Reflecting on HMP Risley's discovery wing model pilot delivery: Co-producing a positive social climate on a mainstream prison wing

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This article showcases an example of an innovative wing model pilot which included seconded custodial staff as part of a delivery team partnership. The HMPPS Creating Future Opportunities (CFO) wing delivery model is designed to empower both staff and residents to co-produce a welcome atmosphere and community feel on a mainstream prison wing. The HMPPS, CFO and Achieve Career Connect[1] delivery team at Risley designed and delivered an enrichment activity programme, facilitated peer mentor capacity building roles and drew on external partnership support. Using qualitative evaluation data collected in Risley as a CFO wing model pilot site, this article identifies core practice factors which staff reflected on as contributing to the successful delivery of this pilot. Originating in findings generated during a delivery staff team workshop and supplemented by interviews undertaken with strategic prison managers, external partners and residents on the Discovery wing, four best practice learning points are identified.

Innovations in wing delivery

The term 'social climate' refers to the general character of the social environment where people live.[1] Innovations in wing delivery models delivered to specialised prison resident profiles, such as Therapeutic Communities[2] and Psychologically Informed Planned Environments (PIPE)[3] are not new to the sector. Importantly however these established wing delivery models are identified as achieving a more harmonious prison experience.[4] It has been argued these more community generating models have the potential, if delivered as a prison-wide organisational change process, of contributing to Enabling Environment standards in custody. [5 6]

Bennet and Shuker identified four best practice principals underpinning the establishment of a positive social climate on a prison wing:[7] 1. Voluntary nature of participation; 2. Empowered staff who can work collaboratively with residents; 3. Management teams recognising value of including staff and residents in decision making, and meaningful opportunities for participation; 4. Senior managerial and policy maker support and advocacy of a revised regime and therapeutic infrastructural support. However, the potential benefits of applying these delivery practice model approaches to more mainstream prison wing provision remains an omission. Compared to other sectors like health care, the notion of co-production in mainstream Criminal Justice System (CJS) delivery is not as well an established approach.[8] However, a greater emphasis on engaging, involving, and empowering

1. Achieve Career Connect Careers Information, Advice and Guidance in prisons: https://careerconnect.org.uk/services/criminal-justice-achieve/
2. Bennett, J., & Shuker, R. (2018). Hope, harmony and humanity: creating a positive social climate in a democratic therapeutic community prison and the implications for penal practice. *Journal of Criminal Psychology, 8*(1), 44–57.
3. Haigh, R., Harrison, T., Johnson, R., Paget, S., & Williams, S. (2012). Psychologically informed environments and the "Enabling Environments" initiative. *Housing, Care and Support, 15*(1), 34–42.
4. Turner, K., & Bolger, L. (2015). The provision of PIPEs–psychologically informed planned environments. *Prison Service Journal, 218*, 41–46.
5. Davies, J., Pitt, C., & O'Meara, A. (2019). Learning lessons from implementing enabling environments within prison and probation: separating standards from process. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 63*(2), 218-231.
6. Liebling, A., Laws, B., Lieber, E., Auty, K., Schmidt, B. E., Crewe, B., ... & Morey, M. (2019). Are hope and possibility achievable in prison? *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice, 58*(1), 104-126.
7. See footnote 2: Bennett & Shuker (2018).
8. Freeman, L. R., Waldman, M., Storey, J., Williams, M., Griffiths, C., Hopkins, K., Beer, E., Bidmead, L., & Davies, J. (2016). Working towards co-production in rehabilitation and recovery services. *The Journal of Mental Health Training, Education and practice, 11,*197207.

whole communities in shaping and influencing criminal justice provision is taking place across the CJS. [9] [10] This mirrors the aspiration of a more rehabilitative or transformative culture being developed in custody, which has generated a small but growing evidence-base over recent years.[11]

Evidence-based background to the wing pilot initiative

In 2021 HMPPS Creating Future Opportunities (CFO) piloted Activity Hub programmes in the community to assist those on a licence or community order to abstain from criminal behaviour by supporting them to become community assets.[12] Evaluated as successful in fostering an encouraging and motivating environment, a 6-month follow-up showed that those engaging were less likely to reoffend than a non-intervention comparator group.[13] [14] In 2022, CFO piloted the creation of similarly dedicated spaces in mainstream custodial contexts, requiring a single dedicated wing or house block, to be identified that would be both funded and run by CFO. Securing wing model pilot site status drew down costs for three HMPPS staff secondments, and three third sector Prime provider-sourced Case Manager roles. These mixed sector partnership delivery teams were tasked to deliver a community building programme and facilitate peer involvement role opportunities that would support the aims of affecting a welcome, safe, supportive and rehabilitative community culture on a mainstream prison wing. These community-capacity building activities are facilitated alongside the initiative providing resourcing for a more conducive wing environment.[15] One of the four CFO pilot sites were hosted at an Adult Female and YOI training and resettlement prison and three at Adult Male, Category C training and resettlement prisons, of which HMP Risley was one.

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HMP Risley's discovery wing model pilot

Risley is in Cheshire and hosts 1100 men. The Discovery wing at the time of this study contained 200 beds split across People Convicted of Sexual Offences (PCoSO) and Mains (non-sexual index offences) resident profiles. Core delivery of the Discovery wing model's activity programme were supported by the prison's Physical Education Department and Education providers, and resident profile relevant external charity partnerships. The three phases of the Discovery wing model pilot were: Phase 1— Induction and release preparation course focussing on all elements of resettlement, delivered by Prime provider staff, and complimented by team building activity work delivered by wider prison departments; Phase 2 — Vocational experience, residents then worked full time in the prison's bike workshop, providing residents with real work experience; and Phase 3 — Community projects — involving residents conducting prison environment improvement tasks, under the supervision of the Discovery wings Prison Officers.

Both of the Mains and PCoSO resident profile groups participating were recruited to contain four veterans,[16] who were subsequently NCFE[17] Level 2 Mentor trained. Peer mentors provided support to the eight sub-group participants in each group activity cohort. All CFO Discovery wing engagers met regularly with a Community Case Worker before release to establish contact with CFO's community-Activity hub initiative, to assist their transition onto a community order.

9. Weaver, B. (2018). Coproduction, governance and practice: The dynamics and effects of User Voice Prison Councils. Social Policy Admin, 53, 249-264.
10. Cunningham, N., & Wakeling, H. (2022) Engagement and Co-Production with People with Lived Experience of Prison and Probation: A synthesis of the evidence base. Prison Service Journal 262, 3–11.
11. Mann, R., Fitzalan Howard, F., & Tew, J. (2018). What is a rehabilitative prison culture? Prison Service Journal, 235, 3-9.
12. For more details see: https://www.creatingfutureopportunities.gov.uk/history-of-cfo/
13. Darby, J. (2022). CFO Interim evaluation https://www.creatingfutureopportunities.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/HMPPS-CFO-Activity-Hub-Interim-Evaluation-2022.pdf Accessed 04/02/2023.
14. Jarvis, H. (2023). The effect of CFO Activity Hubs on Reoffending Risk Post Release from Custody https://www.creatingfutureopportunities.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/HMPPS-CFO-The-effect-of-CFO-Activity-Hubs-on-Reoffending-Risk-Post-Release-from-Custody-Summary-Report-2.0-2023.pdf Accessed 13/2/2024.
15. CFO provide funding for wing redecoration, furniture, pictures, plants, kitchen equipment, and t-shirts for staff and residents in peer support and peer mentoring roles.
16. As an identifiable cohort from which resident peer supporters could be considered for recruitment.
17. NCFE is an Accreditation and Employer Service: https://www.ncfe.org.uk/accreditation-and-employer-services

The Case Managers delivered phase 1, over 8 weeks, as a bespoke course, featuring meaningful content for the sub-profiled targeted residents serving a short-sentenced, with care experience and/or limited family ties. The Discovery wing delivery team prioritise a welcoming environment built on strong rehabilitative and partnership working principles. Discovery wing residents volunteered to join the CFO phased activity programme combining self-development and reflection activities, practical support, and access to networks upon release. During each course cohort recruitment stage, the mixed sector staff team identified 24 residents, 12 each from the Mains and PCoSO landings. Each cohort of 12 progressed through the 8-week course together. As a half-day course sessions were delivered twice daily to separate PCoSO and Mains sub-groups, either in the morning or afternoon in domestic/association time, which was rotated bi-weekly.

External evaluation details

A Prime provider involved in CFO's wing model delivery commissioned a discreet evaluation of the peer involvement role element of the initiative. The study received ethical approval from the National Research Committee (Ref. 2023-012 and 2023-238) and Sheffield Hallam University's Research Ethics Committee (Ref. ER49795291). The research team adopted an integrated, social capital building-sensitive data collection strategy.[18] The research team conducted interviews, both focus group and 1:1, with Strategic HMPPS and Prime Provider staff, wing residents and the delivery staff team. At each site a workshop with the host prison's Prisoner Council was conducted. For the commissioned evaluation reporting outputs, a pragmatic deductive analysis directed by the questions outlined in the evaluation brief was conducted on the generated data. The evaluation reporting did not focus on the wing model, but the peer involvement role element of the initiative only. All data points were inserted into pre-populated pseudonymised[19] prison-site-specific sample profiled excel worksheets, and 5 evaluation reports generated.[20] However, for staff and resident beneficiaries alike, reflections on the holistic wing model pilot initiative were generated during these peer involvement role focussed evaluation activities.

The research team spent 10 days conducting data collection activities at Risley between February and May 2023. In total, three hundred and nineteen Discovery wing residents engaged voluntarily in the data collection activities described above (8 from the Prisoner Council; 198 in Ethnographic Observation; 78 in workshops and focus group interviews; and 35 in 1:1 Interviews). The research team conducted a total of 23 1:1 interviews with staff, which included delivery staff, Senior staff from HMPPS, Prime provider and external partners.

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Identifying delivery practice success factors

For the purposes of this co-authored piece the focus is to reflect on the most useful practise experience lessons from staff having delivered the Discovery wing pilot at Risley. Focussing on the qualitative Risley data set described above, one of the authors conducted a secondary analysis directed by the Risley delivery staff team's aspiration to share their lived experience of successful delivery with other staff in the sector. The questions directing this article's reflective content was directed by the question: What are the key delivery success factors others in the mainstream custodial sector can learn from Risley's experience? Four key delivery success factors were identified: 1. Investment for innovation; 2. The strength-based approach to both staff and residents as wing community assets; 3. Co-location as enhancing a discreet wing community atmosphere; and 4. Drawing on relevant external partnership networks. There are obvious similarities between Risley's list of success factors and Bennet and Shulker's four best practice principals of initiating a more positive social climate.[21] The remainder of this article presents Risley's four delivery success factors supported by illustrative data, aimed at informing prison service practitioners and commissioners with aspirations to affect improvements in the social climate in prison.

18. Albertson, K., Phillips, J., Fowler, A., & Collinson, B. (2022). Who owns desistance? A triad of agency enabling social structures in the desistance process. *Theoretical Criminology, 26*(1), 153-172.
19. A data management and de-identification procedure by which personally identifiable information fields within a data record are replaced by artificial identifiers, names are changed and pseudonyms used.
20. Albertson, K. (2024a-e). *Peer roles in prison study series.* Available at: https://www.creatingfutureopportunities.gov.uk/publications/
21. Ibid.

Investment for innovation

The first key success factor identified as supporting the co-production of a welcome atmosphere and community feel on the Discovery wing was meaningful investment in the prison service:

> '…it's a real positive thing to have some investment.…Staff can see that. Prisoners can see that. It's also unusual in that it includes prison staff development. I've been involved in quite a lot of projects over the years, and it can often feel like someone is doing something to you. The fact that this investment is for custodial staff, so there is that buy in and it's joint ownership of delivery …. this is an opportunity to be more creative and think through professional development.' (Senior Management Team member, interview)

It is established that enacting improvements in the relational capacity of custodial wings relies on regimes bringing together residents who voluntarily want to participate is key for community-based growth.1 On the Discovery wing, residents demonstrated they were also aware of the benefits of being on a novel regime which included purposeful activities, which they reflected had resulted in an environment they also wanted to invest their time and energy in (and protect):

> 'On this wing it's more chilled out than others in here… We all live on here, so we don't want it full of dickheads who don't want to be engaging with the good stuff we got going on in here.' (Owen, Wider wing resident, interview)

Adaptions in regime practice, such as affecting the in-take criteria on specific wings with a discreet identity were supported at senior team level at Risley:

> '…having some direction or identity for a wing, for the staff and for the prisoners, means they identify with the wing, this is what we are trying to do. This is what our purpose is and that's how we start when bringing people on there. There's no problem having slightly different regimes as part of managing that innovative living environment because they won't be able to take ownership of that environment otherwise' (Senior Management Team member, interview)

As illuminated above, investment for innovation on the Discovery wing mirrors Bennett and Shuker's1 principals of initiating a more positive social climate by enabling staff to work more collaboratively with residents that want to engage which relies on having senior management team support for revised regimes.

The strength-based approach

Strengths-based approaches are defined as 'enabling people to find the best solutions for themselves'.[22] Residents on the Discovery wing highlighted adopting a strength-based model in the custodial environment can also play an important role in how residents, alongside staff respond to change:

> 'The officers they weren't looking down on you and in prison you don't get that very often.' (Aasif, Discovery wing resident, interview)

> 'The veterans are used as assets on here really well…There's a calm respect for them especially from some of the younger more chaotic lads in here- I see it day-to-day, from just being on the wing.' (Liam, Discovery Wing resident not participating in the programme, interview)

Providing strength-based opportunities for residents, not based on their offending history, but on their skills, passions and interests, ultimately facilitated a more mutually supportive relationships between Discovery wing residents:

> '…you know I am the one's telling the lads to line up, at the servery to make sure everyone got the right food, and no-one was pushing and that.' (Mark, Peer mentor, interview)

What are the key delivery success factors others in the mainstream custodial sector can learn from Risley's experience?

22. Department of Health and Social Care. (2019). *Strengths-based approach: Practice Framework and Practice Handbook.* Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/778134/stengths-based-approach-practice-framework-and-handbook.pdf (accessed 16 February 2025).

The Discovery wing pilot site opted for the peer mentor role, which included selected wing residents completing an externally accredited L2 Mentoring qualification, which again was appreciated as a distinct opportunity in the custodial context by residents:

> 'So being able to have some responsibility…is a big, big thing when you are in prison.' (Tony, Peer mentor, Discovery wing interview)

Staff also felt invested in:

> '…my Custody Manager at the time…it still took me a while to make the decision to apply…you know: Have I been in the job long enough? Have I learnt enough? The one thing that did sway it for me was — it is completely different, and you get interesting training which stretches you — you know.' (Oliver, Discovery wing Support Officer)

As illustrated above, adopting a strength-based approach to both staff and residents as community assets at the Discovery wing pilot further echoes Bennett and Shuker's principals of exporting positive social climate good practice. In this case in terms of empowering staff to work collaboratively with residents and providing meaningful opportunities for participation and therapeutic infrastructural support.

Co-location as enhancing a discreet wing community atmosphere

The colocation of a range of services is seen as good practice in criminal justice delivery models adopting a hub model approach.[23] The Discovery wing model pilot delivery was acknowledged as very different from residents' usual experience of prison life, based around everyone being a member of the wing community and working together:

> '…people love this wing, people on here want to stop on here…I look forward to getting up every day now.' (Ben, Wing resident, interview)

> '…it's like a different dynamics, cos we are all doing something together.' (Philip, Peer mentor, interview)

There are lessons here for delivering meaningful activities with a co-located mixed sector staff team on the wing as discreet communities in their own right, which conveys a more positive message of recognising the strengths regardless of offending status.[24]

> 'Couldn't ask for a better staff team — we just gel together. You can bounce off them and have a laugh.' (Ryan, Discovery wing resident, interview)

The opportunity to engage in peer mentor roles was also acknowledged as operating to generate a more trusting environment for those residing in custody:

> '…prisoners need time to develop their own opinions and learn to make good decisions on their own…. trust and building that trust is the most important thing really. So, it's like doing it in the classroom- it's about building trust in there for later, then they come to me on the wing the next time they get stuck with anything as trust, well- it's earned.' (James, Discovery wing Peer mentor, interview)

This approach to co-production of custodial environments by involving service users was also highlighted as a distinct developmental approach adopted by Risley's senior management team:

> 'The aim is for the Prisoner Council to be the voice of the prisoners, so we are also looking to get Custodial Managers to have Prisoner Council forums on each wing eventually.' (Senior management team member, interview)

Co-location was identified as key to enhancing a discreet wing community atmosphere during Discovery wing pilot delivery.

Drawing on relevant external partnership network support

While many of the external partners working with the Discovery wing were veteran-specific, each of the charities who were interviewed were very clear that they saw their role as supporting all the Discovery wing residents, not just the veterans. This was highlighted in the collaborative rather than competitive view of their engagement with this custody-based initiative:

'It's not about competition. It's about collaboration. It's about working with people who are passionate about what they're doing. Rehabilitation is not just about getting them employment or education.

23. Phillips, J., Albertson, K., Collinson, B., & Fowler, A. (2020). Delivering desistance-focused probation in community hubs: Five key ingredients. *Probation Journal, 67*(3), 264–282.
24. Ward, T., & Brown, M. (2004). The good lives model and conceptual issues in offender rehabilitation. *Psychology, crime & law, 10*(3), 243-257.

It's about empowering them. It's about getting them involved in a project that's going to help their self-esteem. It's a project that's going to raise their confidence…. it's about improving them as a person. It's not just about skills, it's whatever — the activity could be around anything- reading poetry, whatever works for that cohort, you've got to let them be the driving force…It's about using them as a resource, as an asset.' (External partner 1, interview)

> '…we've found, more now that I think governors are now becoming more aware of the fact that you know they need to identify the veterans and to use them…when we go in, we're not just here for the veterans mind.' (External partner 2, interview)

This sense of working together with agencies both inside and outside of the prison was reflected as newly arrived wing residents, who had not even begun to engage in the CFO programme, who were aware of these collaborative efforts to assist them, first and foremost, as a member of the Discovery wing community:

> 'I feel relaxed and welcome here. They have all taken me under their wing…the peer mentors are literally on here all the time, and [Custody Managers] door is always open… And all them charities come in here and meet with us. So, I feel they have all got my back.' (Liam, Wider wing resident, Interview)

> '…we get charities in at least once a week to make sure that they're getting consistent support. And it's not just a charity coming in once making all these promises and then never seeing them again.' (Phillipa, Case manager)

Drawing in external resident profile partners was identified as key to the successful delivery experience of the Discovery wing model pilot.

This article contains a reflection on the delivery of an innovative wing model pilot at HMP Risley, substantiated by a secondary analysis of qualitative evaluation data. Four key delivery success factors are highlighted as underpinning this innovative example of changing the social climate of a prison wing, which others who are considering implementing such a different way of working need to consider. These are the necessities of: Investment for innovation; Adopting a strength-based approach to empower both staff and wing residents to become wing community assets; Thinking through the co-location of partnership delivery staff teams on the wing as a discreet community; and generating effective working relationships with external partners.

There are limitations to this study. Outcomes have not been presented, and it may be that reoffending rates (and other intermediate outcomes) are higher or lower for residents accessing this initiative in custody. A quantitative evaluation is however being carried out by CFO's Evaluation team. That said, there is value in considering the experience of a custodial sentence in a way in which people — both staff, residents and external partners perceive as more positive — even if it does not result in reduced reoffending, but a more positive experience of custodial life for all. Additional funding have allowed the successes of the Discovery Wing to continue into the future as well as extending commissioning for similar therapeutic wings to ten additional prisons throughout England in 2024.[25]

This reflection on the delivery of the Discovery wing model pilot mirror Bennet and Shuker's best practice principals underpinning the establishment of a positive social climate on a prison wing.[26] Co-produced innovations in delivering mainstream custodial models, such as the Discovery wing pilot initiative described, represent a real opportunity for those in the sector to contribute to meeting the HMPPS Business Strategy commitments to Enabling people to be their best, Delivering an open learning culture, Motivating cultural transformation through partnerships and Modernising the estate.[27]

Drawing from this reflection prison service leaders could make greater use of a tried and tested wing-as-community hub delivery model in the mainstream prison custodial context, as the benefits to those subject to a custodial sentence, and those working in prison co-producing a wing-based community means the potential benefits of this wing model are manifold.

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25. For further details or enquiries, please contact cfo-servicedesk@justice.gov.uk
26. See footnote 2: Bennett & Shuker (2018).
27. HMPPS. (2019). HMPPS Business Strategy: Shaping our future. HMPPS. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/864681/HMPPS_Business_Strategy_Shaping_Our_Future.pdf (accessed 12 March 2025).