinct and the senses,[22] means new transitions are shaped by a gradual appreciation of new systems of control. Within a therapy-based regime this may be confusing for some residents who have spent long periods processing the monotonous stream of sensory data on conventional wings as demonstrated by the following quote from the author: "The medium category prisons in England that I have spent time in seem to have a sensory fingerprint that is consistent, the wings have a certain noise, smell, touch, taste and visual template." This quote suggests prison has a sensory code that is repetitive in design, as familiar noises, sights, smells, tastes and touch all meld together to shape identities and impositions of power. Sensory appreciation often happens at a subconscious level meaning adapting to a new cultural and physical environment within TCs may be hampered by an ingrained sensory template customised on mainstream prison wings.

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Understanding sensory patterns

A study by Kelly et al., was one of the first to recognise that young people with substance use disorders have complex sensory patterns significantly different than those in the general population.[23] Participants had much higher sensory processing patterns for sensory sensitivity, sensation avoiding and low registration. This means they may not recognise all sensory data, be more hyperactive, display frustration through sensory overloads, especially in loud or bright environments and feel over stimulated to the point where touch may be avoided. This is significant when discussing transitions, especially post detoxification, with such an ingrained history of long-term avoidant behaviours in response to sensory stimuli it may take some time for individuals to adapt to a sensory world they fought so hard to avoid. This may suggest the senses are a disrupted phenomenon that are aggravated by the pervasive nature of substances in custody. This could lead to transitional challenges for a population that may already feel disempowered and isolated. It may be worthwhile, therefore, for TCs to apply more sensory interventions to enhance and promote community and recovery participation.

Sensory management on traditional wings

Incarceration may lead to feelings of fear, loneliness and panic. However, for some, prison may be a recurring experience with familiar rhythmic routines and ingrained patterns of behaviour. It is therefore re-entry into society that becomes a more ominous and foreboding transition.[24] Prison is therefore a singular structure with multiple meanings. Sykes discusses the attributes that some prisoners adopt in the face of perceived weakness, such as fortitude and stoicism to effectively manage a life in prison.[25] This means overtly expressive emotions and conscious or unconscious sensory experience may be suppressed as sight, sound and touch become aligned with a highly monitored 'convict code'. This is a very important consideration and may give insights into the challenges associated with transferring to a therapeutic setting that encourages residents to be truthful about emotional and sensory states. What is seen, heard, touched and spoken is intrinsically linked to the convict code which emphasises 'keeping yourself to yourself'.[26] The following quote showcases how individuals may

20. Atkinson, S., & Robson, M. (2012). Arts and health as a practice of liminality: Managing the spaces of transformation for social and emotional wellbeing with primary school children. *Health & place, 18*(6), 1348-1355.
21. Herrity, K., Schmidt, B. E., & Warr, J. (Eds.). (2021). *Sensory penalties: Exploring the senses in spaces of punishment and social control.* Emerald Publishing Limited.
22. Bain, A. (1864). *The senses and the intellect.* Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green.
23. Kelly, J., Meredith, P. J., Taylor, M., Morphett, A., & Wilson, H. (2021). Substances and your senses: The sensory patterns of young people within an alcohol and drug treatment service. *Substance Abuse, 42*(4), 998-1006.
24. Mitchell, M. M. (2022). Masculinities in prison: Expression, variation, and implications for violent misconduct. In T. Bartlette & R. Ricciardelli (Eds), *Prison Masculinities (*pp. 103-120). Routledge.
25. Sykes, G. M. (1958). *The society of captives: A study of a maximum-security prison.* Princeton University Press.
26. See footnote 24: Mitchell (2022).

transition with altered sensory states that need unlocking in therapy:

> "In prison I behave a certain way, I restrict and monitor my sensory world. I try not to listen to gossip (association can cause harm), I keep my mouth shut about certain things I see, I do not touch other people's items, if I smell drugs, I do not acknowledge it. I am constantly adjusting the way I process the senses; it feels unnatural, forced and tiresome, I want to just relax and be me, but I cannot."

This suggests that the transparent engagement expected on TC programmes that extends to sensory experience may leave many individuals finding it difficult to adjust to an environment that encourages openness and honesty. This is because residents may have supressed and proactively managed sensory feedback for so long on mainstream wings. It may be argued, therefore, that transparent sensory experience is abducted by the state through institutions that run on fear and retribution rather than freedom of expression and rehabilitation. The imposition of carceral environments, where sensory data has to be distilled, means the state plays a part in creating fragmented and highly modified sensory experience, thus creating a barrier between reality and adjusted experience. This means there may be a clash between institutional and therapeutic logics that increases the barriers to effective transitions. This type of sensory manipulation presents a gap in the literature and is a critically important concept to understand when composing therapy-based programmes and potentially understanding high attrition rates that exist in TCs. Sensory experience is a personal experience that may fluctuate greatly, especially for those who are neurodivergent, and/or trauma impacted. The sensory management for these populations may be driven by an added desire to avoid unwelcome sensory triggers that impact wellbeing.[27]

It may be worthwhile, therefore, for TCs to apply more sensory interventions to enhance and promote community and recovery participation.

Adapting to a new sensory world on the TC

On arrival on the TC there will be an expectation over time that residents begin to share genuine emotional and sensory experience.[28] Stark realism, central to TC philosophy, is a giant leap for residents who may have moulded a sensory and emotional radar that fits in with prison culture. According to Kelley and Schmeichel,[29] constant exposure to fear-based hyperarousal can decrease tactile sensitivity, which suggests the prison space may have the ability to influence a person's sense of touch. This poses abstract and philosophical questions about the `feel' of prison and transitions in general. How much of the person is transitioning? Does the prison experience engulf or modify intrinsic aspects of 'self' so much that the original person never truly travels or arrives at the desired destination? With differing influence for some people, the prison environment may be aggravating and healing within one overarching institutional paradigm. This may lead to a more intense and confusing therapeutic liminal and sensory journey, as it exists within the parameters of punitive justice and rehabilitative philosophies.

Post detoxification

An intimate and powerful attribute of drug dependency is the ability to change sensory experience until the user is the expert in sensory manipulation and adaptation. Certain drugs induce particular sensory states, and therefore the user becomes attuned and intimately aware of how to shape sensory feedback to fit a lifestyle or a moment in time. The transition from a state of heightened or numbing sensory lifestyle, to a new clarity of sensory realism post detoxification, may be overwhelming. Such incredibly emotional transitions bring new meaning and purity to seemingly mundane moments as sight, touch, smell, and taste, take on new meaning. While this may offer childlike excitement as individuals smell and taste food or hear the rich genuine tones of children and partners on visits, it may also lead to deeply painful feelings of anguish, vulnerability, guilt

27. Roberts, K., & Lawrence, D. (2024). "Banged up with ADHD": a qualitative analysis of the experiences of adult men with ADHD in prison. *The Journal of Forensic Practice, 26*(3), 1-228.
28. Rapoport, R. N. (2013). *Community as doctor: New perspectives on a therapeutic community.* Routledge.
29. Kelley, N. J., & Schmeichel, B. J. (2014). The effects of negative emotions on sensory perception: fear but not anger decreases tactile sensitivity. *Frontiers in psychology, 5,* 942.

and pain that is physical, emotional and spiritual. Transition from SUD to recovery is a monumental sensory transformation, and as the author explains here it can create intense feelings: "In my addiction everything was staged, the sensory world was tuned to my own chemical needs; after detoxing I was hit with an overwhelming flood of pure, raw sensory information. Everything felt so interactive, I like this new place, but I am frightened and childlike, this is literally a new world, what do I do here? I feel exposed but alive." This quote emphasises the powerful transformational changes that are at play within a newfound sensory world post detoxification. Such a complex myriad of new sensory experiences is part of the liminal process of change as individuals relinquish one identity and go through a periodic moment of transition to a new status, identity and outlook. This is not an abstract or low impact transitional phenomena but a new human experience as the world thereafter becomes radically different.[30]

Identity transitions

Identity transformation is more than a combination of popular buzz words that fit neatly into therapeutic discourse. It is a common phenomenon shaped by social and psychological change within a community dynamic.[31] It can be argued that multiple identities are formed prior, during and after custody; prisoners often have their identity stripped then reconstructed by the ongoing carceral experience.[32] Therefore, the weight of the institution may create a forged carceral identity that needs unpicking to find a clandestine self that is strategically hidden from view, making recovery-based identity transition even more complex.[33] Identity changes sufficient for recovery are therefore fighting against both institutional and substance imposed layered identities.

To `thrive, survive or mitigate harm` masks are often adopted culminating in a frontstage performance that may shield a true reality which is hidden from view backstage.[34] However, this may be too simplistic for a population who do not have the practical options to fully relax into backstage comfort zones that may or may not reflect their true self.[35] This adds more credence to the transitional challenges that await individuals in prison as they engage in therapy. This is also not a neatly systematic process of positive change; indeed, some identity changes may leave people more susceptible to a range of pains that were once hidden under a blanket of substances. Therefore finding 'self' may be a difficult transition characterised by exposure to a new sensory and emotional world, making this a unique and imposing process for some people.

> This poses abstract and philisophical questions about the 'feel' of prison transitions in general. How much of the person is transitioning?

Conclusion

Transitions have multiple meanings within the realm of TCs in prison, such as movements between normal location to TCs, and personal transformations as therapy shapes a new identity post detoxification. Liminality is a lens that shines light on the transformation of 'self' and a powerful framework to understand the impact of detachment, ambiguous states and newfound identities. With identities in constant flux and a new sensory world post detoxification the overall experience of therapy can be profound. This article builds on the existing literature on the sensory and emotional experience of prison by focusing on the sensory journey from mainstream wings to TCs.

By encapsulating this in a liminal framework it supports a range of people, including practitioners, prison staff and those in the grip of SUDs, to gain insights into specific transitions. These may include physical movements into therapy, identity transformations and the significance of post-detoxification sensory exposure. Further research into broader prison-based therapy, such as less structured drug free wings, may also uncover whether the intensity of therapy has a bearing on the significance of sensory and emotional environmental transitions.

30. See footnote 5: Turner (1969)
31. See footnote 6: Slater & Coyle (2017)
32. Warr, J. (2020). 'Always gotta be two mans': Lifers, risk, rehabilitation, and narrative labour. *Punishment & Society, 22*(1), 28-47.
33. McPhee, I., Holligan, C., McLean, R., & Deuchar, R. (2019). Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde: the strange case of the two selves of clandestine drug users in Scotland. *Drugs and Alcohol Today, 19*(2), 133-146.
34. Goffman, E. (1956). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.* Doubleday Anchor; Laws, B., & Crewe, B. (2016). Emotion regulation among male prisoners. *Theoretical criminology, 20*(4), 529-547.
35. See footnote 3: Crewe et al. (2014).

It is clear, that the senses offer an insight into therapeutic transitions that should not be overlooked, not only in the context of how a new social world is created post detoxification but regarding the construction of effective therapeutic spaces and the impact of internal prison movements. It may be a worthwhile consideration to incorporate dedicated sensory spaces within more therapeutic spaces, and ideally throughout the prison estate, to support people as they navigate an environment that is essentially run on deeply embedded sensory codes and rules. The sensory filter that is often implemented, either consciously or not, on mainstream wings may need breaking open whilst on the TC, meaning this type of information may be of importance to programme designers, treatment readiness assessments, and practitioners. Therapeutic tools also need to be robust enough to break through a range of constructed identities built through sensory manipulation to uncover the true self which may be hidden under a cloak of protection. As a consequence, it may be a worthwhile consideration for future studies to access how effectively residents adapt to a new sensory world upon arrival on the TC. Differing sensory experiences are not only hidden and modified behind layers of prolonged substance usage, but adjusted and siphoned through prison culture. This may mean group discussions that unlock the senses early in treatment may have positive impacts on overall progress. This could be driven by senior residents that have been in the TC longer who understand this process intimately. In this context, transitions are transformations in progress; this is a process of deep meaning, painful truth, realisation and hope, and into this rich therapeutic space new meanings are attributed to seemingly innocuous moments.

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Imprisoned 'citizens-in-transition': Change and continuity in subjective citizenship experiences during incarceration

Abigail Stark *is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Lancashire.*[1]

The impact of imprisonment on citizenship has received substantial academic attention, in consideration of denied voting rights,[2] new responsibilities,[3] or exploration of opportunities for 'active citizenship' during incarceration.[4] Nevertheless, prior research has not considered how imprisoned people understand their subjective position as citizens, or how this subjective sense of citizenship demonstrates change or continuity over time, across and within the prison boundary. Citizenship, a contested concept,[5] has been considered a status one can hold, and a feeling that can be experienced, and it is transitions in relation to this feeling of citizenship that will be considered.

This article draws on qualitative data from a project exploring the meaning of citizenship for imprisoned men in England and the Republic of Ireland through the lens of 'lived citizenship', defined as "the meaning that citizenship actually has in people's lives and the ways in which people's social and cultural backgrounds and material circumstances affect their lives as citizens" (p.2).[6] The discussion explores how imprisoned men experience the presence or absence of change in meaningful citizenship, taking influence from youth studies literature on the 'citizen-in-transition'.[7] It is argued the movement between a sense of citizenship, or non-citizenship, is not a linear or absolute change at the point of incarceration (or release). Instead, it can involve transitions between different types or gradations of citizenship identification, between inclusion and exclusion, with individuals identifying as 'more' or 'less' of a citizen at different points across their lives and imprisonment.[8]

The article begins by explaining the importance of considering the citizen 'in-transition' and justifying the relevance of this approach for exploring experiences of imprisoned men, before providing details of the empirical research. The article then explores, through participants' perspectives, how citizenship transitions take place within prison, considering how individuals experienced a sense of becoming citizens, continuation of pre-existing exclusion, destruction of prior citizenship, or transient moments of feeling more or less a 'citizen'.

Imprisoned people as 'citizens-in-transition'?

Citizenship and punishment are intrinsically linked, with boundaries of acceptable citizen behaviour outlined in criminal law, denial of citizenship rights for people with convictions, and aims of creating 'law-abiding citizens' as central to notions of rehabilitation.[9] That citizenship is not fixed for people with convictions

1. Formerly known as the University of Central Lancashire.
2. Tripkovic, M. (2018). Punishment & Citizenship: *A Theory of Criminal Disenfranchisement.* Oxford University Press; Cheney, D. (2008). Prisoners as citizens in a democracy. Howard Journal of *Crime and Justice, 47*(2), 124-145.
3. Miller, R. J., & Stuart, F. (2017). Carceral citizenship: race, rights and responsibility in the age of mass supervision. *Theoretical Criminology, 21*(4), 532-548.
4. Brosnens, D., Croux, F., & De Donder, L. (2018). P*risoners' active citizenship: An insight into European prisons.* Available at: https://prisonerseducation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Brosens-et-al.-2018-PAC-An-insight-in-European-prisons-DEF.pdf ; Edgar, K., Jacobson, J. and Biggar, K. (2011). *Time Well Spent: A Practical Guide to Active Citizenship and Volunteering in Prison.* Prison Reform Trust.
5. Edwards, M. (2015). *The Limits of Political Belonging.* Palgrave Macmillan.
6. Hall, T., & Williamson, H. (1999). *Citizenship and Community.* Youth Work Press.
7. Wood, B. E. (2017). Youth studies, citizenship and transitions: towards a new research agenda, J*ournal of Youth Studies, 20*(9), 1176-1190.
8. See footnote 7: Wood (2017); Smith, N., Lister, R., Middleton, S., & Cox, L. (2005). Young people as real citizens: Towards an inclusionary understanding of citizenship. *Journal of youth studies, 8(*4), 425-443.
9. Carlen, P. (2013). Against rehabilitation: for reparative justice. In K. Carrington, M. Ball, E. O'Brien, & J. Tuari, J. (Eds.), *Crime, justice and social democracy: international perspectives* (pp. 89-104). Palgrave Macmillan.

is evident in extant literature, with people in prison described as experiencing dormant,[10] suspended,[11] conditional,[12] or qualified citizenship.[13]

However, there is less exploration of how changes in one's sense of citizenship are experienced within prison, or of prison as a site where such changes are resisted, supported or hindered. Discussions of citizenship often revolve around a binary of inclusion or exclusion, with little consideration of how one's sense of being 'more' or 'less' a citizen can shift, or be reframed, as experiences of feeling like citizens - and sensing exclusion from such identities - might occur simultaneously, due to conviction or incarceration.

Wood argues "citizenship identities change over the life course and are forged at the intersection of economic, social, political and life-course events and encounters" and critiques citizenship literature's centring of "singular events or moments as a result of their focus on the present, often at the expense of a more sustained understanding of citizenship changes through time and space (i.e. the citizen-in-transition)" (p.1178).[14] Whilst in youth studies, this desire for more fluid conceptualisations of citizenship has acknowledged such identities are "continually negotiated, not only in youth but throughout the life-course" (p.1181),[15] consequently suggesting the potential applicability of the 'citizen-in-transition' lens not just to young people, but to all adults, particularly where various dimensions of marginalisation or social context might lead to fluctuations in one's subjective sense of citizenship. Given the impact of imprisonment on time, not being experienced as linear or coherent,[16] the intrinsic restrictions on autonomy,[17] and the stigma associated with conviction, there is particular value in exploring imprisoned men's experiences of citizenship as 'in transition'. This acknowledgement of citizenship as potentially constantly 'in transition', highlights the need to consider individuals' statuses as not tied to singular events – in this instance, incarceration – but to understand how meaningful identification with citizenship might be in flux, or demonstrate continuity,[18] over the course of one's imprisonment.

The research

This study involved interviews with 64 men imprisoned in either England or the Republic of Ireland, exploring their perceptions and experiences of citizenship during incarceration. Interviews explored the meaning of 'citizenship' for participants and the extent to which this subjectively understood citizenship was realised during incarceration. Approval was sought from the University of Sheffield, HMPPS and the Irish Prison Service, and ethical considerations, magnified in the coercive prison environment,[19] were considered throughout. Participants volunteered in response to posters or informal discussions about the research and, before providing written consent, all were provided with information sheets outlining the purpose of the research, uses of data, and the limits of confidentiality, which were also read aloud. It was made clear participants could withdraw or refuse to answer questions with no consequence. Participants' ages ranged from 22 to 64, and the sample included those serving sentences from three months to Life, as well as some on remand. The vast majority interviewed were British or Irish nationals.[20] Interviews were anonymised on transcription, before being analysed thematically.

Three key elements of subjectively meaningful citizenship were identified based on this analysis: belonging to a self-defined community, opportunities to contribute to these communities, and an identity beyond the 'prisoner' label. The extent to which individuals felt citizenship was realised during imprisonment was influenced partly by its departure from, or consistency with, previous experiences, as well as shifts in feeling resulting from significant moments of interaction. The prison can be a site where a sense of citizenship is negotiated, contested and moulded, in multiple directions along the continuum between inclusion and exclusion depending on one's conceptualisation of citizenship, often being multiplicitous; while many participants initially identified themselves as citizens, based on nationality or universalist definitions based on personhood allowing

10. McNeill, F., & Velasquez, J. (2017). *Prisoners, disenfranchisement and sleeping citizenship.* Available at: https://www.sccjr.ac.uk/news_item/prisoners-disenfranchisement-and-sleeping-citizenship/ (accessed on 23rd January 2025).
11. Ramsay, P. (2013). Voters should not be in prison! The rights of prisoners in a democracy. *Critical Review of International Social & Political Philosophy, 16,* 421-438.
12. Vaughan, B. (2000). Punishment and conditional citizenship. *Punishment & Society, 2*(1), 23-39.
13. Easton, S. (2018). *The politics of the prison and the prisoner:* Zoon politikon. Routledge.
14. See footnote 7: Wood (2017, p.1178).
15. See footnote 7: Wood (2017, p.1181).
16. Wahidin, A. (2006). Time and the Prison Experience. *Sociological Research Online, 11*(1), 104-113.
17. Sykes, G. (1958). The Society of Captives: *A study of a maximum-security prison.* Princeton University Press.
18. See footnote 7: Wood (2017).
19. Moser, D. J., Arndt, S., Kanz, J. E., Benjamin, M. L., Bayless, J. D, Reese, R. L., Paulsen, J. S. & Flaum, M. A. (2004). Coercion and informed consent in research involving prisoners. *Comprehensive Psychiatry, 45*(1), 1-9.
20. Only three of the participants were foreign national prisoners (all interviewed in Ireland), and consequently the vast majority of those interviewed were not experiencing precarious citizenship when considering territorial or nationality-based definitions, an experience which may well have impacted on both understandings and experiences of citizenship in a different sample.

for their inclusion, far fewer maintained this identification when delving into the subjective meaning of citizenship for them and its realisation during incarceration. When asked whether they considered themselves citizens, participants did not only consider the present. For some, reflections on current exclusion from citizenship were contrasted to a previous state of inclusion: "I'm not a citizen in the community anymore, no" (Mason, England), while for others citizenship was something they saw as reserved for, or aspired to, in their post-prison future.[21] These perspectives reflect ideas of citizenship as dormant during incarceration,[22] however participants also highlighted ways this sense of citizenship was subject to change throughout imprisonment, also challenging the idea that paused or denied citizenship is necessarily restricted to, or begins upon, incarceration. It is these transitions, and continuities, which will now be explored.

Becoming active citizens during incarceration?

The relationship between punishment and citizenship is evident in the rehabilitative goals of prison to "mould" individuals into law-abiding citizens (p.26) and,[23] despite widespread acceptance of barriers to citizenship following release,[24] some participants saw themselves as preparing for future citizenship through participation in education, training or, in Ireland where prisoners have the right to vote, elections. As noted elsewhere,[25] however, the potential for activities to be experienced as preparation for meaningful citizenship was dependent on their perceived relevance to external job-markets, with much provision considered as lacking relevance.

For a few Irish participants, imprisonment was a time during which conscious engagement with citizenship developed; incarceration's deprivations served to encourage political engagement. While literature has highlighted how imprisonment may produce narratives of 'reinvention',[26] evident in some participants' discussions of education, the politicising effect of witnessing an absence of rights in prison was also noted as significant. This politicising effect suggested a move towards active participation, rather than away from citizenship, inverting the more negative implications shared by participants. For Ciaran, an Irish Traveller who had also been imprisoned in England, his particular circumstances meant witnessing disenfranchisement there had motivated his democratic participation in Ireland:

> "So when I got here I was surprised that I could vote. When I got the registration form I questioned it because of my sentence – I'd worked it out and with my sentence I didn't think I would get it. When I found out I thought that was great. I've been trying to encourage other prisoners to vote, telling them that people are protesting for it in England.
>
> AS: Did that influence your decision to vote?
>
> Yeah that's one of the reasons that I do it. Because I was told that I couldn't in England, I wanted to. I encourage my family to vote now as well – my wife voted for the first time in this election. I don't know if my one opinion is going to make a difference, but if I don't vote then I can't change anything. Society likes to forget about you when you're in prison, like out of sight, out of mind."

The prison can be a site where a sense of citizenship is negotiated, contested and moulded

When asked about voting before prison, Ciaran highlighted his altered view of the relevance of politics since incarceration, previously seeing voting as "nothing to do with me", noting he "couldn't read or write back then", but having "really seen the value of education" since imprisonment. Thus, prison may serve as a site for politicising, or instilling a new sense of democratic citizenship, through awareness of, or as a way to resist, the disempowerment of incarceration.[27] This complicates notions of imprisonment as suspending citizenship and demonstrates how

21. Stark, A. D. (2022). Anticipated citizenship in the shadow of imprisonment. *Probation Journal, 69*(3), 278-295.
22. See footnote 10: McNeill & Velasquez, J. (2017).
23. Vaughan, B. (2000). Punishment and conditional citizenship. *Punishment & Society, 2*(1), 23-39.
24. See footnote 21: Stark (2022); Henley, A. (2018). Mind the gap: sentencing, rehabilitation and civic purgatory. *Probation Journal, 63*(3), 285-391; Miller, R. J., & Stuart, F. (2017). Carceral citizenship: race, rights and responsibility in the age of mass supervision. *Theoretical Criminology, 21*(4), 532-548.
25. See footnote 21: Stark (2022).
26. Crewe, B. & Ievins, A. (2019). The prison as a reinventive institution. *Theoretical Criminology, 24(*4), 568-589.
27. See footnote 13: Easton (2018).

individuals may experience shifts towards a sense of citizenship, and associated responsibility,[28] where regimes facilitate engagement. Such sentiment was less evident amongst English participants, suggesting political and legal rights have implications for such transitions to political engagement. However, crucially, such politicisation may come from the very sense of exclusion inherent in incarceration, with marginality being "*productive* of political subjectivity" (p.143).[29] Further demonstrating the potential for such exclusion to co-exist with elements of inclusion, despite enfranchisement helping "a bit", Ciaran described himself as "less than a citizen"; while narratives of becoming engaged as citizens inside were evident for some, these were often shared alongside a broader sense of exclusion.

While enfranchisement of prisoners in Ireland constituted a significant change in formal citizenship rights, there were also limitations to this being experienced as meaningful. While Thomas highlighted the vote as indicative of citizenship, issues accessing voting cards limited the meaning of this right for a few participants:

> "Thomas: I'm a citizen and I'm entitled to vote, but that said I was denied my vote at the recent elections. I never got my vote, and I'm registered to vote. AS: So what happened there then? Thomas: Just myself and a lot of the other prisoners didn't get our voting cards, so we didn't get to vote."

While narratives of becoming engaged as citizens inside were evident for some, these were often shared alongside a broader sense of exclusion.

This demonstrated that, even where formal indicators of citizenship exist, the day-to-day reality of prison had significant implications for whether this status was experienced in practice.

Continuation of missed citizenship

While some saw their political engagement shift during incarceration, this was not universal, with others identifying a continued perceived irrelevance of citizenship consistent with pre-prison lives. Adolescence is often viewed as a period for formulating a citizen-self, through socialisation into routines of democratic participation, and beginning to engage with citizenship acts through work and paying taxes.[30] While most participants responded with a sense of what citizenship meant to them, for a few who described experiences of social exclusion, growing up around crime, and negative/limited engagement with mainstream schooling, there was a sense of missed transitions to citizenship due to lack of exposure to, or opportunity for active citizenship participation:

> "When it comes to all that kinda stuff I'm not right clued up, you know cause I've been in jail all my life? Like my lifestyle's the jail lifestyle like. Citizen and all this, MP like…I'm not really clued up with it, miss. I'm behind all that! I've never been to school and that, me. Everything I've learnt in education, it's been in jail!"

For Jayden (England), imprisoned in his teens, citizenship held little subjective relevance, which he identified as due to lacking relevant education. While citizenship education features in schools in some Irish prisons,[31] there is limited citizenship education provision in English prisons. Further, through his continued incarceration up to and beyond voting age, he had never experienced the opportunity to participate in the democratic process, not developing a sense of citizenship through this practice. Youth studies literature highlights adolescence as a key period for transition to citizenship, and for participants who spent this time inside this was a stolen transition, through separation from society and mainstream education during formative years. Despite differences in formal enfranchisement, this sense of irrelevance, lack of understanding, and exclusion from citizenship[32] was also evident amongst some Irish participants, where prison had been a feature of life since youth. This was reflected by Luke, excluded from school as a child and then imprisoned as a teenager, in answer to the question of whether he had ever voted:

> "Never Miss, no. […] I don't understand it. I literally don't understand it - Fianna Fáil, the

28. Behan, C., & O'Donnell, I. (2008). Prisoners, politics and the polls: Enfranchisement and the burden of responsibility. *British Journal of Criminology, 48*(3), 319-336.
29. Turner, J. (2015). (En)gendering the political: Citizenship from marginal spaces. *Citizenship Studies, 20*(2), 141-155.
30. See footnote 8: Smith et al. (2005).
31. Behan, C. (2021). Education in prison: *A literature review.* UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.

> Dáil and ...it's not even the Dáil it's Fianna Fáil, Fianna Gael and you know stuff...I just don't get it, I don't. Yeah. Well I'd love to be able to understand it you know? But if I voted, my vote wouldn't matter, you know what I mean?"

Consequently the 'devaluing' of citizenship, that disenfranchisement has been argued to symbolise,[33] was not experienced as new but a more formalised continuation of exclusion from political processes perceived as irrelevant in Jayden and Luke's lives. This complicates understandings of incarceration as fundamentally changing citizenship identification. Instead, these responses suggested continuation or solidification of an existing sense of exclusion, demonstrating the importance of considering continuity, as well as change, when exploring citizenship identities.[34]

Disruption and forgetting of meaningful citizenship

While some participants focused on current or forthcoming orientations to citizenship, others considered imprisonment to have altered perceptions of their former status or required the pausing of previous citizenship contributions. Jake (Ireland), felt his prior good deeds protecting others, and fulfilling acts of 'good citizenship' in his area, were overshadowed by his incarceration:

> "Like, likes of me, like I contribute. I stopped...I took down a load of websites from ISIS, I helped people with their bank cards that got robbed...you know? Telling them to cancel it and get a new one and all, so…I even were good on the outside like if I see dirt on the street I'll pick it up, put it in the bin like. You know? Once you're in jail, you're looked at as a scumbag."

These men felt a 'master-status',[35] of prisoner or criminal, had overwritten previous citizenship and undone any acknowledgement of positive contributions. Their experience was thus one of disrupted citizenship, along with a sense that memory of former citizenship contributions was being tarnished. For a small number it was not simply that they felt currently denied citizenship, or their previous contributions were forgotten or disrupted, but that good citizenship was being undone/destroyed through their absence and inability to make contact to coordinate maintenance of their businesses from inside:[36] "I've still not managed to get my credit cards out, and that's imperative because that's got a knock on effect. My company can't pay bills, other people are wanting to be paid…". For Theo (England), there was a sense this good was hindered, and potential harm done through losses for others, due to his inability to maintain these contributions. Thus, it was not only the case that one's citizenship contributions were halted, but that potential damage was being done to such prior contributions through the passing of time without the ability to minimise damage or prevent their destruction.

Transient moments of feeling more or less like a 'citizen'

While some felt there was "just no way" (Owen, England) individuals could feel more like 'citizens' during imprisonment, incarceration involving an integral denial of choice, acknowledgement of individuality, or dignity, for many a broader sense of exclusion from meaningful citizenship could be punctuated by moments of feeling 'more like' a citizen. The majority of such instances related to 'normal' experiences inside, acknowledgement of individuality, or opportunities to exercise autonomy. Some identified experiencing connections with life outside as the times they felt 'most' like citizens, such as "when the Angelus come on at the 6 o'clock news (Thomas, Ireland), or "when you could contribute" to discussions about life outside, as opposed to not being able to contribute being the 'least' (Alex, England). Most often, however, examples raised were about treatment by others, often uniformed or civilian staff. Rory (England) highlighted being treated as an individual by officers as when he felt most like a citizen:

> "Like talking to the SOs [Supervising Officers] on a level, like you know like they treat you like you're a friend. Like they'll come in't office and give me a packet of biscuits or summit. Dya know, just like me - out of everyone they'll pull me in the office and say "Oh here, Rory, I wanna talk to you about PID [Prisoner Information Desk]"...and then they'll throw me a pack of biscuits and say "go on then, on your way". So...you feel like aww

32. Hall, T., Coffey, A., & Williamson, H. (2006). Self, space and place: Youth identities and citizenship. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 4,* 501-513.
33. See footnote 28: Behan & O'Donnell (2008).
34. See footnote 7: Wood (2017).
35. Goffman, E. (1963) *Stigma: notes on the management of spoiled identity.* Simon & Schuster Inc.
36. See footnote 21: Stark (2022).

that's nice. It's like they're giving you something back. And then they have a laugh with you. They chat to you."

Contrastingly, it was when treated as a "standard basic prisoner" and staff "forget that you're that person" that Rory felt least like a citizen, highlighting the significance of individuality being recognised for a sense of citizenship. Numerous participants noted the significance of meaningful interactions with staff for a sense of citizenship, as Sam (England) said when asked when he felt 'most' like a citizen: "it'd be when I have those 1-to-1 chats with the officers". Both Rory and Sam's comments highlighted how they felt most like a citizen, when *treated* like a 'citizen' as opposed to a 'prisoner'. Sam also highlighted how the significance of interactions with others for one's sense of citizenship meant their feeling of being a citizen or not, at any point, could be determined by who they were speaking to:

"Sam: Erm… to some degree. I believe I am a citizen to certain prisoners, yeah…to prisoners yes, to officers no."

AS: OK, why is that?

Sam: "Well cause prison officers don't necessarily see the things you're doing are good. Like when people borrow tobacco in here, and they end up owing double...Then if I lend out tobacco the prison officers don't see that I'm not doing the same as the other guys. I'm actually doing it to try and stop the lads doing it cause they can't afford to buy it and are always in debt, but it's assumed that I'm doing the same."

Numerous participants noted the significance of meaningful interactions with staff for a sense of citizenship

Thus there was a sense that citizenship is in the eye of the beholder, and within their gift of how they choose to treat the individual, being fundamentally about how one is perceived by others.[37] For some, it was when in the school environment, viewed differently to the rest of the prison, that they felt most like citizens, due to the nature of interactions with teachers in this space, described by Ciaran (Ireland):

"At the school I'd feel a bit more like a citizen. The teachers call you by your first name and it's a bit more relaxed. Teachers might talk a bit about their personal life whereas if a prison officer asked about my kids, I couldn't ask back… he'd probably say it was none of my business because it's a security breach. The school is more down to earth, more normal. It makes you feel like you're not in prison for a few hours."

These comments reflected the belonging and trust that can be strengthened through generation of pedagogical capital in prison classrooms,[38] and highlighted how one's sense of citizenship may also be spatially differentiated, with the classroom as an 'escape' from the prison.[39] In contrast to these instances of meaningful interaction, acknowledgement of individuality and more 'relaxed' interactions, many participants identified elements of the regimes where denial of autonomy was most pronounced as making them feel less like a citizen. Aiden (England) identified "when they strip-search you" as when he felt least like a citizen, noting its "invasive" nature, while Max (Ireland) highlighted "when the door is banged out" on his cell as when exclusion felt most pronounced. Participants' reflections on feeling more or less like citizens demonstrate the differentiated nature of feelings of citizenship, as well as the significance of relationships, interaction and autonomy for enabling broader experiences of exclusion to be punctuated with moments evoking a sense of citizenship.

Reframed 'prison citizenship'

While discussion thus far has considered transition, or continuity, in individuals' sense of citizenship, for some participants the meaning of citizenship also changed during incarceration; there was not only a pause in citizenship status, but a reframing of how citizenship was understood as meaningful, to signal a sense of inclusion within the institution: "Yeah. I'm a citizen yeah. Of the prison . . . So like, I'm a citizen

37. See footnote 8: Smith et al. (2005).
38. Little, R., & Warr, J. (2022). Abstraction, belonging and comfort in the prison classroom. *Incarceration, 3*(3), 1-21.
39. Behan, C. (2014). Learning to escape: Prison education, rehabilitation and the potential for transformation. *Journal of Prison Education & Reentry, 1*(1), 20-31.

inside these grounds. I'm not a citizen outside" (Cillian, Ireland).

This kind of citizenship identified, described as being a "prison citizen" (Conor, Ireland) or experiencing "a different citizenship. Jail citizenship" (Adam, England), also held a distinct meaning in what it entailed, including compliance with the regime. Ryan (Ireland) described this, saying citizenship inside means "three things: abiding by the rules of the prison; being the best I can; and doing good for others", while Adam (England) understood jail citizenship as "being under that thumb innit, in a sense." The meaning of citizenship changed from one centred on belonging, contributing to, and having a non-prisoner identity within a self-defined community, to being focused on compliance with the regime, 'fitting in' in prison, and seeking to do good, speaking to notions of rehabilitation. This emphasis on compliance as central to citizenship, echoed Crewe's findings that the oppressive impact of psychological power in prisons led to "inhuman" or "robotic" expectations of responsible citizenship, beyond passive compliance (p.133).[40] For some, prison citizenship indicated a greater sense of acceptance or inclusion within prison, than outside: "Erm…[I'm] a prison citizen, yeah [laughs]. Well you know, I think I belong in prison more than I do…not belong but…I'm more accepted in here than I would be outside maybe" (Conor, Ireland).

Many participants identified elements of the regimes where denial of autonomy was most pronounced as making them feel less like a citizen.

This sense of prison citizenship as belonging or acceptance within the prison environment echoed Schinkel and Lives Sentenced Participants' findings that, for those experiencing persistent short-term imprisonment, accumulated sentences meant individuals became increasingly displaced from the outside world and their sense of belonging inside was "enhanced (or exacerbated?)" (p.14).[41] Other participants, however, actively resisted a sense of belonging, suggesting an intrinsic connection drawn between the concept of citizenship as belonging within prison and institutionalisation. This was illustrated in Blake's (England) response when asked whether he belonged to a community: "Na I'm not institutionalised me. I class this as I'm in transit, me! I never make this place home…Once you make it home it's game over."

Blake's reflections suggest that, within the context of prison, notions of citizenship and belonging have the potential to hold more negative connotations and be indicative of one's identity being taken over by the institution. On this basis, Blake's assertion that he is "in transit" suggests that – within this morphed understanding of citizenship – he is wilfully taking the position of a passing visitor, resisting a sense of prison as "real life" (p.11) due to fear of negative implications.[42]

Conclusion

Just as reintegration is understood as "both an event and a process" (p.23),[43] so too can the denial or fulfilment of meaningful citizenship. While the event of one's denial of liberty brings immediate formal consequences for citizenship rights, widely discussed in relation to prisoner disenfranchisement, the ways meaningful citizenship is either eroded or developed over time, or its denial sustained, are complex and changeable over the course of incarceration. Consequently, prison should be understood as a space where citizenship identities and understandings are constituted and reconstituted through interactions, with messages of inclusion or exclusion, formal or informal, implicit in these interactions and the regime. This demonstrates that if meaningful citizenship is to be encouraged for those in prison, not only are the formal granting of rights or initiatives to reduce stigma and enhance opportunities on release required, but also an emphasis on treating individuals as citizens rather than prisoners in everyday interactions, with acknowledgement of the individual person in staff-prisoner relations being crucial.

As also argued in relation to youth transitions, it is posited that, in considering the subjective citizenship experiences of imprisoned men, discussion must move

40. Crewe, B. (2009). *The Prisoner Society: Power, Adaptation, and Social Life in an English Prison.* Oxford University Press.
41. Schinkel, M., & Lives Sentenced Participants. (2021). Persistent short-term imprisonment: Belonging as a lens to understand its shifting meanings over the life course. *Incarceration, 2*(1), 1-20.
42. See footnote 41: Schinkel & Lives Sentenced Participants (2021, p.11).
43. Maruna, S., Immarigeon, R., & LeBel, T. (2004). Ex-offender reintegration: theory and practice. In S. Maruna and R. Immarigeon. (Eds.), *After Crime and Punishment: Pathways to Offender Reintegration* (pp. 3-26). Willan Publishing.

beyond linear narratives of *becoming* citizens and disrupt the static binary in observations of (non)citizenship in the present, through a more "temporally, spatially and relationally-sensitive" (p.1177) understanding of everyday experiences as 'citizens-in-transition'.[44] Doing so can illuminate the fluid nature of citizenship identification during imprisonment, which may be in flux, with feeling more or less like a citizen impacted by both broader structural, institutional influences, and everyday interactions. Stern argues prison policy often strengthens an identity of 'criminal' over 'citizen',[45] and this research illustrates that within prison the very meaning of citizenship is reframed, holding distinct, contextually-specific connotations not reflective of a meaningful sense of citizenship with relevance for life outside. Acknowledging this multiplicity of citizenship definitions can better illuminate the simultaneous experiences of a sense of being, becoming, or being excluded from, distinct notions of citizenship, thus reflecting the complexity of imprisoned men's subjective experiences. While the significance of these subtle shifts in citizenship for imprisoned men, and the non-linear experience of feeling more or less like a citizen, have been identified as themes in this broader study, it is a limitation of this research that reflections on citizenship (and transitions in relation to this notion) have been explored at only one fixed point in time. As such, further research focused explicitly on the experience of transition, change and continuity in citizenship, and considering individuals' situated views of their citizenship over time through longitudinal research, would be beneficial to provide deeper understanding of transitions in subjective everyday citizenship for those subject to penal sanctions. Given the significance of individuals' self-identity generally,[46] and specifically as citizens,[47] for journeys away from crime, such deeper understanding of what cultivates a sense of citizenship and how this changes (or not) during one's imprisonment, may have implications for informing ways desistance can be supported through encouraging moments of feeling 'more like' citizens in people's daily lives.

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44. See footnote 7: Wood (2017, p.1177).
45. Stern, V. (2002). Prisoners as citizens: a comparative view. *Probation Journal, 49*(2), 130-139.
46. Farrall, S. (2005). On the existential aspects of desistance from crime. *Symbolic Interaction, 28,* 367-386; Vaughan, B. (2007). The internal narratives of desistance. *British Journal of Criminology, 47,* 390-404; Maruna, S. (2001). *Making good: How ex-convicts reform and rebuild their lives.* American Psychological Association; Paternoster, R., & Bushway, S. (2009). Desistance and the 'feared self': Toward an identity theory of criminal desistance. J*ournal of Criminal Law & Criminology, 99,* 1103-1156; Stone, R. (2016). Desistance and identity repair: Redemption narratives as resistance to stigma. B*ritish Journal of Criminology, 56*(5), 956-975.
47. Farrall, S., Hunter, B., Sharpe, G., & Calverley, A. (2014). *Criminal careers in transition: the social context of desistance from crime.* Oxford University Press.

Multilayered institutional thoughtlessness: A case study of the transition from being a deaf prison officer to being imprisoned[1]

Dr Laura Kelly-Corless *is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Lancashire (formerly University of Central Lancashire (UCLan).* ***Dr Daniel McCulloch*** *is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology and Social Policy at The Open University.*

In recent years, understanding about the lives of imprisoned d/Deaf people in England and Wales has increased significantly,[2] with evidence showing that the pains of imprisonment can be intensified for this population.[3] However, to date, there is little known about what it is like to work in prison as a d/Deaf person. This article takes the form of a case study about an audiologically deaf person who was employed as a prison officer in England, presenting detailed findings about their experience of this role. While this alone would offer significant and previously unavailable insight, adding further depth to the findings is the fact this individual, known here as 'Ashley' then went onto be convicted and imprisoned. Their experience of both roles allowed for a rich discussion about their experience of transitioning from one to the other, the parallels between the two, and the impact of their former role (prison officer) on their latter position (imprisoned person). Perhaps most fundamentally of all, it was clear that for Ashley both experiences were shaped by being deaf, and that prison was "institutionally thoughtless" (p.350) regarding their deafness,[4] irrespective of their position within the prison.

Firstly, we provide some context about the broader study that Ashley was part of, including its research design. We then offer a brief outline of relevant literature, before moving on to present key findings from Ashley's interview, including their experience as a deaf prison officer, their experience as an imprisoned deaf person and the transition between the positions and their relative impacts. These findings will be situated within a broader discussion about the Prison Service's ability to meet the needs of a deaf person, regardless of their position.

The research

In this article, Ashley's experiences are presented as a form of case study. By case study, we mean the study of a single person or phenomenon.[5] In this instance, Ashley's experience represents what might be called an 'outlier' case,[6] that is a case that is interesting because it is unusual. While we are aware that the use of a single case means that findings are specific to this person's reality, the aim of this paper is not to provide a generalisable set of findings. Instead, it offers significant insight into a previously undiscussed phenomenon, and the paper gives sufficient space to present an in-depth account of this unusual experience. In doing so, we draw out its contribution to existing understandings both about deafness in prison, and about the transition from staff to imprisoned person. The findings presented cover a continuous seven-year period within the 2010s and 2020s.

These findings came from a larger British Academy project focused on the experiences of d/Deaf people after their release from prison. As part of the project,

1. Due to the sensitive nature of the data, it cannot be shared publicly. A metadata-only record has been created in Lancashire Online Research Data, and access is restricted.
2. The small 'd' here relates to the audiological condition, measured on a spectrum according to the quietest sound and types of sounds that an individual can hear, whereas the capital 'D' includes culturally and linguistically Deaf people, who value their Deafness and often communicate via British Sign Language (BSL) (Hearing Link. (2021). *Deafness & hearing loss facts.* https://www.hearinglink.org/your-hearing/about-hearing/facts-about-deafness-hearing-loss/). This article focuses on audiological deafness; however, d/D is used in instances where findings have been specified by authors to relate to Deaf people as well.
3. See, for example: Kelly, L. (2017). Suffering in silence: The unmet needs of d/Deaf prisoners. *Prison Service Journal, 234,* 3–15; McCulloch, D. (2012). *Not hearing us: An exploration of the experience of deaf prisoners in English and Welsh prisons.* Howard League for Penal Reform.
4. Crawley, E. (2005). Institutional thoughtlessness in prisons and its impacts on the day-to-day prison lives of elderly men. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice, 21*(4), 350–363.
5. Thomas, G., & Myers, K. (2015). *The Anatomy of the Case Study.* Sage.
6. See footnote 4: Thomas, G. & Myers, K. (2015).

semi-structured interviews were carried out with a sample of 18 participants, 12 being service providers and 6 being formerly imprisoned d/Deaf people. Ashley participated in this research in the context of talking about their imprisonment and their release from prison, as an audiologically deaf person who wears hearing aids in both ears. It only came to light during the interview that they had been a prison officer prior to being imprisoned. Ashley's interview took place on Microsoft Teams and was around 90 minutes long. It was recorded using the Teams recording tool, was transcribed as close to verbatim as possible, and analysed thematically. While much of the content of Ashley's interview correlated with themes from other interviews, having experience of both roles and transitioning between roles were unique within the sample.

Ethical clearance for the project was awarded by the University of Central Lancashire in 2022, and all relevant ethical guidelines were adhered to throughout. To minimise the risk of participants being identified, we provided pseudonyms for each participant and removed other obvious identifiable characteristics. However, when we initially discussed this paper, we were mindful that its sole focus on Ashley might make them more identifiable. Accordingly, we contacted Ashley, clearly stating the intended focus of the paper, and the potential issue of them becoming identifiable. Ashley replied, stating:

> "I'm happy to be left relatively unidentified, although it doesn't really matter if someone works out it was me! My experience as an officer probably affected my follow up experience as a prisoner, as I had insider knowledge, which a new inmate would not normally have."

Ashley read through a draft of the article, was given an opportunity to suggest changes and went onto confirm that they were "100% happy with what you have written". Despite their support of the article, we remained mindful that d/Deaf people can experience sharpened stigma following release from prison.[7] Thus, we took steps to maximise their anonymity in case they wish for greater anonymity in the future.

Existing literature

There is no information available about how many deaf staff members there are across His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). However, through contact with HMPPS about these issues, we are aware that there are individuals currently working in the organisation who are audiologically deaf.[8]

Despite this, there is no academic literature available about this group. This contrasts with literature about the lives of imprisoned deaf people, which is limited but growing. Existing literature shows that this population experience greater pain and suffering within prison compared to imprisoned hearing people,[9] and that HMPPS is not meeting their needs or the conditions of relevant equality law.[10]

However, to date, there is little known about what it is like to work in prison as a d/Deaf person.

The prison environment and regime are oriented around sound and sound-based communication.[11,12] Therefore, to engage meaningfully deaf individuals need access to an array of sound converting resources and adjustments, and to staff who have awareness of their needs and inclination/capacity to support them. However, in reality, such adaptations in prisons are at best inconsistent and at worst non-existent, with reasons for this including a lack of awareness, motivation or resources on the part of individual officers or the service more generally.[13] Existing evidence shows that the Prison Service is "institutionally thoughtless" (p.350) in relation the needs of imprisoned deaf people,[14,15] something which is important to this article. Institutional thoughtlessness refers to the ways that prisons are inadvertently (rather

7. Kelly-Corless, L., & McCulloch, D. (2024). *Deaf after prison: Guidance for practitioners in supporting Deaf people post-release.* University of Central Lancashire and The Open University.
8. As well as audiologically deaf staff members, there are also culturally and linguistically Deaf staff members.
9. Zidenberg, A. M. (2021). Avoiding the deaf penalty: A review of the experiences of d/Deaf individuals in the criminal justice system. *Disability & Society, 38*(5), 824–864.
10. For detailed insight into the lives of d/Deaf people in prisons in England and Wales, see: Kelly, L. (2017). Suffering in silence: The unmet needs of d/Deaf prisoners. *Prison Service Journal, 234,* 3–15.
11. Herrity, K. (2024). *Sound, Order and Survival in Prison: The Rhythms and Routines of HMP Midtown.* Bristol University Press.
12. See footnote 9: Kelly, L. (2017).
13. Kelly, L. M. (2018). Sounding out d/Deafness: The Experiences of d/Deaf Prisoners. *Journal of Criminal Psychology, 8*(1), 20–32.
14. See footnote 3: Crawley, E. (2005).
15. Kelly-Corless, L., & McCarthy, H. (2024). Moving Beyond the Impasse: Importation, Deprivation, and Difference in Prisons. *The Prison Journal, 105*(1), 62-83.

than intentionally) ignorant of the needs of those who differ from the 'expected' imprisoned population of young able-bodied, hearing, English speaking, males.[16]

Prison was initially designed for this 'expected' group, and policy, culture and practice tend to be framed around them. Consequently, 'different' populations can experience additional layers of pain as an outcome of their deviation from the 'norm'.[17] However, this individual suffering is often of little consequence to the prison, where in some instances, making changes to meet different needs can be seen as a burden or as preferential treatment.[18] In the context of deafness, this means that individuals tend to become isolated from prison life and to be confused about rules, procedures and formal/informal expectations.[19] While prison experiences often vary significantly based on the type of prison that someone is confined within, the fact that their deafness is a characteristic that differs so significantly from what is expected in prison means that "isolation from the regime that becomes the defining experiential feature, rather than the regime itself" (p.76).[20] Later we consider how these experiences compare with those of Ashley, drawing out similarities and differences, and exploring whether their former position as prison officer impacted their transition to imprisoned person.

When conducting the literature search, we were able to locate relevant academic sources focusing on reasons why prison staff may engage in corrupt behaviour that could lead to arrest,[21] and multiple news articles highlighting cases where an officer was arrested and imprisoned.[22] However, we could not find any research studies about the imprisonment of former prison officers, instead drawing on literature about the roles, experiences of and interactions between prison officers and imprisoned people more generally. The role of power is a key theme within this body of work, with discussion around the power disparity that exists between prison officers and imprisoned people being a well-trodden path for prison scholars.[23] Imprisoned people are deprived of autonomy by very nature of their role,[24] with their everyday lives in prison being dictated (in many ways) by prison staff, who hold a degree of institutional power, as an outcome of their position. While staff members do have more institutional power than imprisoned people because of their role within the prison, recent research has highlighted nuances in relation to this. For example, Harrison, Mason, Nichols and Smith (2024) have shown that staff too can feel deprived of autonomy at work and feel powerless to make meaningful decisions.[25] This case study contributes to existing understanding here by exploring whether this relative position of power made it easier for Ashley to secure the required adjustments during their time as a staff member, and whether this prior experience impacted their experience as a prisoner, a position of relative powerlessness.

Findings

Being a deaf prison officer

Ashley discussed their experience as a prison officer at length in the interview. They felt that there was a lack of deaf awareness on the part of other staff and the Prison Service more generally, highlighting their own experience of staff training:

> "When I did my prison officer training, it was never touched upon. We were given a little bit of training as to how to deal with people that maybe have physical disabilities. How to ensure that steps are put into place to for them to be able to live, you know, as normally with access to all the facilities as anyone else. There's pretty good training on understanding a bit about different mental health issues, but none whatsoever about people with hearing problems. It's it just seems a shame. It's a silent problem, you know?"

Ashley alluded repeatedly to the fact that any adjustments for their deafness came about through their own persistence in response to a place of work that was institutionally thoughtless as to their needs:

16. See footnote 3: Crawley, E. (2005).
17. Abbott L., Scott T., & Thomas, H. (2024). Institutional thoughtlessness and the incarcerated pregnancy. *Criminology & Criminal Justice, 0*(0), 1–19.
18. Kelly-Corless, L. (2022). No longer free to be Deaf: Cultural, medical and social understandings of d/Deafness in prison. *Disability & Society, 39*(6), 1–22.
19. See footnote 9: Kelly, L. (2017).
20. See footnote 14: Kelly-Corless, L., & McCarthy, H. (2024).
21. Frow-Hones, B. (2024). *Prison Staff Wrongdoing: An Exploratory Study [*Doctoral Dissertation]. University of Cardiff.
22. For example: BBC News. (2025, May 13). *Prison officer jailed over affair with inmate.* https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4grz022lvyo
23. See, for example: Crewe, B. (2009). *The Prisoner Society: Power, Adaptation and Social Life in an English Prison.* Oxford University Press.
24. Sykes, G. M. (1958). *The Society of Captives: A study of a maximum security prison.* Princeton University Press.
25. Harrison, K., Mason, R., Nichols, H., & Smith, L. (2024). *Work, Culture, and Wellbeing Among Prison Governors in England and Wales.* Palgrave Macmillan.

"In the very first instance, when my hearing aids were changed to be the digital version and with the ability to be Bluetooth, security at the jail were unsure as to whether or not they were going to allow me to wear them in for my job. I… kept pushing it back at them. I just basically gave a flat refusal to remove them at any point and said, you know, if you, if you're telling me I can't come in to work with my hearing aids in, then I will simply go off sick until you resolve this. So, through my sort of tenacity, I suppose, stubbornness, I kind of made the system work with me and but it's kind of because there's no system in place. It's just piecemeal. It's made up as they go along just to resolve that one issue in front of them. I was the problem, so they dealt with me. There was never any mention of making sure policies were better written, better understood, more available, nothing"

There's pretty good training on understanding a bit about different mental health issues, but none whatsoever about people with hearing problems.

They followed this up by saying:

"The radio system they used was an in-ear system, so I used to take one of my hearing aids out and have my radio in one ear. And there was no help given to me to ensure that my safety as an officer was the same as someone else's, let alone then any of the inmates. But I did know that if you start saying words like disability discrimination and you say it loud enough, people will then just panic and tend to just go 'oh, whatever you need', so I was confident enough that if it came to it, I could push through… You know when you push it, then you'll get that teeny result, but there's no bigger picture and there no planning. You would have thought when dealing with me that the jail would have thought maybe we should just write this down, so we know in the future. But yeah, there is too much effort involved."

These findings show a difference between Ashley's experience as a staff member, and those of imprisoned deaf people in existing literature, in that although the institution was not set up to meet Ashley's needs, their position meant that they were able to successfully argue for some support in a way that an imprisoned person usually cannot. Although these issues were resolved in Ashley's case, these quotes expose institutional rigidity and an unwillingness to make changes to the service at an institutional level to meet deaf people's needs in prisons, suggesting institutional thoughtlessness in relation to deaf staff members as well.[26]

Becoming imprisoned and navigating the transition

Ashley reflected significantly on how their experience changed once they were convicted, and thus transitioned from being a staff member to an imprisoned person. On this, they said:

"I think the one time that it becomes really prisoner specific is that in jail you have no control over changing that situation yourself. So, you have to rely on staff who are prepared to help… to look things up, to see if there's any more support. You are punished in jail for being different in any way, whatever it is that you've got that's different if it involves any deviation from standard, then your kind of punished for it because it's an effort"

Clearly then, a key difference for Ashley was the 'deprivation of autonomy' that they felt whilst imprisoned.[27] While this is a fundamental pain of imprisonment, this quote shows that this deprivation is felt in different ways when somebody does not fit what is 'expected' in prison and has to rely on staff members for changes to be made, something which maps onto findings from Kelly-Corless and McCarthy (2024) and Abbott, Scott and Thomas (2024).[28,29] They detailed many of the same experiences reported in other literature by imprisoned deaf people. For example, they discussed the importance of the role of sound in prisons,[30] and the problems this caused:

26. See also, Wilson, M., Johnston, H., & Walker, L. (2020). 'It was like an animal in pain': Institutional thoughtlessness and experiences of bereavement in prison. *Criminology & Criminal Justice, 22*(1), 150-170.
27. See footnote 23: Sykes, G. M. (1958).
28. See footnote 14: Kelly-Corless, L. & McCarthy, H. (2024).
29. See footnote 16: Abbott, L., Scott, T., & Thomas, H. (2024).
30. See footnote 10: Herrity, K. (2024).

> "They used to use tannoy system to call prisoners to the office. When I was first put in a room where the tannoy was poor anyway. The other[s]… couldn't hear it either, and so I went to the office and said please be aware that if you need to speak to me at any point the tannoy is not going to work. Someone will have to come and get me, and it was written down somewhere and then ignored. Promptly ignored"

While this quote again emphasises the lack of will to support those who are different, Ashley said that their previous experience as a staff member helped them to navigate this, thus lessening the extent of the issues they faced once imprisoned. They discussed at length their experience of entering prison, where they had their hearing aids taken from them and placed into prison storage, leading to a period without access to them. Below they discuss how they sought to navigate this, using their 'insider knowledge' (as a former prison officer) to do so:[31]

> "I was aware that there are obviously certain rights for those with disabilities having worked the other side of the door with the keys instead. So, I said to them, well, first of all, you haven't written me a personal evacuation plan, which you're legally obliged to do... When I was about to have my door locked after being counted that evening, I said to the officer I need … the form for a disciplinary and a disability discrimination report form thing… and he said, 'Why? What have we done?', and I said, 'You're not giving me my hearing aid batteries'. In the end I essentially did a deal with the officer. I said, 'You give me the form and I will give it back to you unwritten when you hand me the hearing aid batteries, if you don't get them to me before I go to bed tonight, I will be submitting the form'... Eventually he went off and got them from my property and handed them over, to which I handed him back an unwritten form. But I had to remind them, I said, 'Are you comfortable that you will be sending me to bed tonight knowing that I won't hear any fire alarms or whatever? Go on and if you're comfortable with that then that's absolutely fine, but let's just make sure that's recorded'. So, in the end, they made it happen, but it became a source of constant and anxiety for me really because if my hearing aid batteries were to run out in the morning, I wouldn't be able to get replacements for them until the evening. But for those who had no previous experience of a prison, it would have been incredibly scary to be told you can't have your hearing aids and not know that actually they're able to say yes, I can…. I'm sure it's even worse for those that need to communicate in sign language"

Even with this insider knowledge, Ashley reported feeling that trying to get any changes made that they were legally entitled to, was a "constant battle", where their needs were consistently disregarded. This is a clear example of institutional thoughtlessness, where their needs are not necessarily intentionally ignored, but instead, are not taken seriously.

Trying to get any changes made that they were legally entitled to, was a "constant battle"

Ashley discussed being particularly vulnerable as an imprisoned former prison officer. Their vulnerability was exacerbated further by not having access to necessary equipment (such as hearing aid batteries):

> "In jail you feel vulnerable enough, and I mean for myself, slightly different going in as an ex-prison officer, I was already in a vulnerable situation and to feel that at times you're not gonna be as aware of what's going on around you because you're not being helped to keep the equipment that you've been provided"

During their interview Ashley also discussed their experience of leaving prison, stating, "I didn't really expect any support in the move to being released, and so therefore I wasn't surprised that that I got none". This indicates that their former (prison officer) position exposed them to the failings of HMPPS in supporting imprisoned people, thus tempering any expectations they had for their time as an imprisoned person. They also suggested that any positive change or support that did exist usually came about because of individual staff

30. See footnote 10: Herrity, K. (2024).
31. Jones, R. S. (1995). Uncovering the Hidden Social World: Insider Research in Prison. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice, 11*(2), 106-118.

members going above and beyond the norm, rather than any broader institutional support:

> "I saw no evidence of anything progressive happening, and also that depends on the characters in a jail… If you happen to have a custodial manager who is keen to get his or her staff well trained and well versed in all the different aspects of life that they might come across and then maybe they would arrange every now and again a sort of training session, and you might be lucky at some point."

Multi-layered institutional thoughtlessness

Ashley's unusual position as someone with experience of being a prison officer, an imprisoned person and a deaf person, meant that they were able to reflect about their institutional experience in a multi-layered way:

> "The whole system is not well adapted. So whatever angle you're looking at, whether you're a visitor and a prisoner, a prison officer, someone being released or then someone on probation, it just doesn't get any easier"

"It's not so much that it's because you're the prisoner as just because you're bloody needy."

While it was clear that during their time as an imprisoned person, they were subject to an array of extra difficulties because of their status, they were resolute in the perception that there is little space for any sort of difference in prison (such as deafness), stating, "I did get the impression that it's not so much that it's because you're the prisoner as just because you're bloody needy. You know 'Oh, that one again!', so it's more that than the sort of anti-prisoner thing". Adding further weight to this is the fact that Ashley had a family member was also deaf, who required adjustments to be made during visitations times:

> "I also highlighted that my family member was visiting and who has hearing aids and that they would require some support, and again that was missed off. I got my family member to actually write a formal complaint for them as the visitor because I said, 'If you wanna mess me around, that's fine, but don't be disrespectful to my family member's requirements'... So, it shows that it wasn't about me being a prisoner in that situation. It was that that request would have taken a little bit of individual dealing with and therefore was just ignored"

This suggests therefore that the Prison Service is institutionally thoughtless to the rights and needs of deaf visitors too. This is further evidence of the ways in which the Prison Service fails to adapt to meet the needs of people who are 'different' from the 'expected' person within the prison, regardless of their relationship with the prison.

Although there are some similarities between the experience of being a prison officer and being imprisoned, there are also some differences. For example, as both a prison officer and imprisoned person, Ashley challenged the prison's lack of adaptation for their needs. However, the exact way of challenging the prison differed as a prison officer (through threat of sick leave) compared to being an imprisoned person (threat of complaint about the prison). Yet, both experiences highlight that in relation to deaf people, there can be piecemeal change, but that there is often a lack of wider institutional strategy or planning. Ashley summarised this well, saying that "It is just an area that's very lacking and is dealt with on a 'when it crops up, we'll deal with it' kind of thing."

In these ways, institutional thoughtlessness exists at multiple levels, affecting prison officers and imprisoned people (as well as visitors to prisons).

Discussion and conclusion

Ashley's case study offers numerous significant insights in relation to transitions in prisons. Firstly, in relation to 'difference' and transitions, Ashley's account highlights the ways in which 'difference' is disempowering within prisons, regardless of status. Their account as a former prison officer, former imprisoned person, and as someone who had a deaf visitor highlights that institutional thoughtlessness persists regardless of the position held within the prison. Thus, the effect of 'difference' cuts across the experience of transition from prison officer to imprisoned person.

Secondly and relatedly, Ashley's account offers new developments in understanding about power and transitions within the prison environment. Even as a prison officer, a position of relative power within a

prison, their power to challenge the prison was very limited, because of the power that prisons hold over those who occupy them, regardless of their role. This corroborates other studies which have demonstrated that staff commonly feel a lack of control over their lives in prison, despite the perceived power associated with their role.[32] However, although they had limited power as a prison officer, they had to rapidly adjust to having much less power as an imprisoned person as part of their transition.

Thirdly, Ashley's account highlights the ways in which they managed their transition from prison officer to imprisoned person. Significantly, it highlights the ways in which their experience of being a prison officer made a difference in their management of this transition. For example, Ashley's account shows that managing as a deaf imprisoned person was made less difficult by knowing their rights and the recourse for complaints (which they knew because of their experience as a prison officer.) Furthermore, in both positions Ashley used ultimatums of different sorts to 'push' for the adaptations that they needed, in line with the power they had available to them within each role. As a prison officer, this was the threat of going on sick leave if their workplace was unable to adapt to meet their needs, whilst as an imprisoned person, it was the threat of a complaint being made about the prison. In this sense, their prison officer experiences gave them 'insider' knowledge that most imprisoned people (as 'outsiders' to the workings of the prison) might not have. Thus, prior experience of prison as a prison officer shaped Ashley's transition to becoming an imprisoned person, and to some extent mitigated the disempowerment they experienced when they became imprisoned.

In relation to transitions, Ashley's experience highlights the ways in which difference, power, and understanding 'the system' all matter in understanding their transition between prison officer and imprisoned person. Furthermore, Ashley's case study reveals new insights about the ways in which 'difference' (in this context, deafness) is experienced within prisons as both a prison officer and imprisoned person, and the ways in which the transition from prison officer to imprisoned person is experienced as a deaf person. While it is unsurprising that many of Ashley's experiences as an imprisoned person align with findings from existing literature,[33] it is somewhat surprising that their experience of being a prison officer also showed such a degree of institutional thoughtlessness. Like other literature, this suggests that when someone deviates so significantly from what is expected in prison, their experience can become defined by this difference.[34]

Most fundamentally, Ashley's account clearly demonstrated that the Prison Service was not meeting their needs as a deaf person, irrespective of their position within the system (and to some degree, outside of the system, in the case of prison visitors). In this way, prisons are places of multilayered institutional thoughtlessness, with it affecting prison officers, imprisoned people and prison visitors. To address this, we recommend that HMPPS begins to make system-level changes to encourage the Prison Service to become more institutionally thoughtful. These include the creation of service level guidance for how to support a deaf person who comes into contact with the service; the roll out of national d/Deaf awareness training which is incorpoated into wider diversity training; and more effective and consistent recording of d/Deafness across the prison estate (both in relation to staff members and imprisoned people).[35] These steps will not solve all of the issues faced by deaf people within prisons and would only offer a relatively basic improvement in the experiences of this population. However, in our view, they are some of the most realistic and achievable steps currently.

This article provides significant new findings, about (i) the experiences of prison officers who become prisoners; (ii) the experiences of prison staff who are deaf; and (iii) the experience of transitioning between these roles as a deaf person. In each case, we believe this to be the first research publication in the UK to consider these issues. Whilst this case study presents innovative and new findings in relation to these issues, further research could provide deeper insights. Research which explores the experiences of deaf people working in prisons, as well as research about the experiences of prison officers who become prisoners, would have the potential to offer significant new developments in relation to knowledge about prisons and people within them.

32. See footnote 24: Harrison, K., Mason, R., Nichols, H., & Smith, L. (2024).
33. See footnote 8: Zidenberg, A. (2021).
34. See footnote 14: Kelly-Corless, L., & McCarthy, H. (2024).
35. d/Deafness is referred to in relation to recording mechanisms and training here, as being aware of the differences in the needs and behaviours of people at different points across the spectrum of d/Deafness is fundamental to the provision of appropriate support.

The HMPPS Settlement Model: Using regime activity to support people in prison during key transitions

Jennifer Stickney *and* ***Emma Holmes*** *are Consultant Occupational Therapists from the Offender Personality Disorder Pathway, working in partnership with the HMPPS Enable Programme,* ***Chris Gunderson*** *is Head of Transforming Organisational Delivery within the HMPPS Enable Programme.*[1]

This paper explores the three key transitional phases within a prison journey: entering prison, transitioning through prison and being released from prison. Entering prison is a significant life event. It is an abrupt change to life that can have a momentous and long-lasting impact on a person. Transitions within prison can be immensely destabilising, increasing a person's risk to themselves and others. Release from prison is often unexpectedly painful and challenging resulting in many struggling in the early days following release.[2] All three key transitional phases can be compounded by the prison population's vulnerability to adjustment difficulties.

In this paper the authors draw attention to the importance of understanding the needs of individuals and the value of the keyworker relationship to help inform how we can better support people to safely settle during these three key transitional times. They introduce The Settlement Model, and the tools used to operationalise this model. The Settlement Model is an initiative within the Enable Programme designed to use regime activity and Personalised Regime Plans (PRPs) to support the safe settlement and progression of people in prison.[3] The authors conclude this paper by discussing early findings from prototyping of personalised regime planning.

Adjustment challenges within the prison population

People in prison are arguably and ironically less resilient to the challenges of prison than people in the general population. It is well documented that childhood trauma is pervasive across the prison population, within all parts of the prison estate. Ford and colleagues highlight that almost half of people in prison report exposure to four or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).[4] Evidence identifies that exposure to ACEs and poor health can impact on a person's ability to successfully adapt to life changes and are risk factors in developing adjustment disorders later in life.[5] A higher-than-average proportion of people in prison have been through the care system.[6] These individuals, as well as many others within prison, have experienced disrupted attachments to primary care givers in the early years of life. This can affect how they think, process emotions, and behave across their life span.[7] Whilst there is limited exploration around the impact of attachment styles and adjusting to a prison setting, it stands to reason that early attachment experiences will affect how someone understands and responds to sudden and significant change, such as arriving in and transitioning through prison.

1. Since writing Chris Gunderson has moved to a new role: Head of Prison Implementation Programme for the Independent Sentencing Review (ISR).
2. Shingler, J., & Stickney, J. (2023). "I can see freedom but I can't have it": Supporting people in the immediate aftermath of release. I. J. Shingler & J. Stickney (Eds.) *The Journey from Prison to Community* (pp. 24-43). Routledge.
3. The Enable Programme is a HMPPS workforce transformation programme, which aims to transform prisons over the medium term, through a series of workforce and regime changes.
4. Ford, K., Barton, E., Newbury, A., Hughes, K., Bezeczky, Z., Roderick, J., & Bellis, M. (2019). Understanding the prevalence of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) in a male offender population in Wales: The Prisoner ACE Survey. Public Health Wales; Bangor University.
5. Kameg, B. N., & Fradkin, D. (2021). Adverse childhood experiences in youth: Trauma-informed assessment, diagnosis, and management. *The Journal for Nurse Practitioners, 17*(1), 87-92; Giotakos, O. & Konstantakopoulos, G. (2002). Parenting received in childhood and early separation anxiety in male conscripts with adjustment disorder. *Mil Med, 167* (1), 28-33.
6. Social Exclusion Unit. (2002). Reducing Re-Offending by Ex-Prisoners. London: Social Exclusion Unit, 18. Available at: https://bristol.ac.uk/poverty/downloads/keyofficialdocuments/Reducing%20Reoffending.pdf (accessed 25th August 2025).
7. Shonkoff, J. P., Phillips, D. A., & National Research Council. (2000). Communicating and learning. In From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development. National Academies Press (US); Myhr, G. (2014). Responding to threat: Using attachment-related interventions in cognitive behavioural therapy of anxiety disorders. In A. N. Danquah & K. Berry (Eds.), *Attachment theory in adult mental health:* A guide to clinical practice (pp. 48–62). Routledge.

The Criminal Justice Joint Inspection into neurodiversity estimates that around half of those entering prison have some form of neurodivergent condition that impacts on their ability to engage in everyday activities, compared to an estimated 15-20% of the general population.[8] Some of the sensory, communication and cognitive differences that neurodivergent people experience can result in them having increased difficulty adjusting and adapting to the prison environment which can be exacerbated at times of transition.

For service design and delivery to be effective, it is critical to acknowledge and understand the challenges people experience during key transition periods in their prison journey. This will help to ensure their needs are met during these difficult times. These insights enable us to explore how we should build services in response to need and develop opportunities during times of transition that can assist people safely settling, reduce risk and enable progression.

The three transitional phases within a prison journey

Entering prison

People are often at their most distressed on arriving in prison, which is commonly exacerbated by already compromised mental health. Environmental factors specific to prison are associated with increased risk of self-harm, and the impact of incarceration is felt at its most intense within the first few weeks of arriving.[9]

The physical presence of prisons, such as the austere buildings, shared cells, bars on windows, clanging doors, jangling keys,[10] and uniformed officers are stark reminders of loss of control, loss of liberty and being contained against one's will. These sensory cues and experiences can exacerbate pre-existing trauma and/or trigger new feelings of distress. The feeling of powerlessness and exposure to a threat-based environment can elicit trauma response behaviours often linked to criminogenic need.[11]

Adapting to prison life impacts on a person's sense of self. People in prison are removed from familiar settings, where they had roles and responsibilities that formed who they were, and placed into an environment which holds many uncertainties. The nature of incarceration means an immediate lack of autonomy and increased dependency on staff who hold control of the regime and order in the prison. Those entering prison can experience hopelessness and helplessness through disruption to the systems, services and significant others that supported them in the community. Trying to navigate the unknown without any familiar structure, routine or activities in which to engage can have a significantly negative impact on the health and wellbeing of those entering prison.

Some of the sensory, communication and cognitive differences that neurodivergent people experience can result in them having increased difficulty adjusting and adapting to the prison environment which can be exacerbated at times of transition

Transitioning through prison

Prison moves are made based on sentence need, risk, and response to capacity issues. As such, there can be disparities between how moves are planned and processed. Prison moves have varying impacts from person to person based on the reason for the move, circumstances, and ability to adapt.

Moving to a new setting (within or between establishments) can be anxiety provoking and impact on behaviour.[12] Individuals must adjust to many unknown aspects of their new environment including

8. HMIP (2021) Neurodiversity in the criminal justice system: A review of evidence. Available at: https://cjji.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/inspection-report/neurodiversity-in-the-criminal-justice-system-a-reivew-of-evidence/ (accessed 25th August 2025).
9. Favril, L., & van Ginneken, E. F. (2024). Individual and environmental contributors to psychological distress during imprisonment. *European Journal of Criminology, 21*(3), 350-369; House of Commons Justice Committee. (2021). Mental health in prison: Fifth Report of Session2021–22. House of Commons.
10. Stickney, J., & Budd, C. (2023). "180 prisoners and the noise… it hits you, BANG!": Sensory systems, incarceration and resettlement. In In J. Shingler & J. Stickney (Eds.) *The Journey from Prison to Community* (pp. 85-102). Routledge.
11. Hocken, K., Taylor, J., & Walton, J. (2022). Trauma and the experience of imprisonment. In P. Willmot & L. Jones (Eds.), *Trauma-informed forensic practice* (pp. 298–315). Routledge.
12. Kigerl, A., & Hamilton, Z. (2016). The impact of transfers between prisons on inmate misconduct: Testing importation, deprivation, and transfer theory models. *The Prison Journal, 96*(2), 232-257.

different processes, procedures, and dynamics. This may be challenging, particularly for those who experience adjustment difficulties, impacting on how they process and recall information.

Moves between prisons can disrupt meaningful regime engagement. People transfer from the reception estate to the resettlement estate to access purposeful activity based on needs. However, transfers that happen in the middle of courses, training or when a person moves from a high performing regime to one with more restrictions can be a significant barrier to them accessing meaningful regimes. Lack of access to meaningful regime activity results in occupational deprivation,[13] which can have a profound impact on health and wellbeing.[14] Occupational deprivation can disrupt the development and maintenance of skills needed to manage daily life both in prison and on release. This can negatively impact on a person's identity and impinge on peoples' ability to self-regulate through valued activity.

Preparing for release from prison

Preparing for release from prison is often a period of mixed emotions. For some the process of reintegration back into the community can feel daunting. In the first few days and weeks pre and post release people are at higher risk of facing adverse health and social outcomes. These include relapse into drug use, mortality, homelessness, debt, unemployment, and discontinuity of health care.[15]

Whilst there are opportunities within prison for people to build and maintain skills through regime activity, for those with pre-existing health and social difficulties, meaningful and effective engagement in the regime can be hard. Prisons endeavour to tailor approaches to support those with complex needs to engage, however their ability to do this is often limited. These factors can impact on how prepared someone feels for release and community resettlement.

Feeling unskilled and having limited meaningful activity to engage in on release can have a significant negative impact on self-worth and self-esteem. It can affect people's sense of belonging to the community and ultimately can hinder resettlement. Successful community reintegration needs to be underpinned by pre-release planning and preparation to support each person's needs. This should include having a focus on accommodation, vocation, basic needs, and support,[16] as well as ensuring people can engage in daily living skills and activities.[17]

By understanding the challenges people experience during these three key transitional phases, we can explore how to better support them as they enter, transition through and prepare for release from prison.

Prison regime – The engine to drive change forward

Regime and purposeful activity

Regimes are the engines of prisons. They ensure all parts of each establishment work together to run smoothly and effectively. Prison regime is an operational term used to describe the services and activities that are available to people in prison during their core day. In 2021, the White Paper on the transformation of prisons pledged to transform regime delivery in prisons in England and Wales.[18] His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) committed to a new principle called Time Well Spent. This simply means increasing the proportion of time each person in prison will engage in an activity that is linked to an identified need. Though the Government has since changed, the HMPPS commitment to Time Well Spent has endured.

Historically, purposeful activity solely included activity that contributes towards prison performance measures (i.e. education, work, and elements included within a sentence plan). This meant that crucial care and enrichment activity was deprioritised and unsentenced people in prison were excluded from many regime opportunities.

The different activities in which we engage help us to meet our practical and emotional needs as humans; they provide the mechanisms to adapt and develop physically, emotionally, socially and

13. Occupational deprivation - being unable to engage in meaningful activity due to personal and environmental circumstances.
14. Whiteford, G. (1997). Occupational deprivation and incarceration. *Journal of Occupational Science: Australia, 2* (2), 80-81.
15. Williamson, M. (2006). Improving the Health and Social Outcomes of People Recently Released from Prisons in the UK. Salisbury Centre for Mental Health; Binswanger, I. A. Nowels, C., Corsi, K. F., Glanz, J., Long, J., Booth, R. E. & Steiner, J. F. (2012). Return to drug use and overdose after release from prison: a qualitative study of risk and protective factors. *Addiction Science and Clinical Practice, 7*(3), 3; Zlodre, J. & Fazel, S. (2012). All-cause and external mortality in released prisoners: Systematic review and meta-analysis. *American Journal of Public Health, 102(*12), 67-75.
16. Maquire, M. & Raynor, P. (2019). Preparing prisoners for release: Current and recurrent challenges. In. P. Ugwugike, H. Graham, F. McNeill, P. Raynor, F.S. Taxman, & C. Trotter (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Rehabilitative Work in Criminal Justice* (pp.520-532). Routledge.
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18. Ministry of Justice. (2021). *Prisons Strategy White Paper* (CP 581). Ministry of Justice.

culturally.[19] Therefore, it is essential that regime activity responds to the needs of its population, moving away from the traditional concept of purposeful activity. In line with this knowledge, in 2023 HMPPS introduced a new definition of purposeful activity, which links the purpose of activity to the risk, wellbeing and social needs of every person in prison to support addressing recidivism. Purposeful activity is now defined as "Time spent well by a prisoner that contributes to one or more of the following identified objectives:

- Addressing risks or needs related to risk of reoffending or a resettlement objective, as identified through Offender Management work or other formal assessment.
- Enhancement of personal wellbeing, physical or mental health.
- Enhancement of inter-personal, social or life skills."[20]

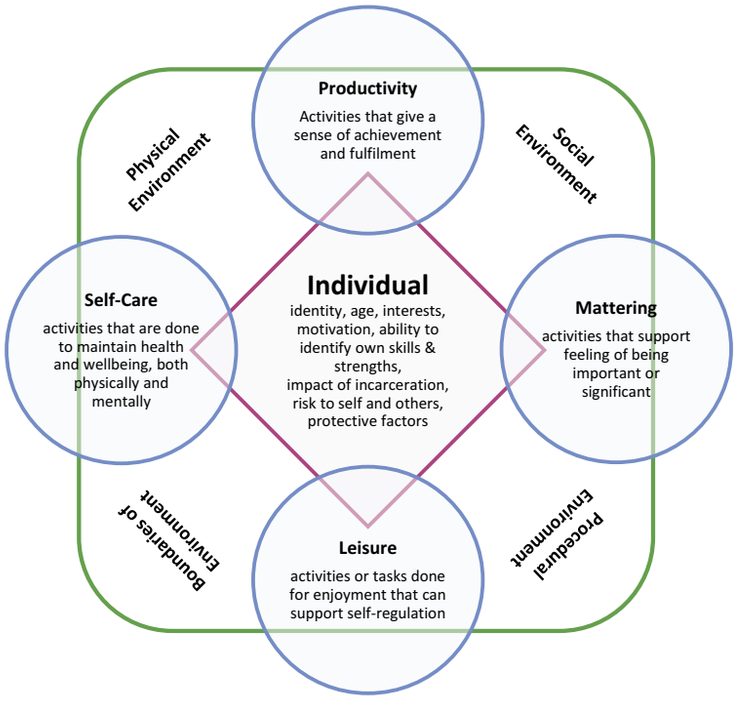
The true purposefulness of an activity is based on its inherent meaning and relevance to the person participating in it. Therefore, to ensure purposeful activity is meaningful within this context, it is essential that the needs of each person in prison are known and reflected in their own individualised regime plan. With this in mind, we can start to look at prison regime being used to support people during the three key transitional phrases identified in this paper.

The model of wellbeing in health and justice ©

The Model of Wellbeing in Health and Justice was designed and developed in order to represent the different aspects of an individual that we need to understand, to ensure their changing needs are met as they transition into and through prison.[21]

At the centre of the model is the **individual.** It includes aspects about the person that could impact on their participation and performance in regime activity. This includes interests, skills, strengths and characteristics that may influence what they do and how they do it. The model acknowledges the importance of understanding the individual in the context of the **environment** with which they are interacting. This includes the **physical** aspects of the environment (such as the material build), the **procedures** and processes that support daily living, the **boundaries** (such as restrictions) and the **social** milieu. In addition, the model considers four domains of activity, which give different health and wellbeing benefits. These domains include activities that give a sense of achievement **(productivity)**; support us to look after ourselves **(self-care);** help us to self-regulate and feel skilled **(leisure)**; and help us to connect meaningfully with others **(mattering)**. Having a balance of these domains, relevant to each individual, supports people's health and wellbeing.[22]

Figure 1. *Model of Wellbeing in Health and Justice*



19. Wilcock, A. (1993). The theory of the human need for occupation. *Occupational Science: Australia. 1*:1, 17-24.
20. HMPPS Regime Policy Framework on Regime in Prisons (awaiting publication).
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22. Matuska, K. (2012). Validity evidence of a model and measure of life balance. *Occupational Therapy Journal of Research: Occupation, Participation and Health, 32*(1), 229-237

The Model of Wellbeing in Health and Justice recognises that a healthy lifestyle in custody looks different for each person. It provides a framework to explore individuals' skills, strengths and needs to support them engaging in regime activity that holds meaning and purpose to them. By understanding the needs, skills and strengths of the people within each prison, we are then able to consider what each prison's regime must deliver to best support people at different times of their custodial journey. The Model of Wellbeing in Health and Justice can be used to assist prisons in developing an operational understanding of how we can support people during identified prison transitions.

The Settlement Model

The Settlement Model provides a structure and process to enable people to access and engage in meaningful regime activity to support them to safely settle during the three identified key transitional phases in their prison journey. It has been developed in partnership between clinical and operational staff, and in collaboration with key stakeholders, combining evidence, as well as clinical and operational experience.

The Settlement Model aims to support the health, wellbeing and safety of people in prison through the use of regime activity.

Engaging with key stakeholders has been crucial to accessing a diverse range of skills and information. This has ensured that The Settlement Model is co-designed and co-developed by people who are invested in supporting positive change within prisons. The Settlement Model focuses on enabling prisons to develop a better understanding of each person in their establishment and how their needs can be best met through engagement in meaningful regime activity. In addition to this, it aims to minimise duplication of information gathering, process and procedures at each transitional stage in a person custodial journey.

The Settlement Model consists of three separate packages that address distinct transitional phases of custody. These are:

- Package one: Initial Settlement (the first 30 days in custody)
- Package two: Transitional Settlement (moving between custodial settings)
- Package three: Release Re-settlement (the last three months prior to release)

Two tools have been developed to operationalise The Settlement Model through keywork. Both these tools have been designed using the Model of Health and Wellbeing to ensure that the right information is being gathered to inform relevant regime plans during these three phases. These tools are:

This is Me tool: (TiMe)

TiMe is an information gathering tool that provides structure to keywork sessions. It places value and importance on the relationship between the person in prison and the keyworker. This tool supports the development of the keyworker relationship by gathering information about each person's skills, strengths and needs in relation to regime activity. In addition, it explores what may impact their engagement in purposeful activity, enabling the keyworker to know the person better. With this information keyworkers can address immediate needs and plan for future support. The information gathered from the TiMe tool helps inform the development of a Personalised Regime Plan.

Personalised Regime Plan (PRP)

The purpose of a PRP is to operationalise the information gathered by the TiMe tool to enable every person in prison, regardless of sentence or status, to access meaningful and purposeful regime activities. With the information gathered from the TiMe tool, keyworkers can link an identified need to the best fit of the establishment's regime opportunities available creating a meaningful PRP. These plans can be regularly reviewed during keywork sessions and can transition with people as they move establishments as a record of progress where needed.

The Settlement Model aims to support the health, wellbeing and safety of people in prison through the use of regime activity. As a first step towards implementation, a prototyping pilot was carried out to ensure that the tools used to operationalise this (that is, TiMe and PRP) functioned as intended and that the process was feasible through keywork.

Prototyping TiMe and PRP

Prototyping is the process of testing the functionality of a product and informing the design iteratively through feedback. Prototyping assumes that for products to be most effective it is essential to understand them within the context in which they are to be delivered. Therefore, prototyping relies on

putting people who will deliver the products or will be impacted by them at the center of the design and delivery, to better understand their perspective.[23] This approach was used to test and improve TiMe and PRP prior to piloting and a formal evaluation, as it offered rapid feedback.

Methodology

Prototyping TiMe and PRP focused on package one (Initial Settlement) of The Settlement Model. In collaboration with key stakeholders, two remand prisons were identified as appropriate, due to them both having established keywork delivery in place at the time of phase one prototyping.

Objectives

The purpose of prototyping was to understand whether the TiMe and PRP tools work effectively in:

- Supporting keyworkers to gather meaningful information about people's skills, strengths and needs relating to regime, on entering prison.
- Keyworkers developing PRPs for people based on information from the TiMe tool.
- Enabling people entering prison to engage in personalised regime activity regardless of sentence or status.
- Adding value to keywork sessions for both the keyworker and person in prison.

Procedure

Area Executive Directors (AEDs), Prison Group Directors (PGDs) and Governing Governors of each prison were engaged with to gain agreement for the prototyping of Initial Settlement. Each prison then recruited an operational Band 3 and 4 prison officer[24] for six months to lead on delivery and data collection. Once the recruitment process had been completed, an awareness and training session was delivered at each establishment to ensure staff felt confident and capable in the use of the TiMe and PRP tools and data collection. Each establishment then worked collaboratively to design the process of delivering TiMe and PRP through keywork.

Both prisons established priority keywork sessions to take place in the first 30 days on entering prison. Priority keywork meant that people entering prison were offered one keywork session each week for the first four weeks. The first keywork session addressed urgent high priority needs. The TiMe tool was completed in the second keywork session, PRP completed in the third session and in the fourth keywork session the PRP was reviewed to ensure it was enabling people to access personalised regime activity.

Once priority keywork sessions were being delivered, bi-monthly check points were established between the authors and key prison staff to discuss findings, answer questions, problem solve challenges and adapt the tools in line with feedback received. This ensured a collaborative approach to iterative changes, which were made to the layout, order of questions, structure of questions and language used within both tools to ensure questions were clear and accessible. To understand if the tools were functioning as intended, the Band 4s reviewed keywork entries as part of the quality assurance process. These findings were shared with the authors to explore whether the TiMe tool assisted keyworkers in completing PRPs and whether there was any noticeable change in keywork documentation.

To understand if the tools were functioning as intended, the Band 4s reviewed keywork entries as part of the quality assurance process.

Towards the end of the prototyping, the HMPPS Change, Communication and Engagement Team facilitated three separate focus groups with each prison. The aim of these groups was to gather impartial feedback to understand if:

- The Senior Leadership Teams (SLT) viewed the TiMe tool and PRPs as having any systemic impact on their establishments during the prototyping period.
- Priority keyworkers regarded these tools as helpful in improving information gathering, communication and relationship building as people entered prison.

23. Ministry of Justice. (2023). MOJ Evaluation and Prototyping Strategy; Voisey, J. (2024) If a picture is worth 1,000 words, a prototype is worth 1,000 meetings. Why prototyping will help you get better results. *Prison Service Journal 271,* 26-33.
24. Operational Band 3 prison officer is an entry level role as a prison officer within a Public Sector Prison, operational Band 4 is a supervising officer: staff in this grade will usually lead a team of Band 3 prison officers.

- People entering prison had found these tools helpful in assisting them to settle in the early days of their custodial journey.

Whilst the facilitators of the focus groups remained consistent across all groups, the questions differed to ensure each group's experience was effectively captured.

Ethical considerations

Ethical implications of prototyping were considered by the authors who were guided by moral principles to ensure that prototyping was responsible and considerate of the impact on establishments and individuals. Key principles were adhered to including:

Transparency – a close working relationship was developed with the operational staff in the prison. This facilitated open, honest and transparent conversations to inform how the tools needed to be altered and developed to maximise operational use.

User-centred design – Keyworkers and people in prison were held at the heart of this prototyping. Prototyping was a collaborative process between the authors, establishment leadership support, keyworkers and people in prison. Prototyping in this form was a vehicle that enabled all the participants to share a transformative experience adapting the design of the TiMe and PRP to maximise delivery effectiveness.[25]

Sustainability – The authors facilitated regular stakeholder engagement and offered iterative feedback opportunities within both prisons. Prototyping resulted in TiMe and PRP being adapted responsively to need, making the tools and process accessible and available beyond this testing period, increasing their sustainability.

Confidentiality – General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) was adhered to throughout this process ensuring no identifiable information from the TiMe and PRP were shared outside each prison.

Bias – The authors were aware of the bias in situ, with each prison gathering data on the TiMe and PRPs alongside those who designed and developed the tools. To address this bias, additional data was collected by the HMPPS Change, Communication and Engagement Team. This team carried out focus groups with key stakeholders who fed back their findings to those involved in the prototyping. The Change, Communication and Engagement Team sits within HMPPS but outside of the Enable Programme to offer impartial feedback on product developments.[26]

Key findings

The process of prototyping and user feedback highlighted three key findings:

The value of a consistent keyworker

Continuity in keyworker (i.e. having the same keyworker for each session) was notably valued by both people in prison and keyworkers. Feedback from the focus groups identified that with continuity of keyworkers, people in prison saw meaning and purpose in engaging in their keywork sessions. This was highlighted by a person in prison stating, "I wouldn't open up as much seeing somebody different all the time because I wouldn't feel comfortable, and I think you have to build a level of trust". Continuity in keyworker also meant that duplication of questions was minimised, and any action needed from keywork sessions was more likely to be achieved.

"I wouldn't open up as much seeing somebody different all the time because I wouldn't feel comfortable"

Where there was no continuity of keyworker, sessions were more likely to be experienced as rushed, less meaningful and at times repetitive, reducing the perceived value of these sessions from both people in prison and keyworkers themselves.

25. Chamorro-Koc, M. (2024). Prototyping for Healthcare Innovation. In: Miller, E., Winter, A., Chari, S. (Eds.) How Designers Are T*ransforming Healthcare.* (pp. 103-117). Springer.
26. Grzybek, M. (2024). Ethical design: principles, benefits and examples. Future Processing. Available at: https://www.future-processing.com/blog/ethical-design-principles-benefits-and-examples/ (accessed 25th August 2025).

The benefit TiMe and PRPs bring to the transition into prison

The TiMe tool and PRPs provided structure to keywork sessions which, when done in a meaningful relational way, contributed towards people safely entering prison. When there was continuity of keyworker, the TiMe tool and PRP were viewed positively by both keyworkers and people in prison in supporting the transition into prison and addressing difficulties early. One person in prison stated that these sessions "felt welcoming during a scary time", with another saying the sessions provided opportunities to talk "about ways to cope whilst in prison". Where there was inconsistency with keyworkers, the purpose of TiMe and PRP was less clear and therefore less valued by people in prison and the keyworkers.

The TiMe tool captured important and relevant information on people's skills, strengths and needs. The gathering of this information was instrumental in being able to develop meaningful PRPs.

The TiMe tool helped in the early identification of difficulties people experienced on entering prison. Feedback indicated an increase in the number of referrals made to services such as neurodiversity support to assist regime engagement following the TiMe tool being completed.

A keyworker identified that within priority keywork sessions "prisoners are able to give information which leads to other things. We've seen an increase in neurodiversity and the number of people being assessed and supported for conditions such as autism which wouldn't have happened before".

The use of PRPs encouraged keyworkers to have increased awareness of regime opportunities available for those coming into prison, which supported early engagement in meaningful and purposeful regime activity.

Improved keyworker job satisfaction

Keyworkers who experienced keyworker continuity felt their roles were valued by the establishment, that they were important, and their work mattered. The relationship that keyworkers developed with people in prison through using the TiMe tool and PRP provided improved job satisfaction, with keyworkers feeling as though their role was making a positive difference to people as they entered prison. One keyworker voiced that this way of working has "given me a reason to come to work, I feel for the first time since being in the job (8 years) that I'm actually making a difference to prisoners' lives". The above quote highlights the value this process can have on keyworker job satisfaction.

"I feel for the first time since being in a job that I'm actually making a difference to prisoners' lives".

Limitations

Whilst these findings are encouraging, it is important to acknowledge that prototyping of the TiMe tool and PRPs has been time limited for a period of six months and limited to two remand prisons where keywork is well established. For a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness in operationalising these tools, more expansive prototyping is needed.

The next prototyping phase is to broaden the range of prisons to include training and resettlement prisons. Expanding prototyping will enable more information to be captured regarding the effectiveness of these tools in supporting people to settle during the three key transitional phases in their prison journey.

Conclusion

Early findings from prototyping the TiMe tool and PRPs within Initial Settlement indicate that the relationship within keywork is critical to the effectiveness of these tools. Having a consistent keyworker is crucial to enabling people in prison to develop rapport with their keyworkers which leads to productive and meaningful keywork sessions.

Feedback received from keyworkers and people in prison identified that the TiMe tool is helpful in assisting meaningful structure to keywork sessions and the information from the TiMe tool can be easily used to create a PRP.

In addition to the benefit the TiME tool and PRPs bring to people entering prison, there are also noticeable benefits to the staff delivering keywork. Keyworkers who experience continuity within their keywork sessions and have senior leadership support report feeling more valued, that their roles matter and that they have increased job satisfaction.

Feedback from SLT and priority keyworkers also suggests that the use of TiMe and PRP in the early days of entering custody can enable other activities to take place faster including: early signposting to agencies that can support accessibility and engagement in activity such as neurodiversity services; early awareness of available regime activities within establishments and the process to access them; better understanding of the needs of people in prison to support more effective regime planning. These factors are critical when considering the role of meaningful activity in supporting transitions in custody.

These initial findings from prototyping the TiMe tool and PRP, support the use of personalised regime planning in assisting people safely settle into custody. More expansive prototyping is now planned to include package two and three of the Settlement Model to explore how these tools can support people transitioning through prison and preparing for release. The continuation of this prototyping will contribute to a wider pilot and evaluation, which will formally look at the impact of TiMe and PRP on regime engagement, safety and wellbeing across the wider prison estate.

People convicted of child sex offences and the Approved Premises

Darren Woodward *is a Programme Team Leader in the Department of Criminology, Criminal Justice, and Law at Arden University. He is also an ex-Prison Officer.*

When people convicted of child sex offences are sentenced and ultimately returned to the community, they will often need to have suitable accommodation provided for them due to risk,[1] loss,[2] or potential future victimisation and vulnerability due to community reactions surrounding their behaviour.[3] This article presents findings from an empirical, qualitative study, where seven men convicted of child sex offences living in the community were interviewed. The aim of this paper is to highlight what life was like for the men inside the Approved Premises (AP), and what their experiences of moving from the AP to the community were.

According to HM Inspectorate of Probation, there are two main roles of the 104 APs in England and Wales.[4] The first is rehabilitation and resettlement, where residents are encouraged or required to undertake Offending Behaviour Programmes (OBPs) or gain assistance with moving on from the AP for example, and the second falling within the public protection remit. In fact, it is estimated that APs provide accommodation for over 2,000 people, most of whom would fall into the high-risk of harm and/or reoffending category.[5] So, the question of where to house people convicted of child sex offences, people who are often demonised and viewed as being unable to change,[6,7] remains an important one within criminal justice. In England and Wales, the use of the AP comes under the authority of Section 13 of the Offender Management Act 2007, with the underlying principles of supervision and rehabilitation being at the fore. This means that under law, the National Probation Service must take all reasonable steps to house mainly high-risk people upon release. However, it is not always as dichotomous as 'high-risk' or not. For example, 14 of the 104 APs do not house people convicted of sex offences due to their proximity to schools and parks. The potential for networking of like-minded people is also viewed as a risk, and communities often react with hostility towards residents, especially if they believe they have committed sex offences.[8,9] It is an undoubted fact that the use of APs for people convicted of child sex offences is viewed as vital in the risk management toolkit of the Offender Manager (OM) and it can be viewed favourably as a place of safety by the Parole Board post-prison, linking to Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). [10]

This article adds rich data to the limited research on APs which house people convicted of sexual offences against children, by exploring the opinions of those convicted of these offences and the professionals who work with them.

1. Roberts, N., Reeves, C. & Jackson, L. (2024). "I'm getting out to nothing": a temporal analysis of dominant discourses and practices with residents convicted of child sex offences in Probation Approved Premises. *Probation Journal, 71*(2), 159-178.
2. Kras, K. R., Pleggenkuhle, B., & Huebner, B. M. (2016). A new way of doing time on the outside: Sex offenders' pathways in and out of a transitional housing facility. I*nternational journal of offender therapy and comparative criminology, 60*(5), 512-534.
3. McAlinden, A.M. (2007). The Shaming of S*exual Offenders: Risk, Retribution and Reintegration.* Hart.
4. HM Inspectorate of Probation (2024). *Consultation on the inspection of Approved Premises.*
5. See footnote 1: Roberts et al. (2024)
6. Pickett, J.T., Mancini, C. & Mears, D.P. (2014). Vulnerable Victims, Monstrous Offenders, and Unmanageable Risk: Explaining Public Opinion on the Social Control of Sex Crime. *Criminology, 51*(3). 729-759.
7. de Vel-Palumbo, M., Howarth, L., & Brewer, M. B. (2018). 'Once a sex offender always a sex offender'? Essentialism and attitudes towards criminal justice policy. *Psychology, Crime & Law, 25*(5), 421–439.
8. Reeves, C. (2013). 'The Others': Sex Offenders' Social Identities in Probation Approved Premises. The Howard *Journal of Crime and Justice, 52*(4), 383-398.
9. E.g. see Ministry of Justice. (2008). Race Review 2008: Implementing Race Equality in Prisons – Five Years On. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/294157/1000439crace_review_part_1.pdf
10. Lammy, D (2017) The Lammy Review: An independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/lammy-review-final-report

Methodology

The data included in this article was taken from a larger scale project that examined the reintegration experiences of people convicted for child sex offences. Seven men were identified as having lived in the AP post-prison and it is this stage of their criminal justice journey, especially when they moved on to private rented accommodation, that is of particular interest.

The criterion for inclusion in the project was simple:

1. Men
2. At least 1 current and 1 previous offence related to child sex offending
3. Aged 21 years or over
4. Under the supervision of the National Probation Service in the community

Ethical approval for the project was granted by a university ethics committee and the local National Probation Service through HMPPS. Prior to the interviews all prospective participants were invited to take part through a participant information sheet. It explained the aims and purpose of the project, and if they did not want to participate this would not be of any detriment to them or their supervision processes. They were also informed about the right to withdraw at any time before, during, or after any proposed interview, up to the point where the data was anonymised.

The participants who agreed to take part were interviewed on a semi-structured basis, lasting between thirty minutes and one hour. The data was then transcribed, anonymised and analysed using thematic analysis. Anonymity was particularly important with this cohort, and a pseudonym was assigned to each participant. Table 1 below highlights the pseudonyms, along with their housing journey pre and post-conviction.

Table 1. *Participants and their Housing Status Before and After Conviction*

Participant	Housing Before conviction	Housing After Conviction
Phil	Rented Accommodation	AP
Andy	Own House	AP
Allan	Own House	AP then Rented Flat
George	Own House	AP then Rented Flat
Adam	Rented Flat	AP then Rented Flat
Sean	Rented Flat	AP then Rented Flat
Nick	Rented Flat/Previously lived in AP during a different sentence	AP then Rented Flat

Findings and discussion

The following section will introduce two main themes and one sub-theme that came from the date. The table below illustrates those themes and provides some context:

Table 2. *Themes of the findings*

Theme/Sub-theme	Context
The AP – living there, and moving on as a person convicted of child sex offences	This theme takes the perspective of three participants and highlights how they had appreciation for the function of the AP, and how they did not fully feel like a part of the community while they resided in there.
Sub-theme - Violence and Threats in the AP – a ToxicEnvironment?	This sub-theme follows on from the above and demonstrates how violence, threats, and fear in the AP were very real for the participants. The impact of this resulted in some of the men being more isolated than perhaps they would have hoped for.
Appreciating what is lost and negotiating life outside of the AP	This final theme discusses how the men had often lost a lot in terms of social capital due to their convictions. It highlights their transitions in the community and how they remained isolated through fear of reprisal and fear of losing what they had gained since release from prison.

The AP – living there, and moving on as a person convicted of child sex offences

Andy had lost his own house due to his conviction and prison sentence. This transition from his own house, to prison, to AP was quite significant for him, and even though the AP was a roof over his head he had some reservations:

> "I'm in an environment [the hostel] where I'm with other criminals...which is supposed to be a bloody no-no. It's alright. I have a roof over my head and it's a safe environment at the moment. I'm getting fed, it's only costing me £20 per week...I'm fine with that...when I do get a place, I'll be able to furnish it and have some decent stuff rather than having to rely on hand-outs." (Andy).

Clearly, he was keen to move on, and it was interesting to hear that he wanted to return to a 'normal' life and maintain the minimal family connections that remained:

> "I miss my family life, and it can be...I know where I am in the hostel at the moment, I've got people to talk to...but it can still be lonely. That's the thing. Fortunately, I have my sister...one of my sisters and I see her every week and she's the only one I do see. So, she brings a bit of normality back into my life which is a good thing." (Andy).

He continued, adding further weight to the notion of loneliness, and how he struggled to reintegrate with purpose:

> "What I see at the moment while I'm still in the hostel is virtually no reintegration because I'm not mixing with anybody else. If I get my own place, you'll have neighbours and this that and the other. Like I say, I like my garden, if I get a garden I'll be happy as Larry…" (Andy)

Andy was lonely because he struggled to reintegrate with others due to his offending behaviour and the negative reactions from other people in relation to this. He did show appreciation for the use of the AP and had some hope despite the loss of his own home. This appreciation was also noted in the account of Adam, as he described the way in which the AP had supported him post-release:

> "Well as you know, I'm a sex offender and I've been out of prison for about seven and a half months now. For the first, just under seven months, I was in the hostel and that sort of helped me get back on my feet. If it hadn't been for the hostel, I don't know what I'd have done. I'd have probably been back inside…[but] you don't feel part of the community unless you are living in your own place… you feel like you're part of the prison because you're still being watched. You've still got curfews…" (Adam)

It appears that the AP helped Adam to stay out of trouble in those months post-release, but the restrictive regime, mixed with his proclamation of being a 'sex offender' all added to the fact that until he had moved on, he was never going to fully reintegrate into the community. This was a common theme within these first narratives: the impact of the 'child sex offender' label, then the need for the AP to help and support, mixed with the frustration of not feeling part of the community. Moving into the community seemed to be a symbolic step away from being reliant on criminal justice services support.

Phil expressed concern about being able to move out of the AP due to the 'sex offender' label, linking to the labels of 'criminal' and 'sex offender' used by Andy and Adam above:

> "[Previously] I've had virtually no problem getting housing…but obviously now I have a criminal record it's just, to me, absolutely distressing. I apply to some [and they say] 'we can't take you because you are a sex offender'…it's just a stigma that…has been blown out of proportion because the majority of people think everyone is like Jimmy Savile or Gary Glitter…obviously there is a lot of stigma that goes with it...[as well as] having a criminal conviction. Applying for housing is virtually impossible because I have been turned down by numerous housing associations. I have had to [try and] find a place privately. There is a lot of stigma that goes with it. OK you have probation [and] other services like the police...but there is no one to help pick up your life. At the moment I am still struggling because it's not like 'OK you've got seven months and it's all finished', you're not...you've got 10 years on licence plus you've got to try and pick up the pieces and move on with your life, with that stigma which doesn't go away, it's there for life...it's pretty hard." (Phil)

This passage from Phil sums up how hard the transition from AP to the community continued to be for him. When he was asked how he would try to stay

motivated and achieve his goal of moving out of the AP he answered "to be quite honest I don't know. At the moment, I am just taking it one step at a time." This meant that for Phil at least, longer term goals may not have been a priority, moving into private housing was.

In addition to his inability to move out of the AP, despite his efforts, he claimed to have had many "arguments" with other residents, especially non-sex offenders, both inside and outside of the building. This is a theme that will be discussed in more detail below and it adds to the evidence presented above that even though living in the AP was useful, it was also difficult, and participants were looking forward to moving out.

Violence and threats in the AP – a toxic environment?

Living in the AP exposed some of the men to violence and threats from other residents, especially from those who did not have convictions for sexual offences. The participants highlighted concerns and anxieties of living in a seemingly unsafe and toxic environment:

> "A thing happened at the hostel when I was there. I thought this lad was joking. He had a cricket bat. I was sat on a chair and he walked up, offered it up to my knee and whacked me…people [in the hostel] had been saying things [about his offending] and he's sort of believed it. So, the following day I said 'do you realise what you did with that cricket bat?'
>
> He said 'yes I do'. [George replied] 'So I tell you now mate, it's a good job they took it away from you because I was about to get it and do the same to you'." (George)

Although George was able to confront his assailant, the environment that was supposed to care for him and get him ready to move to his own accommodation, had fallen short of that duty. This was a common theme among the participants, and this is highlighted in the following passage from Adam:

> "…the only behaviour I've faced is luckily when...four days after I got out. One of the lads found out my name, went on the internet, found out what I'd done, and he came to me and went 'I know what you've done' and I went 'oh...good for you'. I went and told the staff at the hostel straight away; they had a word with him and it sort of eased off. The only time he ever had a go at me was when he was pissed and then he started giving me little digs...so I'd ignore him. He never got violent with me luckily...he threatened it a couple of times, but he never actually got violent. He did it to a couple of lads that he found out about; he hit one of them over the head with his hand and threatened another one. But with me he never actually..." (Adam)

This may seem like a minor incident in comparison to that of George above, but violence and threats to another person are all relative and each incident builds up to create spaces that do not feel safe. In prison, people on remand for, convicted of and/or sentenced for child sex offences are offered 'vulnerable prisoner' status under Rule 45 of the Prison Rules 1999. They can be located on Vulnerable Prisoner Units (VPU's) away from the mainstream location of people convicted of non-sex offences in a safer environment for their own protection.[11] However, this level of protection is rarely afforded in the community, which is an issue within this delicate transition. George, below, voiced his concerns:

> "It [the label] does not make me feel very good at all. They change it to paedophile, which is what some of the people at [the hostel] were calling me...if somebody does know my past when I [see] them in the street and they start shouting this; it worries me what would happen. I don't fancy getting beat up." (George).

It is apparent from what George said that the fear of being identified as a person convicted of child sex offences was an issue that he and some other participants had to negotiate inside and out of the AP. This discreditable identity arguably was only a problem if people had knowledge of their offences, but the fear remained.[13] For example, Adam alluded to uncertain consequences if his child sex offender status was known to others:

> "...basically, the stigma, that's always on my mind...will people find out what I've done? That's one of the reasons why I don't want to get too close to anybody...then they don't know my name...they can't find out about me and if they do find out about me, I'm not losing anything by not being close to people. If I get

11. McNaughton Nicholls, C. & Webster, S. (2018). *The separated location of prisoners with sexual convictions: Research on the benefits and risks.* Analytical Summary [PDF]. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5bc74704ed915d0ae30b91fe/separated-location-prisoners-with-sexual-convictions-report.pdf

close to somebody and they find out [what I've done] it's going to be hard for them and hard for me." (Adam).

Here, Adam is discussing how the label of being a person convicted of child sex offences can cause uncertainty for him, and how he will not know what their reaction will be. Indeed, it has already been established above that he was subjected to threats, and he had looked forward to moving out. It can be argued therefore that mixed APs such as the one the participants resided in, may not be the most constructive tool to promote reintegration into the community, and thus reduce risks and recidivism. Those who did move out of the AP were glad to, and this will be explored in the final theme.

Appreciating what is lost and negotiating life outside of the AP

Nick was initially released from prison to the AP. He was happy with this at the time because he "knew people in there" (residents and staff) and because he "had been there before" due to previous convictions and subsequent releases from prison. He had a somewhat positive view of resettling into the AP and then moving on, because of this previous experience: he knew what to expect despite the complications that often come with a risk management and resettlement plan. He was however very motivated to move out of the AP for reasons that are described below:

"Being in there is difficult because it's near a school and parents know what it is, because they have tried to get it closed down. You have people looking at you, but nobody has really said anything." (Nick).

Nick was embarrassed about being in the AP, about the label associated with it and any perceptions that the community had about him:

"I got bidding for the council house and got offered one. I moved in and now I am just trying to decorate it and get it looking good...I just got out and got what I needed to get set up, money wise and stuff like that. [Along with] seeing my Brother and my Dad." (Nick).

Nick did not express any concerns about any violence or threats in the AP, his sole motivation was to get back into the community away from any potential labels that could be given to him.

Transitioning from one space to another was not as straightforward as the account of Nick for some of the participants, and this was due to the nature of their offending. This point was reiterated by the experience of Adam:

"I've put in for three sheltered dwellings and as far as I know the council rang my probation officer and because it had communal areas, he recommended that I wasn't suitable for it. His reason was that when they have these communal centres, people can have their grandkids visiting...if you knew people was going in there that was a risk to me, you'd stay away...why don't they trust you to do that? I think that's what it is, it's a matter of trust and I think they go a bit overboard." (Adam).

It is within reason that a person who has committed offences against children may be treated with caution in the community, and members of that community deserve the right to feel safe and protected. Therefore, suitable risk assessments must be made, and not every accommodation provider is equipped or willing to take potentially high-risk offenders. This was a loss of autonomy for Adam. Prior to being convicted he could live where he wanted to, but that was now all that freedom was gone. This sense of loss was often demonstrated when the participants spoke about what they had at the time of interview in comparison to before they were convicted. This loss is not as abstract as that felt by Adam above, it was more tangible:

"When I got my place…I did not waste any time in getting it ship shape. It's all decorated and painted, flooring done and everything and it looks nice now. I miss my garden. I had a garden at my old house but had to give it up when I went into prison. It was a three-bed house with a big garden." (Allan).

During this project, loss was a major and reoccurring theme, probably unsurprisingly. Due to their offending, many of the men had lost relationships, family, employment, and housing. These are many factors that are believed to help people reintegrate with success and the men appeared to appreciate how stark the loss was.14 Being in prison brings to the fore some losses that are perhaps quite obvious,15 on the other hand being in the community as a person on often strict community licence conditions brings a dichotomous sense of freedom and restriction. Having experienced loss seemingly helped the participants

12. Goffman, E. (1963). Stigma: *Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity.* Penguin.

appreciate their place in the community, especially after moving from the AP. Some therefore adopted a form of behavioural self-management in order to help negotiate life and prevent further loss, which undoubtedly increased their isolation:

> "It's a bungalow. That is what I wanted because it was affecting me going up and down stairs…I keep myself to myself and that will not cause problems, not for me, whether it does for anybody else, I don't know. I think I will manage, if I keep doing what I'm doing. Keep myself to myself, keep my nose out of other people's business…" (George).

> "A lot of the time I'm keeping myself to myself, I've met one of the neighbours and she seems alright, but I don't have a lot to do with her…I've always been one of these that likes my own space. Once I'm in my place on a night, I just like to chill out, watch telly or whatever, listen to music." (Adam).

Unfortunately, isolation, a lack of meaningful relationships, lack of suitable employment or housing, can be criminogenic factors that increase the risk of offending behaviour, especially child sex offending. What may be an encouraging transition, prison – AP – rented accommodation, may in fact make things worse.

Conclusion and recommendations

This article aimed to disseminate some of the findings from a larger qualitative research project concerning people who had committed child sex offences who were living in the community post-conviction. It specifically focused on the themes of life inside the AP, linking to violence and threats within that environment, and then transitioning between the AP and the community and the loss that the participants felt. It established that these different stages were often quite difficult for the participants to negotiate due to their perceived or actual risk of reoffending, their status as a person convicted of child sex offences, or the emotional/violent reactions that other people had towards them. This caused fear and a heightened sense of threat, further requiring the men to isolate themselves rather than reintegrate, thus increasing the risks associated with the onset of sexual offending. The AP was a 'toxic' environment, where there was a mix of people with and without convictions for child sex offences. It did not seem to be difficult for people to know about another person's offending, and this further increased the likelihood of violence occurring. Finally, some of the men were able to move out of the AP and into their own places. When they did, they took pride in this, and it was clear that they once again had some form of social capital, and a bond to the community. This made them mindful of what they had previously lost, but rather than being close to their community as they had hoped, some expressed how they did not mix with others and kept themselves to themselves.

Based on this conclusion, the following recommendations are presented:

1. The mix of people with and without convictions for child sex offences within APs across England and Wales is of concern. It is recommended that HMPPS carry out a wider study to examine the prevalence of violence and threats between the two groups. This will help establish what measures may need to be put in place to better protect those in their care.
2. People who have been convicted of child sex offences often move into the AP and then the community with little or no support. It is recommended that dedicated housing advocates who specialise in housing support for this cohort be trialled within APs, with a view to roll out nationally in the future.
3. The framing of expectations for people who have been convicted of child sex offences needs to be addressed from an early stage. This could be through specific and targeted work and education within prisons, or through the sentence planning and Offender Management in Custody (OMiC) measures. For example, Arden University have been working with HMP Rye Hill on projects such as this for the last few years.

13. See footnote 3: Kras, K. R., Pleggenkuhle, B., & Huebner, B. M. (2016).
14. Sykes, G. (1958). *The Society of Captives: A Study of a Maximum Security Prison.* Princeton University Press.

Navigating tension in transition: Exploring the transformative impact that the Safer Living Centre has in supporting individuals to reintegrate and desist from sexual crime

Kirsty Teague *is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Derby.* ***Nicholas Blagden*** *is a Professor in Criminological Psychology at the University of Derby.* ***Lynn Saunders*** *is a Professor in Applied Criminology at the University of Derby.*

For men with a sexual conviction, transition into the community following release from prison can be fraught with difficulty.[1] Tension between risk management and rehabilitation can be felt more readily due to the perceived freedom expected to be afforded by release from prison. Indeed, opportunities for personal development underpinned by strengths-based approaches are more readily blocked in the community due to the dominance of risk frameworks.[2] This is particularly problematic when considering the often-shared experiences of stigmatisation and marginalisation experienced by men who have a sexual conviction, with social isolation being a recognised risk factor for re-offending.[3] The 'pains' of navigating life with a criminal record are associated with goal failure, hopelessness and isolation, and thus stifle desistance.[4] Having a sexual conviction can further hamper desistance efforts due to the stigmatising nature of the crime type.[5]

The Good Lives Model (GLM) offers a strengths-based framework for rehabilitation and crime prevention,[6] placing an onus on the importance of primary goods as protective factors. Within this framework, peer support is recognised for providing individuals with opportunities to achieve meaningful primary goods.[7] [8] Informed by the GLM, the Safer Living Foundation (SLF) charity occupies a core gap in community-based support provision. In particular, the Safer Living Centre (SLC) is uniquely situated due to offering much needed evidence-based and research-informed initiatives and activities to support the desistance from sexual crime.[9] This paper uses research findings to highlight the necessity for work of this kind and its role and value.

The Safer Living Foundation (SLF) and the Safer Living Centre (SLC)

Established in 2014, the SLF charity is one of the few charitable organisations working to reduce sexual offending and re-offending through rehabilitative,

1. Saunders, L. (2020). The transition from prison to the community of people convicted of sexual offences: Policy and practice recommendations. *Prison Service Journal, 251,* 11-18.
2. Blagden, N., McCann, K., & Macmillan, S. (2023). "I don't have relationships anymore…": Navigating licence conditions and transition into the community for men with sexual convictions. In: J. Shingler, & J. Stickney (Eds.). *The journey from prison to community* (pp. 35-151). Routledge.
3. Seto, M. C., Augustyn, C., Roche, K. M., & Hilkes, G. (2023). Empirically-based dynamic risk and protective factors for sexual offending. *Clinical Psychology Review, 106,* 1-12.
4. Nugent, B., & Schinkel, M. (2016). The pains of desistance. Criminology & Criminal Justice, 16(5), 568-584.
5. Cubellis, M. A., Evans, D. N., & Fera, A. G. (2019). Sex offender stigma: An exploration of vigilantism against sex offenders. *Deviant Behaviour, 40*(2), 225-239.
6. Ward, T. (2002). Good lives and the rehabilitation of offenders: Promises and problems. *Aggression and Violent Behaviour, 7,* 513–528.
7. Perrin, C. (2025). *Peer support in prison: How incarcerated people make meaning through active citizenship.* Routledge.
8. Ward, T., Mann, R. E., & Gannon, T. A. (2007). The good lives model of offender rehabilitation: Clinical implications. *Aggression and violent behavior, 12*(1), 87-107.
9. Formerly known as 'The Corbett Centre', and referred to as such by participants of the research.

reintegrative and preventative initiatives. One of the main interventions delivered by the SLF is the Safer Living Centre (SLC) based in Nottingham, England.[10] [11] The Centre, which opened in 2019, is, to the best of our knowledge, the first of its kind globally and primarily supports individuals as they transition from prison into the community and those serving community sentences. The Centre aims to assist individuals' reintegration and desistance through the provision of support and pro-social activities. This includes cooking classes, supporting access to education, employment and housing, aiding with employability skills and identification of job opportunities, personal growth activities such as meditation, and providing a safe space to develop social skills, enhance wellbeing and reduce isolation.

Methodological and ethical considerations

This paper discusses research findings from a longitudinal research project exploring the reintegration journeys of men leaving prison with a sexual conviction and their subsequent engagement with the SLC. The research is situated within the interpretivist paradigm, which is influenced by the methodological philosophies of phenomenology and hermeneutics. The interpretive paradigm supports the belief that 'knowledge is relative to particular circumstances — historical, temporal, cultural, subjective — and exists in multiple forms as representations of reality' (p.407).[12] At its most basic, interpretivism accepts multiple meanings and ways of knowing, focusing primarily on recognising and narrating the meaning of human experiences and actions.[13] It was for this reason that semi-structured interviews were utilised, and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was deemed the most appropriate form of analysis, as it allows for a rich understanding of how people make sense of going through a very specific experience.[14]

For men with a sexual conviction, transition into the community following release from prison can be fraught with difficulty.

Semi-structured interviews (n=26) were conducted with participants across two timepoints. At timepoint 1 (T1) there were14 participants, and interviews took place between November 2020 and February 2021. At timepoint 2 (T2) there were 12 participants, with interviews taking place between December 2021 and January 2022. The interviewees were the same across both timepoints, with only two participants being unable to continue the research at T2. All interviews took place at the SLC, and the average interview was an hour and a half. All participants were (i) male, (ii) current service users of the SLC, and (iii) had previously served a custodial sentence for a sexual crime.

Recruitment of participants was done via the SLF Centre Manager, who acted as a gatekeeper, as they had access to the records of those who met the selection criteria. Selected service users were provided with an overview of the research project before having contact with the research lead, who then provided further information about the research and asked service users if they would like to participate. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the research at any time, and that they would be anonymised within the research. Ethical approval for the research was granted by Nottingham Trent University (application: 2019/181) and His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (application: 2020-001).

Research findings

The overarching superordinate themes of the research were: (i) navigating loss and liminality; (ii) building resilience; and (iii) the wounded healer archetype, as outlined in the theme table below. For this article, one superordinate theme ('building resilience') is utilised to highlight the transformative potential of the SLC for those transitioning back into the community following a period of imprisonment.

10. Safer Living Foundation (n.d.). *Who we are.* Retrieved 12th February, 2025, from: https://www.saferlivingfoundation.org
11. Safer Living Foundation (n.d.). *Safer living centre – Nottingham.* Retrieved 12th February, 2025, from: https://www.saferlivingfoundation.org/what-we-do/adult-projects/the-safer-living-centre-nottingham/
12. Benoliel, J. Q. (1996). Grounded theory and nursing knowledge. *Qualitative Health Research, 6,* 406-428.
13. Fossey, E., Harvey, C., McDermott, F., & Davidson, L. (2002). Understanding and evaluating qualitative research. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 36,* 717-732.
14. Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2012). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research.* SAGE.

Table 1: *Superordinate and subordinate themes pertaining to the research project*

Superordinate theme	Subordinate theme
Navigating loss and liminality	• Accelerated social ageing • Relational regression • Precarity, temporality and community
Building resilience	• Havens of safety, hope and purpose • Formation of a moral community • Growth capital • Reciprocity and 'giving back'
The wounded healer archetype	• Manoeuvring masks • Obstruction and resistance

Superordinate theme: Building resilience

Resilience has been described as a 'psychological turn' in neoliberalism (p.478),[15] and refers broadly to 'positive adaptation, or the ability to maintain or regain mental health, despite experiencing adversity' (p.259).[16] Importantly, the framing of resilience is centred around the individual, who is tasked with the responsibility to adapt to, or bounce back from, instability (p.61).[17] Intrinsic to discussions about resilience are notions of power and privilege, with privilege and resilience having a close relationship;[18] lacking the former can proliferate social injustice and exacerbate inequality.

For men with a sexual offence conviction, by virtue of having a criminal record, their need for resilience increases at the point at which their 'resilience capital' (p.227)[19] depletes due to the stigma of having a sexual conviction.[20] Rydberg states that 'social stigma and sex offender supervision compound reentry challenges experienced by general offender populations, increasing strain during the reentry process' (p.15).[21] This is particularly acute in considering formal mechanisms for capital building, such as employment, where stigma-related exclusion can exacerbate social isolation.[22] Related to this are the restrictions placed upon individuals serving their punishment in the community under licence, who often lack meaningful relationships and experience social isolation.[23] This is important as loneliness has been found to be a psychologically meaningful risk factor.[24] It is also acknowledged that there is an established link between having a conviction for a sexual crime and experiencing social anxiety.[25] In relation to resilience, it has been found that 'higher levels of resilience may protect against or help to overcome the experience of social anxiety' (p.59).[26] Understanding resilience-building within the context of rehabilitation and reintegration is therefore important. The below section unpacks the three subordinate themes of: (i) havens of safety, hope and purpose; (ii) formation of a moral community; and (iii) growth capital. 'T1' and 'T2' are utilised to demonstrate whether extracts were from a timepoint one or timepoint two interview.

Subordinate theme I: Havens of safety, hope and purpose

At T1, in reflecting on reintegration post-prison, participant 2 explored the role that the SLC had for people adjusting to life in the community. In particular,

15. Gill, R., & Orgad, S. (2018). The amazing bounce-backable woman: Resilience and the psychological turn in neoliberalism. *Sociological Research Online, 23*(2), 477-495.
16. Herrman, H., Stewart, D. E., Diaz-Granados, N., Berger, E. L., Jackson, B., & Yuen, T. (2011). What is resilience? *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, 56*(5), 258-265.
17. Anderson, B. (2015). What kind of thing is resilience? *Politics, 35(1)*, 60-66.
18. Jakimow, T. (2021). Vulnerability as ethical practice: dismantling affective privilege and resilience to transform development hierarchies. *Third World Quarterly, 43*(3), 617–633.
19. Poole, A. (2020) Internationalised school teachers' experiences of precarity as part of the global middle class in China: Towards resilience capital. The *Asia-Pacific Education Researcher, 29,* 227–235.
20. Snape, N., & Fido, D. (2021). Sex offenders vs. people with sexual offences: Putting the person before the offence. *Journal of Concurrent Disorders, 1*-16.
21. Rydberg, J. (2018). Employment and housing challenges experienced by sex offenders during reentry on parole. *Corrections, 3*(1), 15-37.
22. Tovey, L., Winder, B., & Blagden, N. (2023). 'It's ok if you were in for robbery or murder, but sex offending, that's a no no': a qualitative analysis of the experiences of 12 men with sexual convictions seeking employment. *Psychology, Crime & Law, 29*(6), 653-676.
23. See footnote 2: Blagden, N., McCann, K., & Macmillan, S. (2023).
24. See footnote 3: Seto, M. C., Augustyn, C., Roche, K. M., & Hilkes, G. (2023).
25. Porter, S., Newman, E., Tansey, L., & Quayle, E. (2015). Sex offending and social anxiety: A systematic review. *Aggression and violent behavior, 24,* 42-60.
26. Jefferies, P., Höltge, J., & Ungar, M. (2021). Social anxiety and resilience: Associations vary by country and sex. *Adversity and Resilience Science, 2,* 51–62.

the participant juxtaposes the landscape of prison life with the busyness and speed of change in the community. For participant 2, the SLC helped provide a 'safe place' for adjusting and learning new skills. The analogy used of roads and traffic is interesting as it resonates with established literature on the (slow) pace of change in prison:[27]

> 'It's a safe place, especially for when you just come out. I think it does offer what you need when you first come out, especially if you've done a reasonable sentence, because it's all changed. I'd describe it like, you know, when you first come out and have to cross the road. Well, there's no roads in prison. Well, there's roads but no traffic as such. The speed of — everything moves at a certain speed in prison. Here, ex-prisoners can come and gain some skills.' [Participant 2 — Interview T1]

At T2, safety was something that resonated in relation to staff at the Centre, and in particular, the SLC Manager. Participant 13 had dark auras — as a precursor to epileptic fits — and experienced dark flashbacks relating to his past. The SLC Manager was seen as someone who uniquely understood the impact of the illness on daily life, and the wellbeing needs of the participant — in this case, to remain occupied and feel safe:

> 'I was having an aura and [the SLC Manager] said, 'if you need to come down, I'll find something for you to do. Even if it's to put a hoover in your hand, or a mop. Just come and do something. You can stay the whole day'. That was like, I wonder if he'd do that for anyone else? I'm thinking he's that much of a great person, he would do it for anybody, and that just shows why this Centre is so special, because they do see you as a person and not just a number or an offender.' [Participant 13 — interview T2]

At T1, there was a recognition of the uniqueness of the SLC and its staff members. Chiming with the literature on the internalisation of stigma,[28] it is interesting to note that a participant stated that he did not know if he would help someone who had committed offences like his own:

> **R:** '[The SLC Manager] has been a really good — I call him a mentor. He says he's always there if I need him. What I find amazing is he knows what I've been into prison for but he's still willing to go out of his way to help me out. That is what I find incredible.'
>
> **I:** 'Why?'
>
> **R:** 'Because, if I was in his position and someone come to me and said, 'oh, I've abused kids', I'm not sure I'd be able to go, 'okay, I'll help you out'.' [Participant 3 — Interview T1]

In relation to the safety fostered in the SLC and by individual staff members, there were generative feelings of hope and purpose, too. For example, whilst recognising the role and value of the Centre for service users, it was felt that the SLC, existing and being supported by volunteers, signals that there is hope for reintegration, as people had freely chosen to support and help:

> 'You get volunteers coming in that might have a preconceived idea of a man in a trench coat, sweets in his pocket, but when they actually meet the person, they think you're actually not quite what I thought you'd be.' [Participant 11 — Interview T1]

The Centre aims to assist individuals' reintegration and desistance through the provision of support and pro-social activities.

For some, the SLC embodied a haven, evoking feelings of safety and asylum. There was therefore buy-in into the culture and values of the SLC. Service users were supported to engage with diverse provision at the SLC, ranging from mindfulness to games club. As found below at T2, participant 5 discovered his purpose at the SLC during a game which he had not previously played. These individual moments became pivotal in contributing to the development of the wider culture and 'success' of the SLC:

> 'There was a fella, he said, '[anonymised], come and sit down and have a game, I think he said his name was [anonymised]. Good draughts player. I thought I don't play draughts but sat and played a game, and he

27. Van Deinse, T. B., Zielinski, M. J., Holliday, S. B., Rudd, B. N., & Crable, E. L. (2023). The application of implementation science methods in correctional health intervention research: A systematic review. *Implementation Science Communities, 4*(149), 1-15.
28. Tewksbury, R. (2012). Stigmatization of sex offenders. *Deviant Behavior, 33*(8), 606-623.

was crap. I thought, 'shit'. So, I started making mistakes and letting him win. I thought it's all part of it. It makes me feel like I've given something. He's not a good player at all; he's terrible. He was trying hard, and I'm not a good player anyhow, so I can make mistakes quite easy. I think I won the first two, and he won the next three. He felt happy then, and I knew I'd made him happy. That was the first day. I thought, I like this games club, you've got a purpose again. It built up from there, then I did the quizzes.' [Participant 5 — Interview T2]

It is useful to consider the SLC as more than a place where people go for occasional support and skills development. Instead, the SLC and those within it hold much deeper meaning and significance. The individualised and nuanced relationships with the SLC collectively contribute to the wider feelings, perceptions and attitudes of the SLC.

Subordinate theme II: Formation of a moral community

The second subordinate theme, 'formation of a moral community', explores the wider cultural and social dynamics of the SLC. This theme explores the ways in which service users of the SLC make sense of the lateral relationships formed, collectively contributing to a 'moral community'. Moral community among men who have a sexual conviction was initially reported by Ievins and Crewe in their ethnographic work at HMP Whatton, a treatment prison in the Midlands of England for men with sexual convictions. They found that: 'prisoners attempted to form an accepting and equal moral community in order to mitigate the pain of this moral exclusion and to enable the development of a convivial atmosphere. However, these attempts were limited by imprisonment's structural limitations on trust and prisoners imported negative feelings about sex offenders' (p.482).[29]

Interestingly, nine out of 14 (64 per cent) participants from the current research project were released directly from HMP Whatton. At T1, in the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic and 1 year post launch of the SLC, participant 11 alluded to the potential of the SLC, recognising that it was a place where people could be 'open' and 'won't be judged'. Indeed, such is the foundation for fostering a sense of community:

'I've not been here many times, but if I was to describe it, I'd say it's a place where you can go and be open about who you are and won't be judged for it and get access to help and support as needed really. Be that someone teaching you how to cook or someone just listening, so — which is a real luxury for people in our position really, so I think that's how I'd describe it.' [Participant 11 — Interview T1]

Social connection can form from being in place of vulnerability, and can serve as a unifying force and collective strength.

A year later, participant 11 again discussed his perception of the Centre. By T2, his perception of the SLC was solidified by his experiences. In particular, he referenced that his engagement with the SLC had led him to 'feel like there's somewhere, a community which [he's] part of and [has] a place within it'. This is significant as social connection for men with a sexual conviction can be difficult due to perceptions formed by populist discourses,[30] and sociopolitical desire to eliminate 'possibilistic risk'.[31] Feeling under threat has links to vigilantism and the potential for symbolic and actual bodily violence.[32] As such, having a space that is not under threat is important:

'I feel like a part of the furniture, if that makes sense. I feel like I can ring up [SLC Manager] and say, 'ahhhh, I feel really…', and he'll say, 'come along' and there not have to be a purpose, but just feel like there's somewhere, a community which you're part of and have a place within it, and that place isn't under threat.' [Participant 11 — interview T2]

Whilst there was clear evidence that there is a moral community among service users at the SLC, it is

29. Ievins, A., & Crewe, B. (2015). 'Nobody's better than you, nobody's worse than you': Moral community among prisoners convicted of sexual offences. *Punishment & Society, 17*(4), 482-501.
30. Mahoney, I., Teague, K., Long, M., & Winder, B. (2022). Populist and vindictive constructions of sexual offending, pluralities of violence, and the implications for criminal and social justice. *Archives of Criminology,* (XLIV/1), 123-145.
31. Furedi, F. (2009). Precautionary culture and the rise of possibilistic risk assessment. *Erasmus Law Review, 2*(2), 197-220.
32. See footnote 5: Cubellis, M. A., Evans, D. N., & Fera, A. G. (2019).

important not to over-idealise the positive aspects of this community. Indeed, negative feelings about people with a sexual conviction were held too. At T2, participant 4 was conflicted about his feelings towards people who had perpetrated a sexual crime, but recognised that 'everyone's lost':

> 'Some people, some of them, they just love to whinge and it's all about them all the time. Well, it's not like that. I think that's a sex offender's trait. You know what I mean? It's all me all the time. It shouldn't be like that. I mean, alright, I messed up big time and I lost a load. But then, everyone's lost.' [Participant 4 — Interview T2]

Social connection can form from being in a place of vulnerability,[33] and can serve as a unifying force and collective strength.[34] Indeed, a convivial atmosphere is generated as a by-product of the support offered by the group and a desire to bring out the best in those around them. For example, participant 13 at T2 discussed how, in a mindfulness session, he had contributed to another service user seeing themselves in a more positive light. This had the longer-term impact of bringing out a sense of individuality and confidence which had not previously been demonstrated:

> '[I'm] proud at how many people I've helped leave this Centre with a big smile on their face… helping people talk in the mindfulness sessions because people were struggling to come up with a colour that represents them. Take one of the lads, for example, he chose black because he was always focused on his past. I goes to this guy, 'change it to grey because if you were that focused on your past, you wouldn't be here', and everyone was like — when he'd left — that was great for you to say something like that. Then someone said, 'green, just because it represents nature'. I go, 'why don't you flip that, and turn it into green for growth because you've been here. I saw you when you first came here; you wouldn't talk, wouldn't do anything, would be shy'. And now, he's taken to talking about all sorts. He's starting to wear his top hat with glasses on them like a punk rocker would wear.' [Participant 13 — Interview T2]

Subordinate theme III: Growth capital

The final subordinate theme 'growth capital' highlights the skills and experiences which culminate in personal growth, and the meaning and impact this has for service users of the SLC. Since the SLC opened, volunteer-led cooking sessions were held in the kitchen area of the Centre, initially taking place on a one-to-one basis for rapport-building purposes. 'Cooking as inquiry' (p.321)[35] is regarded a methodological practice due to the social and discursive nature of cooking. Within criminal justice settings, food making can be viewed as a generative 'convivial' and 'co-operative' process (p.147). Thus, it is unsurprising that it holds a similar utility for men post-release in community-based settings too. For some who engage with the cooking sessions, confidence levels can initially be low. This can partially be attributed to cooking being largely a gendered domestic activity,[36] with which they may have had little prior experience. At T1, participant 13 had a transformative experience based on his cooking sessions, eventually being awarded an external grant to purchase cooking equipment for his home to continue developing his culinary skills:

> The Centre aims to assist individuals' reintegration and desistance through the provision of support and pro-social activities.

> 'I have learnt so much from the cooking lessons… it felt like '[anonymised], you're actually going to cook something yourself', and I'm looking around to say 'look, look' to my next-door neighbours. She came to let her dog out and stood with her mouth open… '[anonymous], you're cooking!! It was such a good feeling. So now, I'm baking cakes and cookies at home and doing Sunday dinners,

33. Field-Springer, K., & Stephens, K. (2017). "She gets me": Forming a friendship from a place of vulnerability. *Health Communication, 32*(3), 386-388.
34. Thomas, D., Mitchell, T., & Arseneau, C. (2016). Re-evaluating resilience: From individual vulnerabilities to the strength of cultures and collectivities among indigenous communities. *Resilience, 4*(2), 116-129.
35. Brady, J. (2011). Cooking as inquiry: A method to stir up prevailing ways of knowing food, body, and identity. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 10*(4), 321-334.
36. Daniels, S., Glorieux, I., Minnen, J., & van Tienoven, T.P. (2012). More than preparing a meal? Concerning the meanings of home cooking. *Appetite, 58*(3), 1050-1056.

> trying other stuff to make, but sometimes it goes wrong… so, new skills, new techniques, learning, trying new foods.' [Participant 13 — Interview T1]

He recognised that whilst the acquisition of skills was useful, there were more holistic benefits to engaging with the sessions:

> '… Being able to talk without feeling judged about the past, making friends with people, people treating me like a person and not an ex-offender, having a laugh. Most people think it's about having a place to go rather than being alone at home, I don't think about it like that. I think I'm going to learn new skills; I'm going to see new people, I'll be able to talk about this, and be able to do that.' [Participant 13 — Interview T1]

For service users who felt proficient at cooking, there was a recognition that cooking sessions could still be of benefit, as there was a recognition of sociability in further upskilling — cooking was seen as a vehicle to interaction that was felt to be needed and lacking in other areas of their life:

> 'I don't feel like I really need someone to teach me how to boil an egg, but I probably wouldn't mind a conversation about boiling eggs. It's not practical things so much for me really as it is social contact.' [Participant 11 — Interview T1]

At T2, participant 11 reflected further on the non-culinary reasons for engaging with the cooking sessions, reaffirming the social value they hold. It is clear that the opportunity for social engagement may be grasped; however, it presents:

> 'I appreciate that cooking lessons, or budgeting club, they serve a practical person for some people, they don't for me — I mean, generally speaking, they don't — because I feel like I can manage that kind of stuff really. But equally, there may be teaching me something I don't know, but the main thing for me is the social interaction. I don't really — I don't mind what it's doing.' [Participant 11 — Interview T2]

With participant 11, especially, his lack of social connection had led to relationships with professionals being relied upon more readily. This has been found too by Blagden, McCann and Macmillan, in which they highlighted that men with sexual convictions can become reliant on professional services 'to offer the first line of community support' (p.142).[37] Indeed, in staff offering this much-needed support, filling a relational void, there is hope that this supports individuals to gain pro-social capital away from the SLC. However, structural barriers relating to licence conditions can prevent this, and thus contribute to service users being further invested in the community-building aspects underpinning the SLC.

As the superordinate theme analysis highlights, 'building resilience' was particularly prominent among participants 11 and 13. Demographically, both participants were of a similar age, 38 and 40, respectively, and were without work, thus lacking meaning and purpose in parts of their lives. As such, they actively found ways to engage with the SLC. Embodying tenets of active citizenship,[38] participant 11 was editor of the SLC newsletter, whilst participant 13 hosted games club, leading to greater engagement than most with the SLC. Meaning and belonging were found at the SLC in ways they did not have outside of the Centre.

Conclusion and recommendations

Through discussion of the 'building resilience' superordinate theme of the current research, the article highlights the transformative impact that the SLC has for those who engage with it following a period of imprisonment for a sexual conviction. Presently, whilst there is a single SLC site in Nottingham, there is growing evidence for Safer Living Centres to exist across the country to support the reintegration of men with a sexual conviction leaving prison and entering a volatile society. The SLC has a positive impact in supporting people through a period of transition, where risk may be elevated. Whilst Centres of this kind are not a panacea and not intended to be a long-term means of support, the positive ways the SLC is engaged with highlight the necessity for such provision in other localities. However, expansion in this area remains limited due to the lack of socio-political and, thus, financial support for this work. For this work to be sustainable and expansive in the medium to long term, work to garner socio-political support in this area should be prioritised.

37. See footnote 2: Blagden, N., McCann, K., & Macmillan, S. (2023).
38. Perrin, C., Blagden, N., Winder, B., & Dillon, G. (2018). "It's sort of reaffirmed to me that I'm not a monster, I'm not a terrible person": Sex offenders' movements toward desistance via peer-support roles in prison. *Sexual Abuse, 30*(7), 759-780.

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