**Mentoring Solutions, Ex Offender Support Programme**

**Introduction**

Mentoring Solutions was a pioneering project providing intensive support for ex-offenders in the first hours, days and weeks after their release from prison in the form of mentoring provided by an experienced trained team of staff and volunteers most of whom are themselves ex-offenders. Started in the Southampton, Portsmouth and Winchester area 31/2 years ago to serve local clients particularly those with addiction problems, it has served more than 350 clients including men and women and people of many different ethnic backgrounds and with many different issues. Clients and referrers have had nothing but praise for the services and therein lies the problem, for although Mentoring Solutions is exactly the sort of service called for in Justice Secretary Chris Grayling’s 2013 announcement and takes the direction indicated in the 2003 Carter Review(1) and the seven pathways set out in the Home Office paper of 2004 “Reducing Reoffending National Action Plan” (2) it has had to close its doors because it could not obtain operating funds to enable it to continue.

**Summary**

Mentoring Solutions was established in 2010 by a donation from the Public Health Community team of Portsmouth NHS. It was established with the co-operation of the Probation service in Southampton who advised on the protocols and manning of the service and guided on processes and policies. The first client was received in March 2011. The client base was drawn from recently released adult prisoners serving less than 1 year from local prisons.

It was a voluntary organisation. Its theme was to intervene in the client's life and aid them away from repeat offending (and doubtless re-imprisonment) by drawing on the life experiences of ex offenders who had successfully turned their lives around and with training and support acted as mentors to new clients, aiding with :

 \* Benefits

\* Accommodation

\* Signposting in Health matters (Physical and Mental) and substance withdrawal

\* Education

\* CV building and job applying

This was delivered from date of release and lasted intensively for 4 weeks and on a needs basis of the client.  In the 3 and a half years it operated, it saw 357 clients , released mostly from local prisons but with recent closures increasingly from far flung prisons in the South of England. Three staff operated on a voluntary basis (reimbursed expenses), all had extensive criminal records including imprisonment. One of them re-entered education and completed a degree in social welfare.

Costs were over the life were approximately £70,000. Funded by NHS - £25,000, donations £5,000 and private funding £40,000. Results were good. As far as we could ascertain only 23 clients re-offended, were caught and were processed through the criminal justice system.

Anecdotal evidence exists in plenty. The exercise a success and it was with great sadness that the organisation was closed due to the lack of funding , a failure to get charity status quickly enough.  But it is a  process that works and should be encouraged.

**The Aims of Mentoring Solutions**

The idea which guides Mentoring Solutions is simple: 85-90% of ex-offenders eventually gain control of their once chaotic lives, this difficult experience gives them valuable insight into the needs and attitudes of newly released ex-offenders. With training and support they can help others to find their way through this transition. Ex –offenders trained in mentoring and support can provide a vital point of contact particularly for those offenders fighting addiction and with relatively short term sentences that may not provide the time for rehabilitative support in prison. This is very important in the first few week after release, when they may need fairly intensive mentoring and wide ranging support to address health and addiction issues, find accommodation, seek benefits and other entitlements, get places on retraining schemes and perhaps find a job. But they also need social contact and on-going contact to help them re-establish community bonds. Contact in the first days and weeks after release is vital for clients, helping them to form good habits and relationships and to avoid street gangs or return to addiction and crime.

Mentoring Solutions offers intensive support provided by ex-offenders with relevant training and support. This can be seen as the application of the principles of Positive Deviance - finding those people who had successfully overcome their issues and problems and asking them to share with others what had worked for them (3) and Coproduction – working in partnership with communities to empower them to address their own issues (4). The staff work with unpaid volunteers to provide all the services and support offered to clients. Their training has included: DANOS (Drug and Alcohol counselling) Motivational, mentoring and counselling skills and Mental Health (IAPT) training. This provides them with a start on the employment ladder and for one a possible route to higher education. They were initially paid the minimum wage for part time work up to 15 hours a week but as finance was reduced they operated as volunteers on the basis of expenses only.

Clients were referred from offender support services such as National Careers Service (formerly Tribal). They were met at the prison gate and offered daily mentoring and support meetings over a period of up to 4 weeks. This provides the time and discipline clients need to contact a range of local services and charities that can meet their specific needs. Immediate problems such as housing, contact with health services and other personal issues are dealt with over this period and clients are helped to plan their approach to issues such as behaviour management, education and job seeking. Clients are also welcomed to a drop in centre offering companionship, activity (pool table, coffee and biscuits) and computer access for job and other searches twice a week, that is operated in conjunction with St Mary’s parish in Southampton (see Annex A). Local support services to which clients are referred include Southampton City Limits (SCL), The Princes Trust, Narcotics Anonymous, Stonham Bass (housing group) and DWP Job finding agency.

In the Southampton, Portsmouth and Winchester area including the Isle of Wight there are 5 major prisons, though three prisons are amalgamated into one management unit, HMP Isle of Wight. These house a total of some 2,500 inmates. Mentoring Solutions took referrals from HMP Winchester, Reading and Dartmoor and several other prisons including HMP Bronzefield and Send that are women’s prisons, Hampshire Police and other released offender support agencies.

The contribution made by Mentoring Solutions is of course only one of the many different support services that help ex-offenders recover their lives from addiction and offending behaviour. Support within prisons is vital from prison officers and organisations that provide counselling and guidance. Indeed Mentoring Solutions is grateful to colleagues that ensure their leaflets and contacts are available in so many prisons where offenders ask for and are referred for support. Equally services that provide long term housing, addiction support, health and psychiatric care and personal development guidance are vital follow on support to which many of Mentoring Solutions clients are referred. But evidence suggests that through the gate support and intensive help over the first few days and weeks of release are crucial and often missing elements of the support ex-offenders need.

**The Value of Mentoring Solutions Assistance**

Examination of a sample of 103 client referrals showed they were nearly all young men of whom 4 declined the offer of support. Of the remaining 99 clients seen 6 reoffended and 6 were currently being mentored, 87 appear to have avoided reoffending (as far as is known), all were referred to health services (including 65 to addiction services), 84 were assisted in claiming benefit entitlement, 72 were referred to accommodation sources, 28 were helped to enter into retraining and education services, and 33 were referred to employment advice services, 11 were helped to find jobs. Many continued to attend the drop in centre.

Any value claimed for the contribution Mentoring Solutions makes to helping people reorder their lives and avoid reoffending must take as its starting point an estimate of what would have happened without the intervention. The clients are referred and choose to participate because they are seeking help to turn their lives around, clearly some of them would have succeeded in addressing their issues and hopefully would have avoided further problems without this support. However, on the basis of the evidence of activity levels and the experience of other similar programmes it is reasonable to estimate that at least 30% of the clients would be expected to reoffend within a year years and in 60% of these cases the first re-offence would be within six months. This reoffending occurs despite the availability of many excellent community based support services for ex-offenders. In fact this is a very conservative estimate, given the high proportion of young men with addiction problems (for whom reoffending rates rise to 90%) referred to Mentoring Solutions. On this very conservative basis it can be estimated that in 3 and a half years during which 357 interventions have been provided and reoffending has been reduced to less than 10%, at least 60-70 clients who might otherwise be expected to do so, avoided reoffending. If the cost to the Criminal Justice System is some £130,000 for each reoffender in 2008 values, as noted in Annex C, this suggests saving of £7,800,000 to £9,100,000 to the Criminal Justice System. If wider impacts of reoffending on the cost to victims of crime and to society are taken into account the saving generated by the scheme would amount to some £42 million. Given the financial difficulties faced by the charity, the cost per client was unrealistically low for much of the operation – less than £200 per client. This would mean that a Social Investment Bank investing in such a scheme on this basis would achieve a return from saving to the Criminal Justice System of over £110 for every £1 spent and return to wider social costs would be £600 per £1 spent.

While these cold calculations show the cost averted for the Criminal Justice System and victims and wider society, the human value of the scheme must take into account the positive impact on all 87 clients who successfully worked with the project to turn their lives around and give them value and meaning and it must also recognise the fulfilment of the three staff members, volunteers and supporters who have gained immeasurably from the experience of this programme. The human stories set out in Annex B depicts real life examples (with names changed) of some of the people Mentoring Solutions have helped on their personal road to recovering their lives.

**In Conclusion**

Mentoring Solutions demonstrated the success of its model of Positive Deviance and Co Production by the benefits it brings to offenders and the wider community and its low operating costs. It seems illogical that a programme that has been so successful so economically and socially beneficial and so well fitting government policy should have come to an end. Mentoring Solutions played a vital role in preparing clients to plan their lives and accept the help and support of other agencies as well as dealing with immediate issues. Clients need support to develop order in their chaotic lives and this is where Mentoring Solutions was most valuable. We urge the government to find ways of supporting local initiatives such as this.

**Annex A**

**The Drop –in Centre in the Basement of the Parish Offices**



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**Annex B: The Human Case**

Al is a heroin addict in his thirties with a chaotic lifestyle but with a determination to turn his life around, he sought the help of Mentoring Solutions who met him from the prison gate on a Friday. As an addict his most important possession was his discharge “scrip” (a prescription for methadone treatment). In the few hours it took to get from the prison to his lodgings he managed to lose his scrip. With the help of his mentors he went “cold turkey” for the weekend during which mentors took turns to spend time with him and keep him calm. It is impossible to describe what cold turkey means to an addict but Mentoring Solutions mentors know and understand. The following Monday they sorted him out with addiction services and helped him make some important decisions on his life and future. He is not fully recovered yet, he is still in treatment and has no job but he is on the road to recovery and in charge of his life.

Ben is 22 year old, whose addiction and subsequent jail term led to a complete breakdown with his family, who refused to accept him back into their home on his release. Mentoring Solution staff found him the last emergency bed in a local hostel (the “ebed” is just that a bed in a corridor with nowhere to put bags that must be cleared up in the morning). He spent the next day with mentors who helped him find longer term accommodation and put him in touch with addiction support services. He then worked on a voluntary basis with Mentoring Solutions for a short period. Mentors then helped him to get funding for a training placement and later he got a job in market gardening on his own initiative. It was at this stage that a mentor helped him phone his parents (they lent him a mobile phone and made the first call). He is not yet back home but he has a future.

Cath is a young Portuguese women who was not a client but a volunteer coping with an addiction problem, from which she was recovering, she worked in a night shelter and volunteered with Mentoring Solutions (through narcotics services). She helped with female clients including Diana an English girl again a heroin addict released from a sentence arising from prostitution, to feed her habit. Diana was another person who turned her life around starting with a very simple process of filling out a DLA (Disability Living Allowance form) and receiving help from addiction services.

Ed is a 54 year old Afro- Caribbean man who came to Mentoring Solutions twice, the first time he tried to get straight he could not cope and broke his parole license by theft, which sent him back to prison. On the second occasion his probation officer called the office as she was convinced that Ed really wanted to go straight this time. For the second time mentors picked him up at the prison gate and spent time with him planning his next steps. His addiction problem was relatively less serious and he was sincere in his desire to serve his probation license (i.e. stay out of trouble) with a view to returning to his home country. Mentors helped him find accommodation, and get further training in catering, he now does some voluntary work using his catering skills and with luck will succeed in his ambition to get back to life in Trinidad.

These are true life stories but of course all names have been changed

**Annex C: The Economic Case**

Nationally the total population of offenders in prisons in England and Wales in 2008 was 83,000, about 95% of whom are men. The total number of people in the Offender Management System is greater including those on pre and post release supervision - 56,000 and offenders under a court order – 147,000 (5). Of the offenders over 18 released from prisons: about a quarter were formerly in some form of care. Many have low levels of literacy and numeracy and a variety of learning difficulties and disabilities including dyslexia, 50% have reading skills at or below that of an 11 year old, 7% have an IQ of less than 70. Nearly half of all males and one third of females in custody were excluded from school and 50% of male and 70% of female offenders achieved no qualifications at school or college. Prior to conviction, two thirds were unemployed, and one third homeless. On entering prison more 70% of prisoners had drug abuse problems and infection rates of HIV and hepatitis C are between 15-20 times those of the general population. But 80% of them had never had contact with drug treatment services (6). Nearly three quarters of prisoners in custody suffer from two or more mental disorders a great many female prisoners self-harm. On release from prison over 40% lose contact with their family and over 50% are not registered with GPs or dentists.

Probation Services priorities are to protect the public and support the courts, focussing on serious offenders. Two thirds of those released from prisons receive no statutory support other than the release grant of £48, those who have served more than 12 months in prison and are over 21 are given probation orders. A larger number of offenders are not given a prison sentence but receive Supervision and Court Orders, that could require them to undertake unpaid work, attend the Probation Office and/or attend courses such as anger management and consequential thinking skills, for this group Probation Services start at 18.

On average 47.5% of people released from prison re-offend within 12 months and 67% within 2 years. However this is highly variable depending upon the nature of the offence and the age and sex of the offender. Highest rates of reoffending (90%) are committed by those with drug treatment and testing orders. Young male adults are most likely to reoffend, which may be due to their failure to resolve personal issues or to find a job and social contacts. They are most vulnerable to criminal gangs both in prison and on release, which offer a street based social group and in some cases the opportunity to earn a living through drug dealing. Criminal gang membership greatly increases the likelihood of reoffending (7).

Most people released from prison manage to achieve some level of normalisation by their early thirties. Though 10-15% of offenders continue in “a life of crime”, 85-90% eventually resolve their issues and free themselves, from years lost to drug abuse, feelings of inadequacy, social isolation and disadvantage.

Without minimizing the responsibilities of offenders for their behaviour, it is apparent that a great deal of offending reflects failures of care, education, health and offender management services. Community efforts to address reoffending offer both potential economic and social benefits and the fulfilment of a duty of care to the individuals and to society

The target for reducing reoffending rates set for the National Offender Management Service, when it was created in 2004, was to reduce the rate of reoffending by 10% by 2010. Key aspects of policy were to create local partnerships including with the NHS, Local Authorities and NGOs to address the 7 pathways to reducing reoffending: accommodation, education, training and employment, physical and mental health, drugs and alcohol, finance, benefits and debt, children and families and community and attitudes, thinking and behaviour. Evidence suggests that offender and ex offender support programmes can reduce reconviction rates by 10- 15%. Alcohol and drug addiction services can reduce reconvictions by 11% (8). A study of support for released prisoners, which included enabling them to open a bank account, showed rates of reoffending reduced to 35% (9). An economic evaluation of a programme in which offenders were mentored and supported by ex-offenders, showed reductions in reoffending of 40% and benefits of at least £10 for every £1 spent (10). This suggests that even the modest attempts to address ex-offender issues can reduce reoffending behaviour significantly. A review by the Young Foundation (11) shows average improvements in reoffending of 10% for a range of interventions.

The total economic cost of crime to England and Wales estimated in 1999/2000 (6), adjusted for the retail price index, suggests the total cost including costs to victims in 2008/9 was £75 billion, of which about £15 billion relates to costs of the Criminal Justice System (CJS) including the police, courts, prison and probation services, £11 billion of these CJS costs relate to reoffending (8).

On average each reoffending prisoner is estimated, by the Cabinet Office paper of 2002, to generate costs to the CJS of £130,000 (5) in 2008 values. Even assuming that clients seeking help have a lower propensity to reoffend, say 30% and if support reduced their re-offence rate to 25% on average, each offender supported would, on average, generate saving of £3,250 to the Criminal Justice System. If economic cost to society are commensurate with these gains, based on the 2000 study (8) total impact would be over £16,250 for each ex-offender receiving support. This figure includes a broad range of social costs including loss to victims, but even on the basis of savings to the Criminal Justice System support for offenders and ex-offenders is likely to represent good value for society, if it can achieve an appreciable reduction in reoffending. And one should also consider the value for ex-offenders of fuller, more meaningful personal, work and social lives.

Reducing reoffending might seem a sort of statistical abstraction, but it is actually about reducing the social cost of crime to its victims (potentially almost 10% reduction in solved crime) as well as creating opportunities for fulfilled lives for offenders who may also be regarded as losers to crime. Offenders are feared and blamed by society but offenders themselves also frequently have feelings of low self-esteem amounting to self-loathing and isolation (12). They are often conscious of wasted, empty lives, indeed research suggests that low self-worth and social isolation are major factors in reoffending. Recent studies have shown that social contact is highly valued by people and social values have been suggested. In the next phase of developing Mentoring Solutions we will explore the extent to which the increase in social capital -(bonding between ex-offenders, bridging with other groups and linking to services and support) can be measured and valued from the ex-offender’s perspective, this will build on principles and methods developed in working with new immigrant communities with Portsmouth City Council, funded by the European Integration Fund.

It is difficult to know how to value a life well spent or to value community links (social capital), these are moral questions. The value of a life saved from death by traffic safety measures is assessed by the Department for Transport at some £1.3 million in 2007/8 terms (13). Social capital is even harder to measure but for, example Putnam (14) suggests an isolated person is twice as likely to die early as someone better connected to society. So in addition to the economic costs to victims, there is a substantial loss of quality of life to perpetrators of wasted, isolated lives and years spent in prison.

This initiative also shows the great potential for extending joint working by Offender Management Services, the NHS, Local Authorities and NGO Community Organisations to address the needs of offenders and ex-offenders. Ex-offenders who have themselves recovered their self-confidence and role in society may play a vital role in such programmes since they can share experience and help others build self-esteem and address their life issues. The starting point for engagement can be varied, ranging from art to community work or simply making contact with services such as the GP and Dentist and of course drug rehabilitation services. This is can be an important first line of contact and social support as one element of Offender Management and social support services providing an integrated approach to the seven pathways to reduce reoffending. Employing ex-offenders in such programmes can also constitute a first step towards meaningful work and social contribution for them. This approach has obvious dangers and difficulties but the price of not trying is the immense personal cost of wasted lives as well as the cost to the Criminal Justice System and the rest of society.

This approach to valuing offender support services underlies the idea of Social Impact Bonds. This is an experimental mechanism for financing social interventions on the basis of the benefits achieved. A partnership of public and voluntary sector bodies could raise capital and operating funds backed by Social Investment Wholesale Bank in the form of a bond that is financed by income from savings in future costs or other benefits. Thus the charitable organisations participating can achieve a profit if the outcomes are shown to be positive and cost saving but will make a loss if saving cannot be demonstrated. A pilot scheme at HMP Peterborough (15) is exploring how the idea might be applied in the field of offender support services, where services that reduce reoffending can be shown to have a major impact on future costs.

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