



# Re-imagining futures:

Exploring arts interventions  
and the process of desistance





Sounding out platform 7, Music in Prisons

Photo © Owen Richards, Courtesy of The Koestler Trust



A photograph of a man with a star tattoo on his left forearm, wearing a dark brown cardigan, singing into a silver microphone. The background is blurred, showing other people and what appears to be a stage or performance setting.

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# Foreword

by Tim Robertson

Chair of the Arts Alliance  
CEO Koestler Trust

The arts can easily be caricatured as a fluffy non-essential. To overcome that caricature, those of us who believe that creativity is vital to human development, and who know from experience that the arts are uniquely powerful as a means of transforming lives, often need objective evidence to make the case. This research report offers a compelling new source of such evidence for practitioners, managers and policy-makers who use - or are thinking of using - arts in the field of criminal justice.

Evidence and research have been central to the work of the Arts Alliance since we were first commissioned by the Ministry of Justice, the Monument Trust and Arts Council England in 2008. Our guidance on Demonstrating the Value of Arts in Criminal Justice<sup>1</sup> gives practical advice to arts organisations about measuring impact. Our Evidence Library<sup>2</sup> provides a searchable on-line overview of current research. Unlocking Value<sup>3</sup>, the evaluation that we commissioned from New Philanthropy Capital in 2011, presented detailed statistical data on economic impact, as well as demonstrating significant reductions in re-offending. Our future ambition is to commission the biggest ever study of arts with offenders, looking for both social and cultural outcomes from a set of projects co-ordinated across different criminal justice settings, combined with a community of practitioners to raise quality, showcasing to bring the resulting arts products to the public, and peer review by established artists.

The present report is an interim step towards this ambition. We have commissioned the research in the last year of the Arts Alliance's current funding as a pilot for what we aim to do on a larger scale in the future. We owe a great debt of thanks to Northumbria and Bath Spa Universities for completing the study to a tight deadline and budget. Building on the quantitative data on outcomes found through Unlocking Value, this time we have looked for the qualitative realities behind the numbers - especially to see whether independent researchers could observe desistance taking place in arts projects.

"Desistance" is the process of personal growth through which offenders become non-offenders. Re-offending data shows simply that an offender has or has not been caught committing a crime during a particular time period. It does not usually take into account the frequency or severity of the offending, and cannot say how likely the offender is to commit crimes in the future. Desistance research looks for change on a more profound and permanent level, in which an offender ultimately achieves a new identity - a selfhood free from crime.

Crucially, though, desistance from crime is a journey - sometimes a lengthy or meandering journey - not a one-off event. Projects aimed at reducing re-offending need to support and ideally accelerate this journey, but without pre-empting its conclusion. And evaluation of offenders' progress needs to look for a range of personal and social factors that indicate a redefinition of identity - including a balanced estimation of one's own abilities, a sense of agency rather than passivity, a capacity to form trusting relationships, and a future narrative of potential rather than failure.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.artsalliance.org.uk/demonstrating-value-arts-criminal-justice>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.artsevidence.org.uk>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.artsalliance.org.uk/unlockingvalue>

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These factors are exactly what stand out from the present report. Studying different groups of offenders in four different arts projects, Charlotte Bilby, Laura Caulfield and Louise Ridley have indeed found evidence of desistance, and they have found it in their observation of interpersonal detail. It is enormously refreshing - and the results are all the more convincing for being grounded in human reality.

This report offers a strong basis for the Arts Alliance to go forward to even greater developments in policy, practice and research. I hope it will be a helpful tool and an inspiration to many of us working in the arts in criminal justice. I hope above all that the individual offenders who took part in this study, and all offenders pursuing the arts across the criminal justice sector, will indeed achieve true desistance from crime.

Tim Robertson  
Chair of the Arts Alliance  
Chief Executive, The Koestler Trust

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## Acknowledgements

The Arts Alliance would like to thank the research and evidence advisory group who have provided their guidance and expertise throughout this evaluation process and without whom, this report would not have been possible. The advisory group is made up of: Professor Sarah Colvin (University of Warwick), Anna Herrmann (Head of Education, Clean Break), Saul Hewish (Co-Director, Rideout), Angus McLewin (independent consultant), Rose Parkes (Senior Lecturer in Community & Criminal Justice, De Montfort University), Andy Watson (Director, Geese Theatre). The Arts Alliance would also like to thank the individuals, prison establishments and organisations that have made this evaluation possible including Music in Prisons, padbooks and the Writers in Prison Foundation.





We all know from our personal experience how participating in or creating art has the possibility to change how we see the world and our place in it. This is true for prisoners too - and I have seen how great arts projects in prisons can play a crucial role in helping prisoners see a new crime-free future for themselves. I hope this report will be of value to all those concerned with the prison system making the best use possible of the opportunities created by the link between the arts and desistance.

**Nick Hardwick,**  
HM Chief Inspector of Prisons



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# Executive summary

This report was commissioned by the Arts Alliance, the national body representing arts in criminal justice. Jointly funded by the Ministry of Justice and the Monument Trust, the Arts Alliance represents a growing network of over 470 arts practitioners and organisations working in prisons and the community to support men, women and young people to lead crime-free lives, through creative interventions.

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## Political context

The coalition Government's Transforming Rehabilitation strategy and ongoing austerity measures mean rapid and complex change across the Criminal Justice System. This includes opening up the market, restructuring of the prison and probation service and the introduction of payment-by-results mechanisms to re-offending outcomes. The Transforming Rehabilitation agenda also includes acknowledgement of offenders' complex backgrounds and a call for increased development of offenders' vocational skills to enhance future employability alongside learning opportunities which address responsiveness and diversity issues (NOMS, 2012; MoJ, 2013). This landscape presents huge challenges and potential opportunities for innovative arts projects, which contribute towards the important 'intermediate' outcomes that enable individuals to make positive steps towards effective rehabilitation.

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## Arts in criminal justice

This research, along with the growing body of evidence, suggests there are strong reasons to consider arts in criminal justice an area of considerable significance and innovation. Arts practice aims to bring about a positive affect experience in the participant (Parkes & Bilby, 2010). The affective experience, which can include a sense of community cohesion, that time is passing at a different pace, or an improved feeling of self-satisfaction and achievement, can be linked to desistance from crime.

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## What do we mean by desistance?

Desistance is the process by which people who have offended stop offending (primary desistance) and then take on a personal narrative (Maruna, 2001) that supports a continuing non-offending lifestyle (secondary desistance). Change is not a linear process; rather some will zigzag and will offend again on the journey to secondary desistance. In order for desistance from crime to take place, Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph (2002: 999-1002) suggest that there is a four-stage process which includes an openness to change; exposure and reaction to 'hooks' for change (or turning points); imagining and believing in a 'replacement self'; and a change in the way that offending and deviant behaviour is viewed. Maruna (2007: 652) notes that 'desistance is typically understood to be more than just an absence of crime. Desistance is the maintenance of crime-free behaviour and is... an active process in itself... it involves the pursuit of a positive life'.

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## About the research

This research considers the possible relationships between the intricate process of abstaining from crime and the influence that taking part in some form of art-based enrichment activity might have on participants. Employing a

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qualitative methodology, the research addresses a number of questions linked to intermediate steps (or outcomes) in an individual's journey to desistance from crime. The research specifically explores how arts interventions contribute towards enabling people to form positive identities, build new narratives and build positive relationships with peers, staff and family. It also begins to investigate how arts interventions enable people to make significant behavioural changes. The latest National Offender Management Service (NOMS) Commissioning Intentions Document (October 2013) recognises the importance and complexity of these intermediate steps, which may lead to desistance from crime.

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## The setting

The research team investigated five arts projects in four criminal justice settings, including practising visual arts in a high security adult male prison; music and deejaying skills with young offenders in the community; a music making project in a resettlement (open) prison and creative writing and bookbinding in a closed female prison. The research team spent at least four sessions with each of the projects observing the activities and interviewing participants, arts practitioners and prison staff as part of an in-depth qualitative methodology. The team also used participants' written work and evaluations, and examples of the work produced in the arts activities. This data was analysed using a thematic, content analysis approach.

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## Key findings

This piece of research demonstrates a clear link between taking part in arts-based activities and the movement towards secondary desistance. It identifies the importance of arts practice for the participants and shows what types of outcomes successful projects should be producing. The research also highlights the importance of collecting qualitative as well as quantitative data on arts projects and their participants when measuring these changes.

Analysis of the data across all five projects produced the following key findings:

- Participation in arts activities enables individuals to begin to **redefine** themselves, an important factor in desistance from crime.
- Arts projects facilitate high levels of **engagement**. This is significant because many individuals in contact with the Criminal Justice System have struggled to engage with productive activities in the past. Participants must engage in order to be able to redefine themselves. Engagement in arts projects has also been shown to lead to greater participation in education and work-related activities.
- Arts projects can have a positive impact on how people manage themselves during their sentence, particularly on their ability to **cooperate with others** – including other participants and staff. This correlates with increased self-control and better problem-solving skills.
- Engagement with arts projects facilitates increased **compliance** with criminal justice orders and regimes.
- Arts projects are **responsive** to participants' individual needs. Current policy documentation on commissioning services to meet offenders' needs highlights the importance of **responsiveness** in meeting diverse needs.

“ Art provides the safe space to explore challenging questions and to make work which allows prisoners to discover that they have a creative eloquence and confidence not seen before.

(Art teacher)





Music sessions helped me open my mind and be more positive.

(Participant)

- The **status of arts practitioners as professional artists** is highly significant in the success of projects and their impact on participants. The value of this should not be underestimated by agencies of the Criminal Justice System when considering using external organisations.
- Arts projects provide **safe spaces** for individuals to have positive experiences and begin to make individual choices.

The findings from this research clearly indicate that arts projects can contribute to an individual's journey to desistance. The findings highlight key outcomes for participants and the importance of the relationships with project facilitators. There is now a need for longitudinal research, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods, to assess how far the findings presented here are sustained in the long term.

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## Summary recommendations

The research process and findings highlight a number of issues that lead the research team to make recommendations for different sections of the Criminal Justice System regarding the arts in rehabilitation provision.

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## For arts organisations

- Outline the impact that your project and arts practice will have on your participants
- Consider whether the criminal justice agency you are working with is able structurally to support the participants' journey to desistance at all stages of your project
- Does it create and support hope, engender positive relationships, celebrate success and achievement?
- Be responsive to the participants' individual needs, while setting clear boundaries about group and personal expectations during the project
- Create a supportive, trusting environment in which participants are encouraged to take artistic risks, which might fail
- Celebrate success and feed this back to participants
- On evaluation forms, or reflection logs, ask participants about what skills they have learnt and how they might use these in other situations; whether they have noticed any changes in their behaviour or attitudes during the project and how this might be maintained after the end of the activity; whether they will continue to take part in arts activities in the future
- Ensure that you collect demographic information on participants, such as name and date of birth to enable you to monitor and develop your practice.



I feel privileged to be working with a professional.

(Participant)



I would be lost without art, back in the system.

(Participant)

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## For criminal justice agencies and service commissioners

- Consider how innovative arts provision can be supported in your agency under commissioning specifications and use evidence from this and other research to support your views
- Consider whether and how your organisation structurally supports individuals' journeys to desistance before and after arts interventions
- Do you create and support hope, engender positive relationships, celebrate success and achievement?
- Understand how the arts project will effect change in participants and identify those to take part who will benefit most from these changes
- Publicise the arts activity as widely as possible and explain the impact that you want the arts project to have to all staff
- Enable arts organisations to monitor any changes in behaviour by providing relevant data on the participants and follow up mechanisms
- Identify an appropriate space for them to work in. This space needs to be viewed by participants as a safe environment
- Find ways to recognise success and achievement and feed this back to participants.

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## For government and service commissioners

- Consider that innovative projects have a role in promoting both primary and secondary desistance in a system of 'proper punishment' and 'effective rehabilitation'
- Assess the value of realist evaluation and research as part of a developing evidence base on the impact of arts interventions
- Understand that the soft outcomes that arts projects promote may not be best measured by quantifiable change over a short period of time. The real impact of arts projects can be best measured through the combination of qualitative and quantitative measures
- Be open to new and emerging organisations who provide innovative provision, have identified desistance-related aims, objectives and outcomes, and who have robust evaluation plans in place
- Consider the role and importance of providing the personal and social education projects in the last 12 months of offenders' sentences, rather than only vocational skills. Arts projects are particularly successful in improving cooperative and communication skills and self-confidence, which are important in the job market
- Continue to support arts organisations to develop effective evidence of their impact, exploring data beyond re-conviction rates.



Indeed, that which I have not felt capable of has now become possible due to my new learning and the advice and support of facilitators/teachers.

(Participant)



Music can unlock something in people and help them to address other things head on.

(Facilitator)



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## Background

### About this report

This report outlines the process and findings of a piece of research carried out for the Arts Alliance between February and August 2013. The research investigated whether there was any evidence to link taking part in an arts activity in the Criminal Justice System and desistance from crime. A consideration of desistance from crime, and potential links with the arts, is provided later in this report. Using a realist (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) qualitative evaluation approach, it investigated whether there were any links between taking part in arts practices and desistance from crime. The realist approach ensured that the characteristics of the variety of criminal justice settings involved in the research were taken into account. Data was collected, and analysed in a methodologically rigorous manner, from five arts projects in four criminal justice locations during the period May to August 2013. Full details of the data collection tools used can be found in the appendix to this report.

The findings from each project are presented individually, before overall thematic findings are outlined, then recommendations for arts practitioners, criminal justice agencies and their associated Offender Learning and Skills Services (OLASS) providers, and central government are made.

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## Introduction & context setting

The coalition Government announced its intentions to transform the Criminal Justice System in 2010, in the publication 'Breaking the Cycle: Effective punishment, rehabilitation and sentencing of offenders'. This document outlined the move away from the 'enforced idleness' (MoJ, 2010:1) of prison and towards a system that ensures that former offenders become economically active, skilled members of the community. The rehabilitation revolution has seen changes to the OLASS a further round of prison privatisation, a declaration of the intention to radically change the provision of community penalties (Ministry of Justice, 2013), and changes to the way in which the NOMS commissions criminal justice services, including the extension of payment by results.

In this policy context of rapid change, there is a call for increased development of offenders' vocational skills, which aims to ensure increased levels of employability for former offenders. This does not exclude the use of other forms of education and activity within the Criminal Justice System, as there is an acknowledgement that there is an important role for other types of learning within the Criminal Justice System which might, for example, improve physical and mental health. This, along with the belief that learning opportunities need to address responsiveness and diversity issues (NOMS, 2012; MoJ, 2013), suggests that there is an important place for arts activities within the Criminal Justice System. Indeed, the review of offender skills 'Making prisons work: Skills for rehabilitation' states:

*There is a long tradition of the arts being used within custody to motivate and engage learners, with much good work by voluntary and community sector organisations in support of that. We recognise the important role that the arts, collectively, can play in the rehabilitation process through encouraging self-esteem and improving communication skills as a means to the end of reducing reoffending. Future employment or self employment in, or associated with, the creative arts and crafts can for some represent a potential pathway to life free of crime. Engagement*



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*in the arts with the possibility of fresh vision, or at least a glimpse of a different life, often provokes, inspires and delights (BIS & MoJ, 2011: 19).*

In the context of the current 'Transforming Rehabilitation' (MoJ, 2013) agenda, the proposed opening up of the market for rehabilitation providers means there should be a clear place for arts organisations within criminal justice agencies. However, there is a need to evidence the impact that the arts have on offenders' motivation, intentions and journey to desisting from crime and realising their potential as crime-free citizens. NOMS states in the most recent documentation that it will concentrate on commissioning services which have a proven track record of reducing reoffending.

Evidence based on peer-reviewed, quantitative research will take precedence over 'case studies and anecdotal reports' (2012: 8). It does, however, recognise that for many interventions it will not be possible to gather a level of quantitative data that is methodologically robust. We suggest (a) that this is particularly true of new and innovative projects delivered by smaller providers, (b) that it is likely that many arts practices fit within the categorisation of small and innovative projects, and (c) that this should not stop arts providers from endeavouring to capture data that will help evaluate outcomes.

Data needs to be able to measure outcomes appropriately, in the light of the aims and objectives of a project. The arts organisations that applied to take part in this research identified among their aims 'soft outcomes' including changes in self-esteem; the ability to work collaboratively with others; and participants' enjoyment. Changes in offenders' behaviour resulting in lower reoffending rates is clearly the desirable outcome of any activity in the Criminal Justice System; but a reconviction study is not always the most sophisticated way of measuring those changes, which are complex and may take place over a sustained period.

Quantitative data cannot accurately measure the outcomes of projects with small numbers of participants, which take place over a short period of time. Three of the projects were short-term and all had small numbers of participants, the smallest number being four and the largest eleven. Quantitative analysis cannot provide robust evidence for change in behaviour over such a short period, nor for such small groups – reconviction studies are typically at least two years in length after the delivery of any intervention. Testing for changes in behaviour through the use of psychometric test scores would, again, have been statistically unreliable given the small participant groups.

This should not stop arts organisations from gathering demographic data on their participants, so that they start to build a bank of data that can be analysed or sent to the Ministry of Justice's Justice Data Lab for analysis in the future. Just as arts practices in the Criminal Justice System can be seen as innovative projects in themselves, exploring the mechanisms for change in the journey to desistance needs to be innovative too. Methodologies that can measure changes in behaviour (important in primary desistance) as well as changes in personal narratives (important in secondary desistance) need to be adopted. This needs to be recognised and accepted by policy makers.

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## Research process

This research used a qualitative approach to investigate whether there was any evidence of links between taking part in an arts activity while subject to a criminal justice sentence, and desistance from crime.

The research addresses a number of questions:

- Do the arts contribute to an individual's journey to desistance?
- What intermediate outcomes do arts interventions contribute towards?
- Do arts interventions enable people to form positive identities and build new narratives?
- Do the arts help offenders build positive relationships?
- Is there anything significant about the working relationship between arts staff and the offender, which might enable desistance?
- Can arts interventions enable people to make significant behavioural changes?

The research team and the Arts Alliance put out a call for arts organisations to take part in the research in March 2013 and selected five projects in four locations. Choices about which projects should be included were based on a number of criteria, including the age and gender of the participant population; whether sentences were being served in the community or in prison; the type of arts activity being practised; the make-up and experience of the arts organisation running the activity; whether the arts organisation had the support of the criminal justice agency they worked with to take part in the research; and whether the activity was being run in the research time period. The choices made tried to ensure that the impact on a variety of arts practice on different offender groups in varying criminal justice settings could be evaluated.

The chosen projects were:

The **ISS music project** run by a youth offending service (YOS) in a metropolitan area. This is a music and deejaying project for 13 to 18 year old medium- to high-risk offenders. The young people who take part are predominantly over 16 and male, but young women are not excluded from the project. The sessions are ongoing and are delivered in 2-hour sessions during the week. This project is embedded within the YOS, and is run by YOS staff, but is delivered in a community music studio.

**Art classes** in a unit for personality disordered offenders in a high security prison. These classes are embedded within the prison, and run by staff from a further education college. The classes help men create mainly visual and 2D art work and run every weekday for 10 hours per week. The men are aged between their late twenties and early fifties and are high-risk offenders.

Two projects were chosen from a closed prison for female offenders; **Creative writing**, run by the Writers in Prison Foundation and padbooks, which is a local bookbinding and paper craft project, funded by the National Lottery. It is run on a weekly basis for four weeks and is open to all adult prisoners from all risk categories. The creative writing element of the work runs at the same time as the bookbinding element, but additional sessions run over the four weeks.

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**Music in Prisons** is a music creation organisation, which ran a week-long, intensive project in a resettlement prison for adult men during August 2013. The men were all due for release within the following two years.

The research team spent at least four sessions with each of the projects observing the activities. Participants, arts practitioners and prison staff were interviewed in formal and informal settings. The team also used participants' written work and evaluations, and examples of the work produced in the arts activities. This data was analysed using a thematic, content analysis approach. The analysis was done manually. The team analysed the case studies and then compared the emerging themes, which showed high levels of agreement about what the important findings were (inter-rater reliability).

Where possible, the research team collected data on participant demographics; including age, index offence and offence history.

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## Participants

A total of 30 individuals in contact with the Criminal Justice System participated in this research, alongside project facilitators and criminal justice staff. Twelve of the participants were female and eighteen were male. Ages ranged from 15 years to age 50+. Eleven adult males were incarcerated within a high-secure prison, seven adult males within an open prison, eight adult females within a women's prison, and four young people (three male, one female) were subject to community sentences or bail conditions. Further details can be found within each of the project descriptions later in this report.

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## The arts and the Criminal Justice System

The relationship between the creative arts and the Criminal Justice System has been relatively under researched and under-evaluated (McLewin, 2011), despite having a long and complex history (Cox and Gelsthorpe, 2012). There are strong reasons to consider arts in criminal justice an area of considerable significance and innovation. The value of engaging prisoners in purposeful activity has long been recognised, and is part of the criteria against which prisons are assessed by the inspectorate. Similarly the goals of HM Prison Service include the duty to look after prisoners with humanity, as well as rehabilitating offenders to lead crime-free lives. If we accept that an element of humanity is the need and desire to express ourselves creatively, whether verbally or in other ways, then we must also acknowledge that this demands the provision of creative activities within the prison estate and the wider Criminal Justice System (Parkes & Bilby, 2010).

Arts practice aims to bring about a positive affect experience in the participant (Parkes & Bilby, 2010) rather than having a direct impact on offending behaviour. The affective experience, which can include a sense of community cohesion, that time is passing at a different pace, or an improved feeling of self-satisfaction and achievement, can be linked to desistance from crime. This research considers the possible relationships between the intricate process of abstaining from crime and the influence that taking part in some form of art-based enrichment activity might have on participants.



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## Desistance from crime

Desistance is the process by which people who have offended stop offending (primary desistance) and then take on a personal narrative (Maruna, 2001) that supports a continuing non-offending lifestyle (secondary desistance). Change is not a linear process; rather some will zigzag and will offend again on the journey to secondary desistance. In order for desistance from crime to take place, Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph (2002: 999-1002) suggest that there is a four-stage process which includes an openness to change; exposure and reaction to 'hooks' for change (or turning points); imagining and believing in a 'replacement self'; and a change in the way that offending and deviant behaviour is viewed. Maruna (2007: 652) notes that 'desistance is typically understood to be more than just an absence of crime. Desistance is the maintenance of crime-free behaviour and is... an active process in itself ... it involves the pursuit of a positive life'.

Desistance is not one single life event, although some have argued that a life event might trigger desistance from crime, but a series of changes in attitude and behaviour over a sustained period of time. A desistance-focused approach to changing offenders' behaviour needs to be empathic, collaborative and person-centred (McNeill, 2006), and 'engagement with families, communities, civil society, and the state itself' (McNeill, Farrall, Lightowler & Maruna, 2012: 2) is necessary for desistance to be achieved and maintained. Desistance might be considered a subjective notion that relies on positive self-change, rather than a negative risk-based approach that focuses on offenders' personal deficits.

The Good Lives Model (Ward & Brown, 2004) takes this strengths-based approach to people changing their offending behaviour, and notes that in order to change, people need to have the skills and capabilities to do so, and opportunities and support from external sources. Or, as Hudson, Maguire & Raynor (2007: 637) note, 'agency is as important as – if not more so than – structure in determining whether or not people commit crime, and, in particular, whether or not they desist from an offending career' [*italics in original*].

If agency is at least as crucial as structure in maintaining a positive life course and abstinence from offending, then the outcomes from arts-based activities within the Criminal Justice System may have an important role to play. A number of reports (for example, Hughes, 2005; Arts Alliance, 2010), have noted that arts-based interventions seem very effective in producing what are often called 'soft outcomes', for example higher levels of reported self-esteem and positive self-image, and improvements in social skills and relationships. These elements help support social bonds and the development of social capital,<sup>1</sup> which are thought to be essential in the journey to desistance (Farrall, 2004). Participating in arts-based activities also seems to lead to a greater openness to other kinds of educational courses and attainment (Hughes, 2005; Caulfield, Wilson & Wilkinson, 2009; Anderson, et al, 2011). Research suggests that all the things arts activities support - higher levels of self-esteem, improved relationships and the maintenance of bonds with family, and improved levels of educational attainment - are linked to a reduction in reoffending. Arts interventions may therefore have an impact on 'primary

<sup>1</sup> Social capital concerns the positive impact that developing personal and community relationships can have.

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desistance', even if it is more difficult to identify their impact on 'secondary desistance', despite Maruna's (2007: 659) assertion that being a creative artist might be a generative role which is a 'dignified alternative necessary to justify a break away from criminality'.

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## How the arts and desistance might be linked

While research (Anderson, Colvin, McNeill, Nellis, Overy, Sparks & Tett, 2011; Bilby, 2011; Blacker, Watson & Beech, 2008; Caulfield, 2011; Caulfield & Wilson, 2010; Cox & Gelsthorpe, 2012; Digard & Liebling, 2012; Wilson, Caulfield & Atherton, 2009; Parkes, 2011; Shailor, 2011) has started to demonstrate that arts activities can have a positive effect on offenders' behaviour and attitudes in prison, as well as helping to address the needs of damaged communities outside of the Criminal Justice System (Miles and Strauss, 2010), collaboration between academics and practitioners has been limited. Innovative approaches to researching enrichment activities are nonetheless starting to emerge (see for example Simons & McCormack, 2007; Miles and Strauss, 2010; Atkinson & Rubridge, 2013).

As desistance is complex, so too are the ways in which it can be measured. Links to primary desistance (stopping offending) can be identified by collecting reconviction data on those who have taken part in arts-based activities. Identifying movement towards secondary desistance is more difficult, and needs not only to be evidenced quantitatively, but also qualitatively. Reconviction data and changes in psychometric test scores can help identify changes in behaviour and attitudes (if the test group is large enough and the timescale sufficient to render the statistics reliable); but in all cases this 'hard' evidence needs to be supported by the changing narratives that former offenders tell about themselves. It is important to capture the movement away from the identity of an offender, towards the identity of a crime-free citizen.

This piece of research demonstrates a clear link between taking part in arts-based activities and the movement towards secondary desistance. It identifies the importance of arts practice for the participants and shows what types of outcomes successful projects should be producing. This research is timely because of the increasing importance to service commissioners and policymakers of data that evidences positive changes in offenders' behaviour. The research also highlights the importance of collecting qualitative data on arts projects and their participants when measuring these changes.

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## Findings

The findings set out the results from each of the projects:

- Visual art in the high security estate
- Music production with young offenders in the community
- Music making with male prisoners in an open prison
- Creative writing and journal making with female prisoners

The sections below explain each of the activities, note those who took part, explore the changes that taking part in the activity had on the participants and consider the impact on desistance. Names of individuals have been replaced with pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality.

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### Visual art in the high security estate

The visual arts activities are run as part of the learning and skills suite of activities in a high security estate prison in the North East of England. Art classes run in every part of the prison, on the 'main' wings, on the vulnerable prisoner wings and in the unit for men who have a severe personality disorder. The prison has a history of men submitting work to exhibitions and winning awards not only for visual arts but also other creative activities, such as creative writing. In art classes, men focus on their own projects and work towards qualifications. Work produced in art classes includes both flat work and pieces which are more sculptural.

This part of the research considers the impact of art classes on men who live within the unit for those considered to be dangerous and to have severe personality disorders. During the data collection the research team spoke to eleven men, aged between 28 and 50: Charles, in his 40s; Nev, in his 20s; Nils, in his 30s; Ronald, in his 40s; Colin, in his 40s; Bobby, in his 50s; Jamie, in his 40s; Liam, in his 40s; Mike, in his 40s; Derek, in his 20s; Simon, in his 30s.

Their initial sentences were between four years and life, including men who are serving indeterminate sentences. The research team visited the art classes on four occasions during the research period, but the team had met the majority of the men on previous occasions (seven of the men submitted work to art exhibitions managed by two of the researchers). One man, Charles, agreed that the research team could use his self-reflective journal, produced for the art teacher, in the research. Those who had submitted work to previous art exhibitions also gave agreement for their comments about their work to be included.

Art classes, held in a specialist education room, are run by one member of staff, who is employed by the local education provider. She has worked in the unit for over ten years, and has worked in other areas of the prison too. Classes are held over three days, with morning and afternoon sessions on two days and morning sessions on the third day. Numbers in the classes vary, but no more than eight men are signed up for each class, and on each occasion the research team visited no more than five men took part in the classes. The men are able to sign up to each of the five sessions, but they are encouraged to timetable in other activities, such as cooking and creative writing programmes.



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## Thematic findings

The themes that emerged from this project were **cooperation** with other people, including prisoners, staff and the regime; **considering the role of arts within their sentence; working within set boundaries; and getting acknowledgement** for their work. All of these elements are linked to desistance (McNeill, et al 2012). The participants and the art teacher indicated that the art classes build hope in the participants, and that people's strengths and capabilities are acknowledged and celebrated. This hope can be sustained in a programme that is embedded within the prison setting, as the art classes act as an ongoing support structure that helps the men achieve their personal and artistic aims over a longer period.

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## Cooperation with others

Cooperating with others in a prison setting is a new approach for many of the men taking part in the art class. The notions of cooperation, self-management, discussion with others and finding solutions to problems are all part of the regime within the unit, and these are drawn into the art classes too. Over half of the men talked about the experience of cooperating with others in the art class; participant Simon, for example, said *'you share paint, glue. It sounds stupid, but you know what it's like in here...'*

As well as sharing the art resources, four of the men interviewed, Colin, Simon, Ronald and Jamie, had taken part in a collaborative art piece which had been displayed in an art exhibition. The men worked together to decide how the plaques should be hung, and discussed the impact of selecting certain panels to sit next to each other. The art teacher talked of the impact of this working relationship and noted that it was something that the men had not experienced before, and that discussion was always positive, if sometimes heated.

*I had never been involved in a group piece before; being part of something, making something, being profound from found objects, a first.* [Ronald]

The work has been admired within the prison, and the art class is currently working on a commissioned piece for the healthcare unit, again using found objects. This demonstrates positive reinforcement of the men's achievements, from both within and outside the prison environment. Celebrating achievement in this way is important in changing participants' views of themselves. It helps to develop their **social capital** by creating a sense of community within the class.

Despite the positive discussion of cooperation within the art classes both from the men and the art teacher, there are incidents of sabotage of work.

*Recently a piece of art which I had spent a significant period of time producing was defaced by a group of inmates. My initial reaction was anger and the need to distance myself from the problem. However, upon reflection I tried to understand why this attack had been made (indirectly) upon me... It's such I must accept that challenging issues will face me and that I must begin to use the various skills I am learning within treatment to neutralise 'old me' unhelpful thinking and behaviour. Moreover, I must... continue in my pro-social endeavours (art class) and not allow other people's negative actions to de-rail my own progress.* [Colin from his reflection about art, completed at the suggestion of the art teacher]

This demonstrates the negative elements, or non-cooperation, that can happen within the art classes, but it also shows how Colin has used this experience to reflect not only on what he has learnt in the art classes, but on how this incident can help him see his progress towards a 'new me', an important element in secondary desistance.

## Considering the role of the arts within their sentence

All but one of the men considered the role that the arts had within their sentence and their life within the prison. Only one of the men participating in the art classes had taken part in any creative activities before being sentenced. Nev had a brief period at art college between being in prison and other secure settings. The remainder of the participants said they had never considered taking part in an art class, and some talked of initially being reluctant to come to a class.



Trapped in a Merry Go Round, HMP Littlehey, Dan Snow Silver Award for Pottery or Sculpture. Courtesy of the Koestler Trust

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All of the participants talked about the role of art within their sentence, from deep **self-reflection** about the impact of their arts practice on their treatment progress and the changes in their thinking patterns as shown by Colin above, to examples of art allowing them to spend time doing something which took them 'out of the prison zone' [Derek]. The men saw taking part in art classes as helpful in three ways: as an important element in their **rehabilitative process**; as something to help manage their sense of **self and identity**; and simply as an **enjoyable** activity in its own right. It was clear from the interviews that these three elements were not mutually exclusive and often overlapped.

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## Helping in the rehabilitative process

The men talked about how art classes helped them to work through issues from the treatment sessions that they are required to attend. Rather than simply being about learning how to cooperate with other people on their wings, they considered art classes to help them with their own rehabilitation and therapeutic endeavours. Art classes were often a place to practise skills learnt elsewhere. The classes were a safe environment.

Nils enjoyed the art sessions as he felt that the sessions had become '*therapeutic*' for him. The fact that he could immerse himself in the art enabled him to '*engage with other things too, like the courses that [I] had to do in order to move on*'. Nils said that before prison he had an interest in gaining qualifications, so that he could show he was successful, and initially when he started to attend art classes he did so because he believed that he would be able to gain more certificates. This became less important as time went on, and he reported that art offered him another way to communicate what he was feeling. Painting offered him a mechanism for dealing with difficult issues. '*I think about the art and the pictures and what they mean a lot. Then I think about what other things are in my head at that time and need to get sorted*'.

The men reported that art allows them to think about their past lives, to reflect on their offences and to address their own behaviour. It enables them to be **empathic**, and thinking about the importance of the work that they created and equating this with other things and people has consequences. For Charles, the impact of his work is profound and helps him consider the harms he has caused:



...when I put some of myself in that painting it became precious to me, whilst at the same time making me vulnerable. Opening myself up like this is new and to have that destroyed by a group of individuals without a moment's thought left me feeling powerless, that made me reflect that my victims must have felt the same during my (offences). Only, for me, it was simply a painting that could be rectified, whilst for my victims it was their sense of safety and rights to be treated respectfully in their places of work. The emotional turmoil I have recently felt is but nothing compared to the trauma I must have generated in my victims.





This demonstrates very clearly the impact that arts have on **victim empathy**. Through taking part in the art classes, the participant identified with the victims of his crimes and compared it with other, smaller losses that he had suffered. Victim empathy has been shown to be a difficult emotional response to engender through other forms of intervention.

For Colin, art helped in changing his attitude about what was important in his life. Through art he realised that he could not continue to destroy things he loved or felt were important. Colin, who has a history of being aggressive and confrontational, said that being allowed to hang his own art work on the walls stopped him from damaging his cell after disagreements with other prisoners. He reported that he had no desire to destroy his own work, because many of the portraits were of his children and he felt he could not destroy these: 'different to a DVD player or PlayStation, you don't give a f\*\*\* about those'.



I went through a lot of different emotions with this painting, frustration one minute then elation the next, then back to frustration (I think you get the picture). I feel I went on a journey with it, but in the end I felt a kind of peace of mind, a sense of achievement. I feel there are comparisons with the treatment I'm involved in at the unit. That too has been a journey, a journey I'm continuing. I'm heading towards that 'new horizon', more positive, happy and with a more hopeful expectation for my future.

[Anonymous reflection on a painting]

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The art teacher is instrumental in helping support this **self-reflection**, and has given the men the opportunity to write about whether, and how, they feel that taking part in art classes has had an impact on their thoughts and behaviour.

For some men, taking part in art classes has been difficult as the art teacher often **challenges their behaviour and thinking** not only in relation to the art work they are producing. She is very clear that certain images are not acceptable for depiction, for example overly sexualised images of women. For Bobby, the environment was frightening because he put his faith in the art teacher and allowed her to guide him, something he had never done before in his life. She set boundaries, but expected mutual trust. This engagement indicated another milestone for Bobby, which was the acceptance of his guilt and the acknowledgement that he 'deserved to be here and nowhere else'. Taking part in art classes was a step towards 'coming to terms with what I had done, but it was also a way of improving who I was'. He found that once he had placed trust in another person, he was willing to try with other people too and he found the courage to engage with treatment programmes that he had avoided previously. Engaging with art enabled Bobby to make links to the rest of his life.

Art classes within the unit have helped change the men's thinking and behaviour. Men convicted of violent offences, who carried this violence into the prison regime, have started to change their behaviour. Over half of the men interviewed for this case study talked about the **calming effects** of the classes, and the impact that putting emotions into paint and on to canvas had on them. They often talked of the combined impact of the environment of this part of the prison, taking part in therapeutic activities and art classes. Art allowed them to work ideas out that had been identified in other areas, but also encouraged them to think about new possibilities for change and improvement. Art was identified as a **catalyst for change** in behaviour.

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## Helping manage the sense of self and identity

As well as wanting to change and to improve their lives psychologically, some of the men talked about wanting to achieve qualifications through their work. There is a sense that taking part in art classes is used as an instrument in managing their identity and standing within the wider prison environment.

Nils talked about wanting to achieve in art classes because qualifications were important to him. Liam took the research team onto the wing to see a piece of artwork which he had bartered with another prisoner. Men who had previously taken part in art classes in the prison's main wing talked of aspiring to produce art like the man considered by a great proportion of the art class to be the 'best' artist in the prison. This sense of competition and wanting to achieve is not unusual for some of the men who took part in the research – three talked of being perfectionists who needed to succeed in everything they tried. Some of the men talked about the trusting relationship they had developed with the art teacher, and how she pushed them to achieve more in their art work; to take part in qualifications; to experiment with different styles of working; and to send their work out of the prison for exhibition.

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The supportive art class environment enables the men to take risks, even though this is sometimes difficult to manage. The art teacher noted that she tries to get men to stretch their artistic boundaries and to try new styles or media. She is experienced in working with vulnerable populations, and understands how and when to try to get the men to explore other ideas and techniques and the impact that this might have on other areas of the men's lives. The art classes challenge the participants to change their views of themselves and what they can achieve.

For example, Mike started working in the art classes on controlled but sophisticated images of still lives. He then moved onto larger canvases, painted in acrylic, emulating a local, Victorian artist, 'but with my own twist. They're not strictly copies, but I've taken most of what he did and added a bit more'. With the encouragement of the art teacher he is now considering ideas of movement within his work. He is creating abstract works, based on golf swings, with different mark-making materials on the end of willow branches. This relates to his interest in sport and working out. Art supports his identity as a man who is interested in keeping fit while in prison.

The notion that art supports self-identity is expressed clearly here. Other men talked about self-identity in broader terms, not always explaining fully what they meant, but demonstrating a sense of well-being and positivity.

*(I) forget about where I am and what I am doing. No one judges you here, you can be yourself. [Nils]*

*(art is) relaxing and therapeutic, an opportunity to be someone else really. [Jamie]*

The **changing sense of self** which is brought about through art is demonstrated. Sometimes this sense of change is about fantasy – about being someone else – but more importantly it is about making steps towards changing what the men understand about themselves, and making change positive.

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## Art for art's sake

The sense expressed by all of the participants that taking part in the art classes brings positive change is accompanied by the view that they are spending time doing something which is absorbing, engaging and ultimately enjoyable. Participants talked about the relaxed and calming environment of the art classes, but they also noted that the time passed unusually quickly. This is an impression associated with being engaged in an activity which is absorbing and affective (Csikszentihalyi, 2002).

Ronald said that art allowed him to relax, something he found a bit 'hard to do in these places, always got to be on your toes... not a place to relax'. He described how he forgets the time whilst in the art classes and feels more 'chilled' after the sessions.

*Time really just flies by in these classes and that is a great help when time is something that you have far too much of [Bobby]*



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The sense of **relaxation** and of **enjoyment** is a challenge to many of the men. It requires them, again, to be trusting of the art teacher and others in the class. So while men report enjoying art classes just for their own sake, there is also a notion that this enjoyment comes from a mixture of self-expression, discovery and implementing change which has been learnt in therapeutic activities on the unit. Arts activities that are enjoyable lead to improvements in wellbeing, and have an impact on levels of aggression and support for pro-social problem solving.

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## Getting acknowledgement for their work

Accepting acknowledgement for art work can be seen as a negotiation between the participants and the art teacher. Acknowledgement means not only the praise of the art teacher and staff members, but also praise from outside the Criminal Justice System. Praise is often difficult for the men to accept, and criticism equally if not more so. Jamie and Colin both talked of reacting with violence to criticism in the past, but said that taking part in art classes had helped them address these aggressive outbursts. There was discussion about the trusting relationships built and maintained in the art classes; this was felt to be due to the art teacher's boundary setting within the class, which means that all participants have an understanding of what is acceptable and what will win additional praise and encouragement.

While the men were receiving praise in the sessions, they also learnt how to give praise. Four of the men, Colin, Charles, Liam and Mike, commented on the expertise of the art teacher:

*[Name of art teacher] knows her stuff. She knows what she's talking about'* [Mike]

*[Name of art teacher] gets us to do exercises. She knows how we can mix the paints to get the results we want, but she wants us to do it. Not just show us. Sometimes I just want to get back to it, but this is going to help me get the finish I want.* [Liam]

*Indeed, that which I have not felt capable of has now become possible due to my new learning and the advice and support of facilitators/teachers.* [Charles]

The art teacher said that positive comments about her teaching, and the associated impact on the men's work, were important to her and that it often took people from outside of the prison to elicit these reactions: *'it's important that you come in and tell them these things. We can say how great the exhibition looked, but it's more important coming from someone else. It's powerful that students from an art school are interested in their work.'* [Art teacher]. The research team took visitor comments cards from exhibitions that some of the participants had displayed work into the art classes. The art teacher picked out one which expressed the emotional impact that visiting the exhibition had elicited.

*I am a first year studying fine art. I've seen a lot of art this year – I'm swimming in it, and this show was the most emotionally arresting collection I've seen for a long time. I loved individual pieces but it most impacted me as a collection. It provoked deep emotions. A big hug to everyone who contributed and gave me a piece of you* [comment card from art exhibition]

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The art teacher then used this to engage Mike and Charles in conversation about the emotional impact of their work on others, and related this to the changes in emotions that Charles had noted in his art reflections.

*My early art... shows no kind of warmth or commitment. It is without any real substance or meaning (for myself or the observer). 'Does it look like the image I am trying to replicate?' 'Kind of!' – 'let's move on then – done that', was the kind of internal dialogue typical of my early art pieces. Slowly I am learning to see an artist's work in a different way. What was this person trying to capture? What does his style, use of colours, use of light, etc., tell me – make me feel? Thus, what can I bring of myself that contributes to the original... Through this learning I am both surprised and delighted in what I am achieving – really 'punching above my weight'. I hope, in time, I will experience the same delight through my social interactions.*

Mike noted that he remembered a member of staff from an art gallery coming into the prison to talk about art, and said that it was a positive experience and something different from the norm. Knowing that their art work has been on display in art galleries and exhibitions was commented on by three of the men (Colin, Mike and Nev), and all but two of the men asked about forthcoming opportunities to have their work displayed outside the prison. For the art teacher, the requirement to gain qualifications and, by extension, acknowledgement for the work that the men do is gaining more significance. Progress and success have to be evidenced by written work, evaluations and qualifications:

*'When Ronald first started to come to the art class, he just sat and listened. He knows a lot about history of art. He's got a good knowledge of Picasso and so on. He reads a lot and just wanted to come and sit and take it all in. That was OK years ago, but it's not OK now. He's got to take part and work towards something' [Art teacher]*

For many of the men interviewed for this part of the research, it will be some time before they are released, and gaining a City and Guilds levels one or two qualification will have little impact on their ability to gain employment after release. However, gaining these qualifications and gaining feedback from outside agencies is important for the self-esteem of the men.

Within this prison, the learning and skills manager notes that *'art is used to develop prisoners social skills and gain accreditation but it is also used to develop a more reflective and independent response to their work, helping them to find links between what they discover both in treatment and in their art practice. For prisoners to identify the creative distance they have travelled, showing that there is an opportunity for positive change, questioning preconceived ideas and rigid thinking. Art provides the safe space to explore these challenging questions and to make work which allows prisoners to discover that they have a creative eloquence and confidence not seen before.'*

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## Summary

The majority of the men who took part in the research for this project are serving very long sentences. Some are on indeterminate sentences and have already served longer than their initial tariff. It will be some time before they are able to practise the skills they have learnt outside of a prison environment. However, this group of men spoke of being positively affected by the artistic activities they have taken part in. For some this is enough. They have achieved qualifications and external validity and praise for their work. They report that their behaviour has changed as a consequence of taking part in art classes at the same time as therapy sessions. They use the trusting environment of the art class to practise their skills, but also to test the boundaries. At least three of the participants had taken part in art classes earlier in their sentences, but had found the environment too difficult to deal with and had left. They returned to the classes because there was an element that they had enjoyed, and they found aspects of the environment, while challenging, calming and supportive. Art is making their sentences less difficult for them to manage:

*I would be lost without art. Back in the system, on drugs and thinking 'f\*\*\* it, f\*\*\* them, f\*\*\* the lot of it. [Colin]*

For others art classes are a place to relax and enjoy a bit of time 'outside of the prison zone' [Derek].





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## Art classes

Art classes in this prison, for this group of men housed on a specialist unit, contribute to secondary desistance in a number of ways :

- helping them reframe their own narratives. They are part of a community and can succeed in producing work that they are proud of. This work is valued inside the prison and outside.
- The men value their own work and are proud of it. They are able to give praise to others about work.
- Positive relationships are built in the classes between the participants and between the art teacher and the participants. These relationships are built on mutual trust and on learning to take risks in a supported environment.
- The men talked about building new relationships with each other and with the staff in the prison, which lead to the development of social and human capital.
- are enjoyable, which leads to improvements in wellbeing, and have an impact on levels of aggression and support for pro-social problem solving
- provide a calming space within a challenging environment. The quiet contemplation that working on an individual project gives helps men to think through problems
- provide opportunities to work collaboratively, helping forge new ways of communicating with others and build cooperation skills
- offer long-term opportunities, which means that men are able to return to classes once they are able to manage the 'risk-taking' of the classes.







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## Music production with young offenders in the community

### Project overview

The Youth Offending Team (YOT) in a large urban area runs a music programme for young people in contact with their service. The music programme, known locally as 'the studio', has existed for almost ten years. Initially funded by outside sources, the YOT later decided to use internal funds to run 'the studio'. The programme began for young people on Intensive Supervision & Surveillance programmes (ISSP), but over time its remit has been broadened and it is now open to any young person in contact with the YOT. Referrals are made by a young person's YOT caseworker and are typically made where a young person is seen to have a musical talent and/or interest in music. Overall, the young people taking part in this programme are representative of the wider population of YOT in terms of age, ethnicity, gender, and offence/sentence type.

The aims of the programme are to: develop the creative, expressive and musical ability of children and young people; improve children and young people's self-efficacy and resilience; and improve the level of compliance and successful completion of court orders amongst project participants. It is this third aim that is the primary focus of the YOT.

The programme was designed by and is run by a music leader who is a music professional, not a formal YOT officer or teacher. Sessions run on a one-to-one basis between the music leader and young person (with their caseworker present where appropriate) and a typical level of engagement is one two-hour session per week, although where a young person is particularly motivated to engage with the project they may be able to attend more than one session per week. The programme is run in a professional working studio space in the centre of a city and young people can work on a variety of music-making activities, including: digital composition & production; creative lyric writing; vocal coaching & performance skills (rapping & singing); drum kit tuition; guitar tuition; music theory; deejaying skills; studio sound engineering & vocal recording techniques.

Discussion with the music leader and one of the young people's case workers highlighted that the project is viewed positively by the broader YOT.

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## Participants

The research team spent six days over a three month period (May – July 2013) observing and speaking to four young people involved in the studio work with the YOT. These young people aged 15-18 represent something of the range of young people involved with the YOT, being three young men and one young woman, two on bail and awaiting final court hearings, one sentenced to a Detention and Supervision Order and one a YOT order. The young people were randomly selected from those involved in the music sessions at the time of the research. The information presented below is the result of analysis of observational and interview data with the young people and music leader, and data from the YOS 'Careworks' system.<sup>2</sup> An overview of information on each young person is given prior to the thematic findings.

As noted earlier in this report, the range of projects and settings involved in this research made a flexible approach to the data collection a necessity. In



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the YOT setting, the research team initially observed sessions in order to get to know each of the young people and ensure they were at ease with a researcher present. During subsequent visits a researcher also spent time with each young person in the absence of the music leader, to discuss the project in more detail.

**Background** – Jack, male, age 18, sentenced to a Detention and Supervision Order. He had completed his time in a custodial setting and was being supervised by the YOT. Jack attended a range of ISSP activities (none arts-related) as well as ‘the studio’. His Careworks records highlighted that while he had achieved a basic level of education and was working towards a Level 1 music qualification, he had been unmotivated in seeking out work, but is ‘gifted’ musically. Prior to the music sessions it was noted that ‘if he takes on anything, it’s quite likely he will get bored and walk away’. Jack has been attending ‘the studio’ since April 2013 and had attended 21 sessions by the end of this research.

**Studio sessions** – Jack’s sessions primarily focused on lyric writing, recording lyrics, and some tuition on learning to play drums.

**Outcomes to date** – Distinct developments in his lyrical content, discussed below, linked to his self-image. Prior to attending the music sessions his work had been noticed by an influential rap artist. This relationship developed during the project and work recorded in the sessions has been made available on the internet. Despite poor engagement with other activities in the past, Jack’s attendance at the music sessions was excellent.

**Background** – Tia, female, age 18, was on ISSP bail conditions awaiting a court hearing. She had been engaged with some other ISSP programmes during her time on bail conditions (none arts related) and was attending an apprenticeship training course with a local organisation. Her Careworks records highlighted her referral for mental health problems and issues with low self-worth. The research team were present at her first session at ‘the studio’ in June 2013 and subsequent sessions in July. In total, by the end of the research Tia had attended seven sessions. Tia’s caseworker was present at all sessions at ‘the studio’.

**Studio sessions** – The music leader noted within Careworks Tia’s natural talent but need for some vocal coaching. The sessions were primarily spent on vocal coaching, music theory, vocal warm-ups, and recording Tia singing tracks she likes and had – through discussion with the music leader – identified as suitable for her voice. In the last session attended by the research team, discussion concerned Tia’s role the coming week in a local choir event, organised by her caseworker.

**Outcomes to date** – In Tia’s case, the overriding effect of her engagement in ‘the studio’ sessions related to her confidence. During her first session she was very quiet and under-confident and her caseworker explained Tia’s history of domestic victimisation. The research team next visited five weeks later for Tia’s eighth session and the change in her confidence and manner was notable. Review of Caseworks, discussion with Tia, and discussion with the music leader and Tia’s caseworker all highlighted the increase in her confidence.

Tia’s age and point in the criminal justice process mean that in theory she should now move to supervision by the probation service. However, the YOT agreed to remain responsible for her, given her positive engagement with both her caseworker and with the music sessions. This level of continuity is commendable.

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<sup>2</sup>Careworks is a case management system used in various settings, including youth justice. In addition to offence and attendance data, the music leader uses this system to record brief diary entries on each session he runs with the young people. The research team was given consent by the young people involved in this research and the Youth Offending Service to access this data.

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**Background** – Marc, male, age 15, was on ISSP bail conditions and awaiting a final court hearing. He was scheduled to attend other ISSP sessions (none arts related) and had been attending sessions at ‘the studio’ since May 2013. His attendance was excellent and since May he attended a total of ten sessions, missing one to attend an exam. It was noted in his Careworks file that his attendance at ‘the studio’ was much better than his attendance at other programmes.

**Studio sessions** – The sessions focused on recording and lyric writing with some teaching and practical work on music production skills.

**Outcomes to date** – The research team noted that Marc appeared under-confident during their initial observation and conversations with him. However, by the final session Marc presented as a confident and self-assured individual. He missed one session to attend an exam, but his Careworks file notes his attendance at the music sessions was better than at other programmes.

**Background** – Parvez, male, age 16, sentenced to a YOT order. Parvez was required to attend other YOT activities (none arts-related) and was in full-time education at a specialist education provider outside of mainstream school. He sat several GCSE examinations during the course of this research.

**Studio sessions** – While only scheduled to attend one session at ‘the studio’ per week, Parvez often requested extra sessions and the music leader accommodated these wherever possible. Since his first session at ‘the studio’ in April 2013, Parvez had attended 12 sessions. Parvez had some musical experience prior to attending ‘the studio’ sessions, having begun performing at local small-scale events. During sessions Parvez worked with the music leader on vocal exercises, lyric-writing, production, and music theory. He recorded two full tracks, one of which was played on various radio stations. The research team observed lengthy discussions between Parvez and the music leader about his future education and plans for musical performances.

**Outcomes to date** – Parvez’s music included both English and Punjabi lyrics. He was currently learning Punjabi from family members to develop his lyrics. His Careworks file notes the recommendation that his supervision order be cut short given his excellent engagement and development. He had been offered places at music colleges and planned to attend from September 2013.

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## Thematic findings

The thematic elements which were identified from the young people taking part in sessions at ‘the studio’ were **confidence, redefinition, compliance and engagement, individual need and responsiveness**.

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## Confidence

As noted in Tia’s case study above, improvements in confidence were the overriding factor in her development through the music sessions. During session one she felt barely able to sing alone in a soundproofed booth, yet by session eight she was able to sing confidently in front of four people and felt excited about a choir performance the following week. Given Tia’s traumatic life experiences and range of mental health and self-worth issues, the importance of these gains in confidence should not be underestimated. They were achieved not through constant praise, but through realistic encouragement and constructive criticism:

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*'it's really good that he (music leader) tells me the truth. Hearing that from him, if anything, gives me confidence' (Tia)*

The same improvements in confidence were observed with Marc. He said he now 'speaks louder'. Of note is that these two young people had just begun music sessions at the time the research began, while the other two had been engaged for some time. The music leader explained that he often sees improvements in both the musical and general confidence of the young people he works with.

Although presenting as generally confident, Jack and Parvez both explained how their relationship with the music leader had evolved, becoming *'more confident to say what I want'* (Jack).

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## Redefinition

The music leader explained that the project aims to both directly and indirectly challenge offending behaviours. Directly, 'the studio' provides a **safe environment** where the young people are occupied. There is a strong focus on moving the young people involved into continued education; important because educational attainment is a protective factor against offending. Less directly, the music leader seeks to challenge the image of themselves the young people may seek to project within their community.

Jack provides a clear example of this change and how this is reflected in his lyrics. His early lyrical content referred to crime (described by Jack as *'My life. Robbing. Selling drugs'*) and the music leader described the lyrics as *'ultra-macho'*. By the time the research team met Jack his lyrics spoke of a positive future and the music leader noted how this had been a progression over time. Jack explained that the music sessions had *'helped me open my mind and be more positive'*. It is important to highlight that Jack felt he had begun to change for the better in prison, with 'the studio' helping him 'get back on track'. Similarly, Marc described how the lyrics he was rapping prior to 'the studio' were negative and different to what he now writes: *'that's the old me'*. It was particularly interesting for the research team to see this projection of a changed self-image via music.

Tia's redefinition related primarily to her own view of herself:

*'Even the YOT worker agrees, gone from being depressed to happy. Big change. Think I've grown up'*

Indeed, as additionally highlighted by Tia, an improvement in mood was expressed by three of the young people and reported to last far in excess of the sessions.

For Parvez, the change he reported related to his future plans. He noted that a year ago he had no real plans, certainly not music-focused, and no family support, but the music leader had helped him focus. As noted above, he planned to attend music college from September. Parvez also noted personal changes, stating that he was *'calmer and more focused on what I want'*.



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The observational data suggests that the way in which the young people have begun to redefine themselves can be related to the discussions engendered by the music work, alongside the direct action of making music; for example, the discussions between Parvez and the music leader about Parvez's future education. Parvez explained that he respected the music leader's advice as a professional in the music industry. Indeed, all four young people spoke of their respect for the music leader and how they listened to his opinion and advice on both music and other matters. Tia, for example, noted *'I feel privileged to be working with a professional'*. When we discussed this with the music leader, he explained that gaining the trust and respect of young people can take time but that the project is an excellent way of facilitating this. The importance of practitioners' status as professionals in their ability to gain respect has been noted elsewhere in the research literature (Caulfield, 2011).

There was clear evidence that all four young people had developed their musical ability and understanding over the research period. In addition, all of the young people reported being dedicated to practising their music activities and, where relevant, working on lyrics in their own time.

The research team asked the young people about their life goals and future plans. All reported that music would always be an important part in their life, and all had concrete plans for further work and education. Tia was completing an apprenticeship training course and had just had an interview for a catering apprenticeship. She planned to pursue a catering career but to keep singing, noting that 'music is my new plan B'. Parvez had applied for places on music courses at two colleges and been offered places at both. He was still to make a final decision on which to accept.

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## Compliance and engagement

The YOT aims for 'the studio' music sessions to increase compliance with the order or sentence a young person has been given. Data from the Careworks system demonstrates that these four young people at least have been in regular attendance at the sessions. Indeed, three of the four young people had at times requested extra sessions. Notes within Careworks indicate that their attendance has been significantly better than at other kinds of activities, although two of the young people did report their attendance at other programmes had improved over time. The music leader suggested 'the studio' 'is the carrot' used to encourage engagement with other offence-focused work and thus encourages sentence compliance.

The developments in **attitudes** and **focus** seen in the young people appeared considerable, particularly given the relatively short timeframe over which the research occurred. Here it should be remembered that we are discussing young people at an age where they are both adaptable and likely to be responsive to outside influences. This highlights a key factor in working with young people involved in crime; the need to engage them. Seeking compliance with an order is one thing, but reaching a point where the young person is highly engaged and motivated in a programme is quite another. All four young people taking part in this research were highly engaged with 'the studio' sessions and were able to

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articulate the relationship between this and their changes in attitudes, thinking, and behaviours, as outlined in the 'Redefinition' section above.

The young people themselves reported feeling that the sessions were a good use of their time and they valued the opportunity. In relation to this, the music leader spoke of 'accountability', where the young people are taught to value the sessions from various perspectives, including monetary. For example, it was explained to them that two hours of professional studio time would usually cost a certain amount of money, so they understand that they are being given something valuable. The environment is professional and safe. Both the music leader and the young people highlighted the importance of 'the studio' as a non-criminal justice space.

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### Individual need and responsiveness

A key finding to emerge from all observed sessions and interviews was the development of a relationship between the young people and music leader. As noted above, the young people talked of their respect for the music leader as a **professional** in the area and how their confidence in working with him and sharing their own opinions had developed over time. For example, in discussing the way of working in the sessions, Parvez noted that he and the music leader *'have a connection. We understand each other'*. During observation this 'co-working' was evident.

The knowledge and skills base of the music leader and the one-to-one nature of the sessions meant that 'the studio' programme is able to respond to the individual needs of young people. Initially, there is a level of responsiveness in that only young people demonstrating an interest in and/or talent for music are referred to the sessions. Further to that, and as noted earlier, the sessions are tailored to the individual needs and interests of each young person. The research literature is unequivocal in stating the importance of responsiveness in working with offenders.

The music leader noted the often *'chaotic nature'* of the lives of many of the young people referred to him, and consequently the importance of a *'flexible approach'*. This flexible and responsive approach includes the ability to work across a wide variety of music genres and the music leader explained that he spends time outside of sessions ensuring he understands the genres the young people are interested in.

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### Critical reflection on 'the studio'

All four young people were enthusiastic during sessions and in interviews explained the positive gains from taking part, as discussed above. When directly asked about any relationship between the music sessions and the developments in particular areas outside of musical activities (for example, confidence), Tia commented this was due to 'these sessions mainly'. There was a clear influence on Parvez's choice of Music College. Jack's primary aim was to improve his music and he discussed how the project had done this, making it *'acceptable to a wider audience'*.



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There are some practical issues of note. While the studio environment is a professional one, there are some location issues meaning that the noise from neighbouring businesses can impact upon recording from time-to-time. Additionally, while the music leader is clearly passionate and highly skilled, he is the only staff member involved in the project. At times when he takes annual leave the project does not run. While no young person highlighted this as problematic during the research, there is a lack of continuity for the young people at these times.

It should be noted that given that the research data was collected over a three-month period, it is not possible to make comment on the long-term impact of the work.

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## Summary

The young people that took part in this research are broadly representative of the young people who have taken part in the YOT studio sessions since this project began almost ten years ago. What is clear from the data is that the interpersonal relationships between the music leader and young people have been key to the development of the young people and the development of their musical abilities. As noted by the music leader, the music '*is the carrot*' used to engage young people. There is strong evidence that the project is engaging, and that through this engagement the young people involved in this research were able to begin to construct a more positive identity.

The presence of factors related to the journey to secondary desistance is clear:

- The music project has enabled changes in self-identity amongst the participants.
- The project shows changes to participants' self-esteem
- The project shows changes to participants' ability to manage their attendance at the studio
- They value the support given to them by someone they view as skilled and professional



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## Music making with male prisoners in an open prison

Music in Prisons (MiP) have been working since the mid 1990s, and since this time has carried out over 250 creative music projects and concerts with different groups of prisoners and in different categories of prison establishment. Groups are typically between ten and twelve prisoners who start a course at the beginning of the week and end it by giving a concert for an invited audience, usually other prisoners and members of staff, to celebrate their achievements. During the week, tracks are recorded and then taken away by the MiP team, mixed, and copies of the work are sent back to the participants as CDs. Groups are made up of a mix of people who have different levels of attainment, from those who have never played an instrument before or sung, to a small number of participants who consider themselves to be professional musicians.

Music in Prisons (2013) outlines its approach as one that addresses education, training and employment; children and families of offenders; and attitudes, thinking and behaviour. It aims to build self-confidence and positive change in the participants during the workshops, which MiP believes will encourage them to take part in other forms of educational practice during their sentences. Working together as a group throughout the week supports team working and positive communication skills, as do the negotiations that are needed to create new music, with members of the group taking different roles for each of the pieces. The participants are able to share the work of the project with their family and friends outside of prison, by sending CDs of their work.

The research team spent three half-day sessions, one full-day session and the final concert with the MiP team (made up of three members of MiP, all of whom have significant levels of experience working in prison settings, including two of the founding members of the organisation) and the participants. Sessions were observed and the participants discussed their participation with the researcher; evaluation sheets handed out by the MiP team were also used as a data source; and formal and informal discussions with prison staff (the learning and skills manager and the prison chaplain) were carried out during August 2013.

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## The prison and project descriptions

The resettlement prison holds men and young offenders who have less than two years to serve on their sentence, and they operate release on temporary licence for men who have met, or will meet 'in the near future' [Learning & Skills manager], all of their sentence planning targets. The prison provides a small amount of basic skills training, with the aim that all men leave with an NVQ level 2 qualification. Most of the education provision is linked to vocational training, for example in catering or computing, which is linked to work out provision. Within the last year, directed by the changes in the OLASS 4 provision and the change in the prison from a Young Offenders Institution (YOI) to housing adult men as well as young offenders, the learning and skills manager noted that there was not as much social and personal education as part of the core delivery. The focus for prisoners in the last 12 months of their sentence is to be on vocational skills training (NOMS, 2012). This means there is little opportunity for drug and alcohol awareness programmes or family and parenting skills to be learnt. The staff member thought that bringing in projects like MiP to the prison would provide opportunities to do something which was not related to a vocational activity, but which helped to **develop social skills** in the participants.



In the 12 years I've been here, they're the most professional and worthwhile music project. [MiP] are positive role models. They are clear about achievements. Quick to engage the prisoners. They broaden the prisoners' experience of music. They bring different music backgrounds to the prisoners, so it's not just rap that glorifies crime, you know. They set the expectations of the groups.

(Learning and skills manager)

After previous visits, there had been little follow-up within the prison after the projects had been completed and the staff member queried why the in-house teaching teams did little of this.

*We don't do sufficient follow up. We don't do the good news or any through the gate work. There are opportunities beyond the project, like informal jamming sessions, but we don't encourage it.* [Learning and skills manager]

This acknowledgement is an opportunity for the creation of a new, peer-led project within the prison, which is to be recommended. In a resettlement prison that includes support in managing life outside prison, having a prisoner-run music group would provide a prospect for the further development of useful skills as well as the maintenance of musical talents learnt during the week.

The role of MiP in prisons is to *'take people out of their normal groove and expose them to a fresh learning experience as part of a focused team in which they succeed in incremental steps, and are given positive feedback within a highly disciplined structure'* [MiP project application], and they aim to be *'enabling, encouraging, and inspiring performance'* [MiP team leader] for the people who take part in the projects. During the course of the week, in all of the projects that they have run, the teams see *'changes in people. They see their potential, which is untapped. They become open to doing it.'* MiP collects information from the participants about whether they have any previous musical experience; what they are expecting to take part in; how they feel about taking part in a group situation and their levels of confidence about the project and their participation.

After the end of the project, they are asked again about these elements and how they felt about taking part, whether they are motivated to keep playing music, what skills they have learnt – both in relation to music and other transferable skills; what they could change about the project and whether they have pride in what they have achieved. The evidence collected starts to illustrate links to secondary desistance and the formation of new identities for the participants, but without the through the gate work, mentioned by the staff member as being lacking, this is difficult to prove concretely. However, the evidence collected supports the belief that MiP team members have about their work. MiP acknowledges that it is:

*a small part of a bigger process. Music can unlock something in people and help them to address other things head on. I don't for one minute think that we can change the*

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*world. It's about building up their self-esteem, and about helping them to remember what it's like to succeed again. [MiP team member]*

This MiP project started on a Monday morning and a concert was held on the Friday morning. By the end of the week twelve men had participated in the project, but not all of them took part in the whole week. The MiP practitioners noted that it was unusual to have so many changes in the number of people taking part, and the learning and skills manager commented that the men whom she saw taking part did not match the initial list of participants recruited to the project. The participants suggested that there had been little information about the project on the units (wings), and those who were encouraged to join in later than the start of the project had been encouraged by other men taking part.

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## The participants

Martin is in his late 30s and is due for release in the next nine months. When asked if he played an instrument, he said *'Only a bit of guitar. I can play a couple of chords. But I'm not that good. I've got a guitar in me pad. I'm not as good as my mate'*. Martin rated his confidence levels about taking part in the programme at the start of the week as in the mid-point of a scale of under-confident to very confident.

Kris is in his 20s and was released shortly after the completion of the project. He has done some music production and is learning to play the cornet. On his home leave he bought a guitar and is starting to learn how to play it. His confidence levels about taking part were high, but he was not as comfortable working in groups.

Ray is 50, and rated his levels of confidence as high. He was entirely comfortable taking part in group activities and has high levels of hope for the future. He has almost no musical background, other than playing a little bit of drums, which he has been taught by his son.

Reggie is in his 40s and has no musical experience, but had high levels of confidence and was comfortable working in a group.

Kalim is in his 20s and is due for release within six months of the end of the project. He has written lyrics in the past and like Kris, is learning to play the cornet. He was recruited to the project by Kris. He felt confident and noted that he has hope for the future and reported feeling comfortable taking part in a group situation.

Ralf also joined the group at Kris' instigation. Ralf presented as very under-confident and did not like taking part in group situations, but he had experience of rapping and playing the keyboard.

Julian, who is in his 40s, joined on the third day of the project. Julian's identity is aligned with being a highly skilled guitarist, who has played professional gigs outside prison. Inside prison, he has learnt how to read music which he believes will help him in his future career.

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## Thematic findings

Three key themes emerged from the data in this section of the research: **redefinition, relationships with others, skills of the project staff**. The findings here show that taking part in a short-term music project has a particular impact on levels of **confidence, self-definition** and **team working**, all of which play a role in secondary desistance.

MiP keeps records of the participants on its projects and asks them to fill in three evaluation forms: one before the start of the project, one after the concert and one when the CDs of the music are sent to them. The evaluation forms, which are a good source of qualitative information as well as quantitative data relating to changes in attitude and self-confidence, captured many of the ideas about how the project changed attitudes, thinking and behaviour.

All of the men taking part in the project responded positively about taking part, but only five men out of the six who completed the week filled in the final evaluation paperwork. They all noted positive change in their levels of **confidence** and abilities to take part in group work.

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## Redefinition

Only one of the participants had mentioned to anyone else that they were due to take part in the course at the beginning of the week. Taking part in the project was described as *'my big day'* [Kalim], *'very rewarding'* [Ray], and Reggie, who had told no one about the project at the start of the week, noted by the end of the week he had *'told the lads it's a good project, very interesting'*. Three of the men said that their self-confidence had improved throughout the week, with Martin noting that his worry about taking part stopped. This sense of **positive movement**, which suggests a change in self-identity, is echoed elsewhere in the research.

Five of the participants commented on how the project had started to help them to change their thinking about themselves and their relationship to music. Martin made a short statement that taking part in a group and a concert was *'another accomplishment to tick off'*, while Kalim, Ralf, Kris and Reggie explored to a greater extent what they thought the impact of the project had been on them and their future. Kalim said that a friend on the outside has been encouraging him to do more music and to get into a studio to record his lyrics and this project has helped him think that he can achieve this: *'When I get out, hopefully I'll be a bit better'*. This was echoed by Ralf, who has also been encouraged to rap and record by friends. Kris, even though during his time in prison he had already started to learn the cornet and guitar, reported that he was pleased to be able to take part in the project and that it had given him the confidence *'to pick up a new instrument and to have a go'*.

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## Relationships with others

Reggie, while he reported that the project had encouraged him to take part in other music or arts projects while in prison, was more interested in using his new knowledge to talk to his children about music: *'it'd be nice to go out and say to the kids 'oh, that's a so and so'*. It was clear that Reggie readily made connections between what he experienced in prison and his life on the outside. The learning



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and skills manager said of him: *'Reggie is the only one who has ever said to me that what he's learnt in IT will help him when he goes back to his job outside. He's got something lined up... and he's told me that their system has now been computerised and the stuff he's learnt in here will help him'*. Reggie demonstrated changes in self-identity, supported by the MiP project, which are linked strongly to secondary desistance. For Reggie, important aspects of his self-identity are about his role within his family.

Julian, Kalim and Ray also noted that they had experienced **good team working** throughout the week, which clearly supports the observations by the MiP team and the researcher. Julian, who is an accomplished musician and had taken part in MiP projects before, said that the week had improved his *'personal tolerance and patience'* and that he was *'always impressed by the end of the week [that] the work is done and ready to perform'*. Reggie commented on the negotiations earlier in the week about when he, Martin and Ray should have been in a gym session, saying that he noticed *'the will to work together and give up things that would normally be a priority'*. Improvements in social skills, **internal control** and **self-confidence** are linked to reductions in reoffending and desistance from crime. However, it should be noted that the relatively short-term nature of this research means we cannot state with certainty whether this will be the case for those involved in this research.

The positive comments about cooperation and team working were not confined to other group members. Every one of the men who completed the evaluations was full of praise for the MiP team. Kalim, who felt very supported when he was pushed to take on the rapping in one song that Ralf was not able to perform, said that the team was *'very supportive, fun to work with and full of energy'*.

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## Skills of the project staff

The team's talent was also made mention of and even Ray, who at times during the week seemed not to be openly excited or engaged in the project, said the team was *'excellent, patient, polite'*. Reggie also noted that *'it was so good to have people there who will take time to come into prisons'*. This, like the YOT music project and the visual art project, highlights the importance of the perceived **professionalism** of those running the projects. Participants value the support given by highly trained professionals, which makes them feel that they are worthy of receiving such training and guidance.

The ability of the MiP team to create positive working relationships, based on professionalism, respect and being able to foster trusting relationships in a short space of time, was noted by the prison staff. The MiP project staff modelled positive working relationships throughout the week, and managed problems caused by the resettlement nature of the prison and its impact on the group's rehearsal and recording time. The calm space that the facilitators created for work and learning was felt by the group members:

*It relaxes me, sometimes it's a bit frustrating when it doesn't go right though.* [Kalim]

*I've found it relaxing. I've learnt that there are chords on the keyboard. I used to think that they were all different, but the keys play together.* [Reggie]

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## Summary

The MiP project is an intense project, with the group working together from 8.30am until about 5pm for four days and completing a concert in front of an invited audience on the fifth. It demands concentration and commitment and a requirement for the participants to overcome anxieties about working together, playing instruments that they have had no previous experience with, and communicating and negotiating with people they have not met before (both other prisoners and the MiP team).

The participant group noted **positive feelings** and experiences from the project. They were full of praise for the work and the team, and **identified changes** in themselves that can be linked to changes in self-identity and desistance from crime. This project has encouraged four of the men, Julian, Kris, Kalim and Reggie, to continue to play both within prison and outside; but, as the learning and skills manager noted, there is no mechanism for these expectations to be monitored through the gate.

This project, in a resettlement prison, seemed at times during the week to be affected by the regime: the temporary release system threatened the stability of the group and the integrity of the work to be completed. However, the experience of the MiP team and their flexibility meant that the project had a successful conclusion. While it is understood that activities in prison are sometimes affected by regime and security issues, a learning point for prison staff is that participants' timetables for the project duration need to be considered before they take part.

This project potentially contributed to desistance by:

- Promoting changes in self-identity and improved feelings of confidence and self-esteem, allowing participants to begin to redefine themselves
- Celebrating the participants' achievement to a wide audience of peers within the prison
- Modelling positive relationships and trust, and encouraging such relationships to develop within the prisoner group and between prisoners and staff in a short space of time
- Demonstrating the value of having skills that bring enjoyment to yourself and others
- Enabling the participants to feel valued and supported by someone they view as skilled and professional

# iRememberBook

a write & draw in shared memories book

## all about mum...

## iMeant2sayBook

a thing...  
first: print out both sides of sheet one & sheet two onto 2 pieces of A4 - the numbered pages should be like this on each side...

top  
fold  
sheet TWO

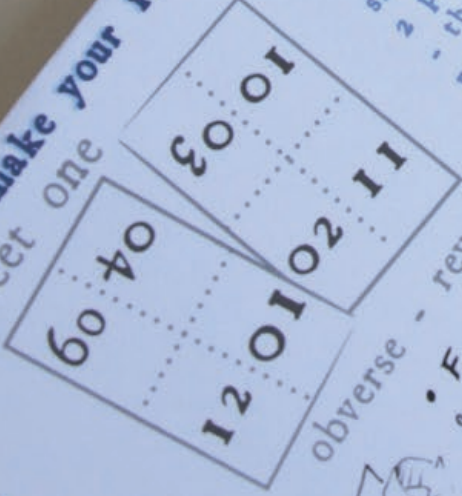
## all about me...

## a padbooklet...

an ideas, notes & sketches book...

a padbook for

To make your 12 page StoryBook - with fold-out feature...  
sheet one



obverse - reverse  
FOLDING...  
sheet one



sheet two...  
after book is sewn together using a craft knife/steel



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## Creative writing and journal making with female prisoners

This project, run in a women's prison, incorporates three elements, all of which are considered to be creative: creative writing, journal making and role playing. The project, run by padbooks and the Writers in Prison Foundation writer in residence, with input from the outreach team at the local living museum, used information about the British suffragette and suffragist movements to initiate discussion and creative writing projects, and then created hard backed journal covers in which the writing can be kept safely by the participants.

Padbooks, funded to carry out this project by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, aims to use the project journals and booklets to help participants to cope emotionally in the prison environment. By making the pad-booklets and their hard covers and by developing their own creative writing projects the participants are able to develop their self-expression and communication skills. While this specific project is not aimed at maintaining relationships through the gate, it gives the participants a skills set, and the opportunity to print off other booklets after the project has ended, which may help them *'explore issues and ask questions they aren't able to vocalise'* (padbooks) during prison visits and telephone calls prior to release. Padbooks' aims are entirely complementary with the aims of the Writers in Prison Foundation's writer in residence. The creative writing element of the project enables participants to *'express themselves and reflect on their personal stories'*. By doing this the project staff want to enable family ties to be strengthened and for the women to enjoy themselves creating something of which they are proud.

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## The project description

The project ran within the prison for five weeks, in a dedicated group work area in the prison library. There were two-hour sessions with the whole project team, one writer in residence and two facilitators from padbooks, once a week, and additional meetings with the writer in residence in the fifth week and throughout the project.

The first two weeks of the project involved discussions about the movements campaigning for the right for women to vote in the United Kingdom, led by members of the outreach team from the local living museum. The participants were guided by the writer in residence in developing a set of letters from fictional characters about their views and place within Edwardian society. They were asked to reflect on the role of women in history and compare it with their own roles in contemporary Britain.

During the third week the participants made a small hard backed journal from heavy card, buckram and wallpaper pieces. The journals could then be used to hold the letters and other elements from the writing projects in. The writer in residence facilitated more discussion about the suffragette movement, and the participants were encouraged to read out their letters to the rest of the group and to explain what else they wanted to include in new drafts of their work.

During the fourth week the participants made a larger hard backed journal, and each of the participants also created a small insert to be put into the project journal. The insert held the letters that the participants had been working on

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during the project, which meant that the journal was not only a group piece, but showcased individual pieces of work. In this session, one-to-one meetings with the writer in residence were carried out. This enabled the participants to talk about the work that they had done both inside and outside of the project hours, and how it could be further developed. The last task in the fourth week was showing all of the participants how to use the padbooks software to print off small journal inserts. These inserts are used by the participants to help them in their creative writing, but also encourage them to share information and stories with family and friends outside visiting hours.

In the fifth week of the project, the participants work with the writer in residence to complete their pieces of writing to be included in the journal to be placed in the living museum. The planned sixth week of the project was for participants who would be eligible for release on temporary licence, who could then visit the living museum with their families and see their written work being put into the archive. None of the participants were able to take up this opportunity during the first two rounds of the project.

The team attended four project sessions: session four with the first run of the project and sessions two, three and four of the second round. Interviews with the participants were carried out in the group setting during the project, and the research team also spoke with the women one-to-one. The research team took part in the sessions, making hard backed journals, inserts and rosettes, and were involved in the role playing. Feedback on the sessions was collected from the session evaluation sheets provided by padbooks.

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## Participants

The research team observed three women taking part in the first round, which had been identified as being a pilot phase of the project, and six women taking part in the second round of the project. The women in the first round, which began as a larger group of participants but on the day of the visit had been depleted due to visits and other prison activities taking place, had been identified as being participants who would be influential in encouraging others to sign up to future rounds of the project. The participants the researchers met on the first visit all had positions in the library either as library workers or learning and skills mentors.

The six women for the second round of the project had been drawn from the main wings in the prison. Three women were in their 30s, (Donna, Marie and Patricia) two participants were in their 40s (Caren and Jintal) and one participant was in her 50s (Helen). The participants were serving sentences from under a year to longer-term sentences. One woman, Donna, hoped to be released a week after the project had ended. Of the six women who started the second round of the project, five took part in every session. One woman, Caren, took part in both rounds of the project. She was a wing mentor, and had been identified as someone who might be able to encourage others to take part in future projects. Anna and Nat took part in the first round of the project.

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## Findings

Four key themes emerged from the data collected for this section of the research: **engagement and relationships**, **future learning and self-development**, **responsiveness**, and **space**. We also present discussion of further project findings and some of the more general thoughts of the participants.

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## Engagement and relationships

The project was lively and inclusive in each of the sessions. The six participants from the second round of the project were engaged with the topics under discussion in the first two sessions, and were willing to play their parts in the role playing about the impact of suffragists and suffragettes. Participants in the first round reported that they had also enjoyed these sessions. History and debates were brought to life through choosing the right costumes to wear for the character being portrayed. The women commented:

*I have found 2day very interesting. Wearing the hats felt really odd. 2 play a role in those days was very downgrading. The debate was very challenging. Thank you.*

*I have really enjoyed this morning's session. It was interesting and I have learnt more at [living museum] than I ever knew. I will go on Encarta and look into the whole thing and do some work on it. Thank you.*

*We could look at women's rights in other countries. Are there any countries better than ours? Do the worse ones make us too satisfied with our lot?*

*The debates and role-plays were really enjoyable and fun. I am upset that [living museum] will not be here again for these sessions.*

*I have really enjoyed this session, especially the debate. [Living museum] staff were great fun, knowledgeable and enthusiastic. It was great. Thank you.*

*Enlightening Group. Loved being part of this course.*

This feedback highlights a number of elements that are important on the road to secondary desistance, as well as how the women see themselves coping with their imprisonment. They noted that the sessions had helped them to think about their lives and their roles in their families, and were a forum where they felt safe, and in which they did not have to be concerned about what they said (this was in a group where not all of them knew each other before the start of the course, and where positive relationships between the women and between the project staff and participants were encouraged from the outset). The collaboration between the participants in both the role playing and the discussions set the tone for the remainder of the project, and the women felt confident enough to read out their creative writing pieces to the rest of the group. Throughout the project the facilitators modelled **positive relationships** and **cooperation** and worked with the women in a mutually respectful way, as can be seen from the comments above about the representatives from the living museum, who took part in the first two sessions of the project.



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## Future learning and self-development

The comments from the evaluation sheets about the role playing and information about campaigners' lives and actions showed that creative learning had a positive impact on the women. Three of the participants noted that it would make them think about finding out more about the history of the women's movement. This push towards future learning and taking up the challenges of other activities was shown in other comments made by the women about the creative writing element of the project. Four of the participants talked about how they had enjoyed writing fictional stories, and said that this prompted them to carry on with writing outside of the project.

*I love writing and being creative. Compiling a life purely fictional is amazing*

*I am interested in writing my story, I could do with some extra ideas.*

*I enjoy writing my story. You can put yourself in it as if you're really there.*

*After being [on] the padbook course, yes I find it uses my imagination going back in time to write short stories, and through research enhances my educational skills.*

Not only did the creative writing element of the project allow the women to think about the roles of others in an empathic manner, but it helped them to consider what they might do after the project. This re-imagining of themselves as creative writers or researchers is clear from the comments above. Viewing themselves in a different way, other than as prisoners, demonstrates the move towards changes in self-identity, a key element in secondary desistance.

The role playing and creative writing activities allowed the women to **reflect** on and reminisce about the lives of women in their own families and compare these with their own current and previous relationships and positions in society. This requirement for self-reflection is often very difficult for prison and project staff to negotiate with the participants. Care has to be taken that something which is supposed to be enjoyable and creative does not provoke anxiety or distress. However, one participant, Helen, said '*Do you know what? Being in here, it's given me time to myself. To think about myself*', and other participants agreed that being given the opportunity to think about themselves first was something that they rarely experienced outside prison. The project helped with this process of self-reflection in that they were asked to consider the role of women in society.

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## Responsiveness

The writer in residence considered how she worked with the participants and explained that she needed to be **reflexive** in her approach to the participant group and noted that creative writing '*can remind them of school*'. Prisoners have lower levels of literacy and numeracy than the general population and more often have histories of exclusion from school. Creative writing practices can be deeply unsettling for other reasons too. The women who took part in the first round of the project could be described as being more vulnerable than the participants for the second round (the first group included women who were on the PIPE (Psychologically Informed Planned Environment) unit or in a unit for personality disordered offenders). After session three of the

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second round, the writer in residence, in describing her practice, talked about a writing activity that asked participants to think about moments of change in their lives and hopes for the future. She commented that this type of activity would not have been appropriate for all women, especially many of those who had taken part in the first round of the project, as thinking about personal history is problematic and sensitive for some prisoners. She acknowledged that the participants were *'brave and generous to share'* their stories, and the ability of the writer in residence to be **responsive** to the needs of the participants was clearly important in facilitating this.

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## Space

The participants talked about how the project had helped them cope with their sentence and being in prison. All of them noted that the library in general, and the project in particular, was a space and time to be shared with *'people who are your own age. It's peaceful and you can learn. You're with people who have families. When there's bad conflict on the [wings], here it's peace and quiet'* [Donna]. Jintal noted that *'the girls in other classes, like beauty, don't want to be there and are just all shouting and playing up'*, but the calm in the project was a different environment. Marie added *'I don't really do the writing, but this really takes you out of the prison'*. The positive elements, about having the time to reflect and think, and share time with participants who had similar values were important. The women looked forward to their time on the project. Anna, from the first sweep, noted that she would *'do Padbooks again and again and again, and it's good that we can print things off and do it outside of here'*.

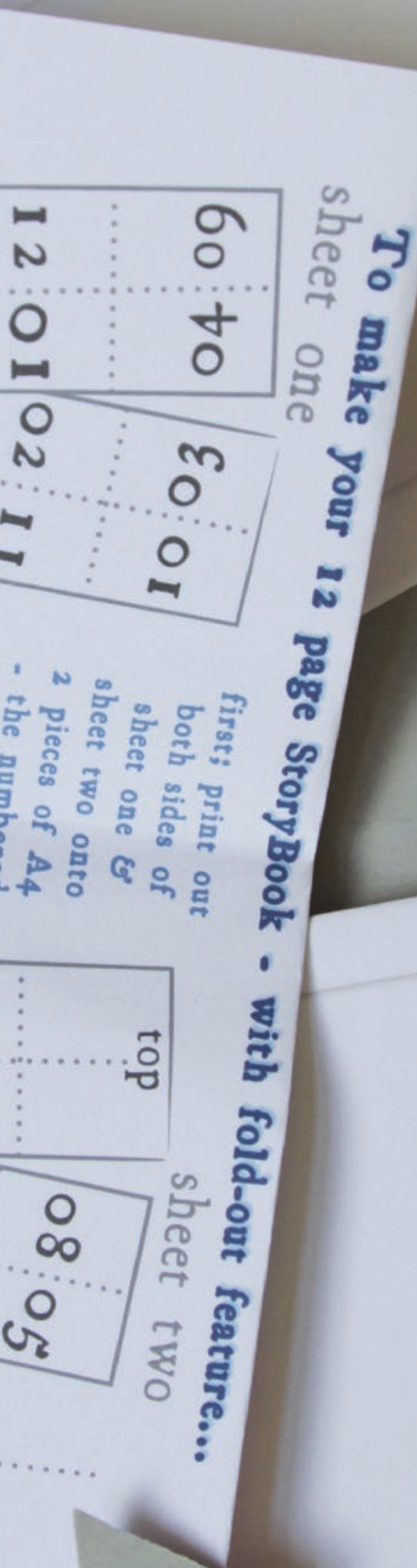
Time for quiet contemplation is difficult to find within a prison environment. Creative activities help people by providing an enjoyable, absorbing activity which allows a different sense of time to be experienced (Csikszentihalyi, 2002). But the project was not only about being able to find a quiet time and space. One participant noted that it made her feel better too; *'feeling a bit low yesterday, today has picked me back up and inspired me to go on. Thank you □'*. During the observation, the research team saw other incidents of participants showing signs of a low mood and low self-confidence at the beginning of sessions, and by the end of the session the participants were *'looking lifted'* [Padbooks facilitator].

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## Further project experiences

The group of women who participated in the second round of the project, not all of whom initially knew each other, came together well. They collaborated in all sessions, shared resources, and gave each other advice on how to develop their writing and what colours to choose for their journals. On one occasion, after the journals had been made, Donna commented that she was really unhappy with her choice of colours and that she did not like it, despite reassurance from the rest of the group about how nice the journal was. She commented in an aside that she preferred Helen's choice of colourway, at which point Helen offered to swap. After some negotiation about the rights and wrongs of swapping something which was quite personal, the deal was done and all participants commented on the kindness of the process. The question about choosing which patterned paper to use for the journals also demonstrates the project team's notions about giving the participants back a little autonomy in a system which often removes the ability for people to make their own choices: *'they become*

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*institutionalised and that makes them forget how to make choices'* [Project team member]. This was supported by a member of the learning and skills team who said that this type of creative project, which had no formal vocational or educational outcomes, enhanced the participants' sense of agency and free will. The staff team who worked in the library were supportive of the project, and other creative projects which had been hosted in the space.

The participants' attitude towards each other seemed to be friendly, and as noted above the women felt that they had things in common with each other. They were asked how they were chosen for the project and some noted that they had been asked to take part by Caren, who was a wing mentor. Others had seen the activities in round one taking place in the library and wanted to join in and the last group '*had a slip put under the door*'. It seemed that participants were encouraged to take part because they had already shown an interest in other arts activities. This showed higher levels of motivation to take part in learning and creative opportunities. It could be suggested that the peer encouragement was one of the elements in the successful outcome of the project. The wing, library, and learning and skills staff helped draw a group of participants into the course who would complete the project. Only one of the participants from both rounds of the project did not complete, owing to her work commitments. The participants from both rounds of the project said that they felt pleased to have been asked to take part; this was especially true of those who had taken part in the first round.

The project aims included participants being able to celebrate their achievements, and the project facilitators agreed that many of the women whom they had worked with on this, and previous projects, had never experienced or expressed a sense of accomplishment before. The padbooks project helped all four women who completed evaluations in the third week to feel that they had done something positive. In completing the sentence '*Making my books made me feel...*' the participants responded:

*Accomplished*

*Pleased to produce my 'own' book*

*Better so I can get my stories put in*

*Happy*

The hard backed journal covers which the participants made in weeks three and four '*have currency*' [padbooks facilitator], in that the women can chose to keep them, or share them and give them away to friends and family. This currency is not simply about being able to give material gifts, but it is about having the skills to share with people inside and outside prison. The participants in the second round of the project talked about using the project to help them maintain contact with family and friends outside prison, and to help them involve children and grandchildren in new activities after release.

*I will take the skills I have acquired today back home with me and put them to good*

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use. *Make a book for my Grandson to write about his little life.* [Anonymous comment from evaluation sheet]

*This and other creative things... At Christmas I can get the kids crafty things to do and do them with them. It's about my family. I've learnt how to make cards and can do them for Christmas and birthdays* [Donna]

Donna also commented that creative activities could help with child and parent visits, although she noted the more general problem that these were not always at an appropriate time and that she did not want to insist that her children came out of school. This 'through the gate' element is also particularly important to all the project facilitators and the prison staff. This is evidenced through the other projects padbooks are involved with in this prison, where they encourage padbooks to be used to '*explore issues and ask questions they aren't able to vocalise*' during visits. Part of the project included training the participants to use the padbooks computer in the library to print off booklets after the project had officially ended. Participants were encouraged to use these booklets for other creative writing projects and also for sharing with family and friends, and to use the online system and software after release. The women who took part in the first round of the project were taught how to use the software and were encouraged to act as support givers and mentors for other prisoners, initially those who were taking part in projects, to print off and use the booklets. They also were able to feedback to the padbooks facilitators about using the software and one participant noted that she was pleased that her feedback about the booklets had been acted on. '*You don't need all those instructions every time. It's a waste of ink and a waste of paper*' [Nat, from the first round of the project]. This project incorporated an ongoing element of creative encouragement after the end of the sessions.

All participants were asked whether they had taken part in other artistic and creative activities in the prison, and there were a range of responses: participant Jintal said that she had not been inside long enough to take part in other things, but she hoped to be able to take advantage of other arts projects, while Donna had earned a '*creative industries qualification certificate thing*' by taking part in cross-stitching and card making, and Helen said that through this project and art classes '*I've learnt that I'm an artistic person! I've discovered I can draw and paint and write*'.

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## Summary

This project, with the three creative elements – creative writing, journal making and role playing – achieved all of the aims it set out to. All three project leaders, the creative writer and the two padbooks facilitators, believed that they wanted to be '*constructive. That's the project*' [padbooks]. While the project aimed to enable the women to use creative writing and the journal making to help them express themselves and to improve, the project team also believe that the participants will '*stop reoffending because of the new self-respect that they have*'. The participants spoke very highly of the project and those who ran it. The evaluation sheets and the interview and participant observation data showed that it helped improve self-esteem through a sense of achievement and future opportunities for more success.

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This part of the research demonstrated that participants could **cooperate** with others, including other prisoners, staff and project staff from outside the prison environment, and celebrate the successes they had in each of the creative elements of the project. The **space** to develop and contemplate their roles outside prison was particularly important for these women, who noted needing time with a group of people, both staff and prisoners, who could provide them with the opportunities to spend time in a calm environment. The core project team, and those from the living museum, showed that they were **responsive** to the needs of the participants. The two rounds of the project which were included in the research included different elements for the creative writing part of the project and used different examples of the history of women's rights. This responsiveness is important in ensuring that participants benefit, and is an essential part of creative practice. This contrasts with public examinations, where each participant needs to meet the same set of criteria, or psychological treatments with a set of approved tasks to be completed.

This project helped the participants reflect on their own sense of self, their **self-development**, and their position in their own communities. The role playing and creative writing helped them to compare their own lives with historical characters, and the bookmaking skills helped them to think about how they could use creative skills with their families before and after release. The consideration of self is one of the most important elements in desistance.

All of the participants talked about the **enjoyment** that they gained from taking part in the projects. This is possibly a difficult notion to manage in a Criminal Justice System which places great value on economically valuable activity and 'proper punishment'. However, enjoyment and wellbeing are linked, which is important in a system that needs to address the high levels of mental and physical ill health and the associated costs of these.

This project potentially contributed to desistance by..

- The role playing and creative writing elements of this project allowed participants to consider their own roles as women and family members
- The participants noted that taking part in the project allowed them time in a calm environment, giving them the space to cope with prison
- The book making aspects of this project allowed participants to consider the role of crafting as a tool to help them reconnect with their family and friends
- The project enabled the participants to regain a small element of autonomy through choice
- The project enabled good and trusting working relationships to be built between the group members and with the project staff
- The successes of the group were celebrated and shared, which promoted a sense of achievement and improved self-confidence
- The project was responsive to the needs of individual participants
- Participation prompted the women to focus on their future learning and self-development needs and wants



Image Courtesy of Geese Theatre Company.  
Photo © Gina Print

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## Overall thematic findings and summary

This report identifies ways in which arts practice can start to develop the indicators for secondary desistance: changes in self-identity and personal agency and the development of social capital. These elements support the difficult and often circuitous process towards refraining from offending and regarding yourself as a non-offender. Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph (2002: 999-1002) suggest that there is a four-stage process to desistance from crime which includes (1) an openness to change; (2) exposure and reaction to 'hooks' for change (or turning points); (3) imagining and believing in a 'replacement self'; and (4) a change in the way that offending and deviant behaviour is viewed. Our research indicates that taking part in an arts project is linked most strongly to stage 3: imagining and believing in a 'replacement self'; but we also found indicators that arts projects stimulate stage 1 in the four-stage process: an openness to change.

The findings reflect the differences in the types of participants, projects and settings, but there were similar emerging themes. These similarities not only emerged from data from participants, but also from the data collected from arts practitioners who ran the projects and the criminal justice agency staff. None of the projects identified as their aim or objectives the need to reduce reoffending. Yet all of them identified an aspect of secondary desistance as part of their goals. For the most part this can be summarised as aiming for participants to see and think about themselves in a more positive way; an important step on the path to desisting from crime.

The findings clearly demonstrate how the arts activities undertaken by participants provided the medium through which they were able to reflect upon their own self. In this sense, the art facilitated reflection, leading to **changes in self-perception**, and potentially changes in behaviour. Environments and programmes designed to focus specifically on redefining the self – such as therapeutic communities – typically do this work over many months and years. What is clear from the findings presented here is that participants in these arts projects were experiencing these outcomes over a much shorter time. We suggest that the space for reflection created through the artistic process is one of the most significant factors in promoting this change. Indeed, all of the projects showed that they had helped participants to think differently about, or **redefine** themselves. While none of the participants described themselves as artists, they considered themselves to be people who had achieved something and who were successful. This encouraged participants to try new challenges, often arts-related, or to use the knowledge they had gained about the arts practice in another environment. This sense of redefinition is one of the most important elements in desistance.

The arts projects allowed participants to positively re-imagine themselves, whether this was through writing a piece of fiction based on a historical life which they never had; singing songs about love and supportive relationships; or through re-ordering thoughts through found-object collage. Arts activities allow self-expression in contexts where individuality is – sometimes necessarily – curbed.

The arts, in all of the creative forms explored in this piece of research, allowed participants to explore new experiences in a safe, trusting and non-judgemental

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environment. In each project participants commented positively on being encouraged, by professionals they respected, to do something emotionally risky. Indeed, the status of the arts practitioners as professionals was a clear theme in the findings of this research. Participants reported having a great deal of respect for the facilitators and valued their feedback and advice. This highlights the importance of the **status of project facilitators as professionals**. The value of this should not be underestimated by agencies of the Criminal Justice System when considering using external organisations.

The achievement of completing something new, or developing a different type of artistic skill is recognised by the participants and the arts practitioners running courses. This achievement has an impact on how individuals view themselves and therefore on how they view their future potential, This willingness to take risks can be associated with a participant's move towards being open to the possibility of changing their behaviour, outlook and life.

The data showed how participants also began to understand the intrinsic value of the arts – doing art for art's sake, growth, expression, or **enjoyment** and a positive affective experience. Indeed, all of the participants talked about the enjoyment that they gained from taking part in the projects. This is possibly a difficult notion to manage in a Criminal Justice System which places great value on economically valuable activity and 'proper punishment'. However, enjoyment and wellbeing are linked, which is important in a system that needs to address the high levels of mental and physical ill-health and the associated costs of these. Enjoyment, in fact, can be considered a turning point for change. In each of the projects the participants noted their enjoyment of the activity. This enjoyment was sometimes linked with the struggle to achieve an outcome of which the participant could be proud; on other occasions the enjoyment was related to taking part in something that was different from the challengingly routine nature of prison or the community penalty. Most importantly, both enjoyment and achievement facilitate **engagement**. Levels of attendance at, and engagement with, the arts projects were high. For individuals who have struggled to engage with productive activities in the past – and this is the case for many individuals in contact with the Criminal Justice System – engaging with an arts project is an important step towards engagement with education and work-related activities.

Having a project embedded in a criminal justice agency means that participants may join, leave and then rejoin an arts project once they demonstrate the first stage in the process of secondary desistance – openness to change. A short-term project run by an organisation outside of the criminal justice agency may be able to act as the 'hook' for change, but cannot manage this process in the longer term.

This research demonstrates that arts practice has an impact on how people manage themselves during their sentence. Participants and staff report intermediate outcomes related to reduction in aggression and compliance with the regime, including a willingness to engage with other activities such as education and treatment programmes. Intermediate outcomes are easier to identify if arts programmes are embedded in the criminal justice agency and



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are working with people who are on longer sentences. Embedded projects are able to track changes in individuals over time, although the importance of the professional status of the arts practitioners should be remembered here so as not to confuse embedded external projects with core educational programmes.

All projects noted changes in participants' ability to **cooperate with others**. This was shown in their relationships with other members of the groups, the arts practitioners and the criminal justice agency staff. Participants demonstrated higher levels of self-control, but also problem-solving skills in the group. As they improved their relationships with others, participants started to comply and engage with the criminal justice regimes, again showing less aggression and violence and taking up other educational and psychological opportunities. All of these elements are shown in the research literature to be related to lower levels of reoffending.

Current policy documentation on commissioning services to meet offenders' needs highlights the importance of **responsiveness** in meeting diverse needs. All of the projects showed that the participants felt that the arts practitioners met their individual needs in the projects. This does not seem to be linked to the length of time the arts practitioners had spent working in a criminal justice environment, but about their capacity to support the participants empathically.

McNeill, et al (2012:2) note that criminal justice agencies need, in trying to support the processes of desistance, to be realistic about the complexity and difficulty of the process. Agencies need to: identify and manage support for individual change; create and sustain hope; recognise and develop individual strengths; develop social and human capital; work with and through relationships; and recognise and celebrate progress. All of the projects included in this research visibly supported those aims. By encouraging cooperation within the groups, between the group members and the arts practitioners, and, on occasions, outside of the immediate art groups, these projects not only develop social and human capital, but demonstrate how negotiations are managed in positive personal and professional relationships. In each of the projects success was celebrated on small and large scales. Recordings and performances of music, readings of creative writing projects by the authors and completion of collaborative art works are all examples of celebrations. These celebrations led to the creation of hope within the groups. If, to support the creation of routes to secondary desistance, criminal justice agencies need to find new ways of working with groups of offenders, they only need to look to arts practitioners for 'the possibility of fresh vision, or at least a glimpse of a different life, [that] often provokes, inspires and delights' (BIS & MoJ, 2011: 19).

In summary, this research found that:

- participation in arts activities enables individuals to begin to **redefine** themselves, an important factor in desistance from crime.
- arts projects facilitate high levels of **engagement**. This is significant because many individuals in contact with the Criminal Justice System have struggled to engage with productive activities in the past. Participants must engage

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in order to be able to redefine themselves. Engagement in arts projects has been shown to lead to greater participation in education and work-related activities.

- arts projects can have a positive impact on how people manage themselves during their sentence, and particularly on to their ability to **cooperate with others** – including other participants and staff. This relates to increased self-control and better problem-solving skills.
- engagement with arts projects facilitates **compliance** with criminal justice orders and regimes.
- arts projects are **responsive** to participant's individual needs. Current policy documentation on commissioning services to meet offenders' needs highlights the importance of **responsiveness** in meeting diverse needs.
- the status of arts practitioners as **professional artists** is highly significant in the success of projects and their potential impact upon participants. The value of this should not be underestimated by agencies of the Criminal Justice System when considering using external organisations.

The findings from this research indicate strongly that arts projects can contribute to an individual's journey to desistance. There is a clear need for longitudinal research, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods, to assess how far these findings are sustained in the long-term. Within the findings there were indications that there are some elements that may be specific to particular art forms; there is a case for investigating this further.

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## Recommendations

The research process and findings highlight a number of issues that lead us to make recommendations for different sections of the Criminal Justice System regarding the arts in rehabilitation provision. The government acknowledges that the arts have a role to play in the criminal justice process, and that they require evidence to support the claims of positive outcomes in order to keep commissioning work. **This research demonstrates that participants acknowledge the impact that taking part in arts activities has on their personal agency in the short term.** Changes to personal agency, or efficacy and identity, are linked to desistance, and this needs to be captured in the longer term.

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### For arts organisations

- Outline the impact that your project and arts practice will have on your participants
- Be clear about whether your project can have an impact on primary desistance (stopping offending) or secondary desistance (a longer term change towards stopping offending, which includes changes in personal agency and self-identity)
- Consider whether the criminal justice agency you are working is able to structurally support the participants' journey to desistance at all stages of your project
- Does it create and support hope, engender positive relationships, celebrate success and achievement?
- Understand whether the criminal justice agency's approach to desistance supports the changes your project aims to achieve
- Be responsive to the participants' individual needs, while setting clear boundaries about group and personal expectations during the project
- Create a supportive, trusting environment in which participants are encouraged to take artistic risks, which might fail
- Celebrate success and feed this back to participants
- On evaluation forms, or reflection logs, ask participants about what skills they have learnt and how they might use these in other situations; whether they have felt any changes in their behaviour or attitudes during the project and how this might be maintained after the end of the activity; whether they will continue to take part in arts activities in the future. This will support the evaluation process
- Ensure that you collect demographic information on participants, such as the given name and date of birth. In the future this will help your organisation access reconviction data from the Justice Data Lab.

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### For criminal justice agencies and service commissioners

- Consider how innovative arts provision can be supported in your agency under commissioning and OLASS specifications and use evidence from this and other research to support your views
- Consider whether and how your organisation structurally supports individuals' journeys to desistance before and after arts interventions
- Do you create and support hope, engender positive relationships, celebrate success and achievement?

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- Understand how the arts project will effect change in participants and identify those to take part who will benefit most from these changes
  - Publicise the arts activity as widely as possible, not just to potential participants, but to other staff members and explain the impact that you want the arts project to have
  - Work with the arts organisation to identify a group of participants that will benefit from the project, not simply those who have complied in the past and deserve a reward
  - Provide the arts organisation with data on the participants – given name and date of birth is the base line so that they and you can monitor any changes in behaviour
  - Identify with the arts organisation an appropriate space for them to work in. This space needs to be viewed by participants as a safe environment
  - Use the arts agency evaluation materials to follow up the participants at an agreed point after the project end and share this information with them
  - Celebrate success and feed this back to participants.

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### For government and service commissioners

- Consider that innovative projects have a role in promoting both primary and secondary desistance in a system of ‘proper punishment’ and ‘effective rehabilitation’
- Assess the value of realist evaluation and research as part of a developing evidence base on the impact of arts interventions
- Understand that soft outcomes that arts projects promote may not be best measured by quantifiable change over a short period of time, but that the real impact of arts projects can be best measured through the combination of qualitative and quantitative measures.
- Be open to new and emerging organisations who provide innovative provision, have identified desistance-related aims, objectives and outcomes, and have robust evaluation plans in place
- Consider the role and importance of providing the personal and social education projects in the last 12 months of offenders’ sentences, rather than only vocational skills. Arts projects are particularly successful in improving cooperative and communication skills and improved self-confidence, which are important in the job market
- Support the continued operation of the Justice Data Lab in providing reconviction data for third sector organisations.





Music in prison (stage performance)  
Sounding out platform 7, Music in  
Prisons Photo © Owen Richards,  
Courtesy of The Koestler Trust





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## References interview schedule- project participants

### Appendix – Research tools

This appendix includes the interview tools which were used to guide the research.

This set of questions should be used as a starting point for any discussion with participants. A prescribed set of questions cannot be put to all participants, because of difference in 'type' of offender, arts intervention and location of the intervention. The interviewing process should be about developing a 'conversation with a purpose', and should be part of the intervention (participant) observation process, rather than a set of formal interviews. Interviews may be one to one with the researcher, but might also take the form of group discussions, which may take place numerous times while the researcher is observing the activities. The language used in the interviews needs to be tailored to each setting and 'type' of participant– for example, 'projects' might be interpreted as 'classes' or 'activities'. Clearly, types of language such as 'arts practitioner' are not appropriate in an informal interview setting, and these questions again need to be tailored by the research team in each case study.

Informed consent will be gained from the participants. This consent may be verbal consent. Each participant will be given an information sheet about the research project, with a set of FAQs attached. These will outline why they have been chosen to take part, what the research team might expect of them, what they can expect of the research team (including qualified confidentiality), what might happen to the information that they give to the research team, and, of course, their right to withdraw at any point. In research terms, all of the participants are considered to be vulnerable, and this will be taken into account when conducting the research – power relationships between the researchers and the participants need to be carefully managed in order there is no sense of implied coercion throughout the research.

Discussions should concentrate on notions of self-identity and change, management of self during the arts project, comparisons to any former methods of CJS intervention and impact on future behaviour and self-management. All of the questions should focus on the impact of the creative aspects of any intervention and the participants should be encouraged to make any specific links between these notions and the creative practice in which they are involved.

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### Introduction – setting the scene

1. How were you selected to take part in this project?
  2. Did you chose to take part, or were you selected?
  3. Did you want to take part in the project?
  4. How was the project described to you?
  5. What did you expect you would be doing as part of the project?
  6. How long have you been taking part in the activity?
  7. Have you taken part in any other types of arts or creative projects during this sentence?
  8. Have you taken part in other creative projects during other sentences?
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9. Is this project different from other creative projects you've taken part in?
  10. What other types of projects, or programmes are you currently taking part in? (explore ideas of ETE, OBP & structured activities as part of the sentence)
  11. Is this project different from other (ETE, etc) activities you're taking part in?
  12. What do you want to get from the project?
  13. What do you think that the CJS agency wants you to get from the project?
  14. What do you think that the arts practitioners want you to get from the project?
  15. What did you think about the practitioners before you started the project?

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## Taking part

1. Could you tell me what you've been doing in the session today?
2. Today you've been doing X, how have you found that activity?
3. Did doing the activity help you at all?
4. Did doing the activity help you think through anything which has been bothering you?
5. How did taking part in the activity make you feel?
6. How will you get rid of/keep that feeling until the next session?
7. Will you tell anyone about what you've done today?
8. Who has helped you make today's activity difficult/pleasant for you?
9. What do you think you've achieved today?
10. What do you want to achieve at the next session?

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## Mapping the activity onto other areas

1. You've told me that today you've found the session difficult and that you feel bad about it. Can you leave that feeling in the session? Or will it have an impact on the rest of the day?
2. You've told me that today you've found the session pleasant, that you've achieved something and that you feel good about it. Can you take that feeling away with you? Will it have an impact on the rest of the day?
3. You've been taking part in the project for a short amount of time/sometime/a long time, do you think that you've changed in that time?
4. Can you describe how you think that you've changed?
5. Do you think of yourself differently as a consequence of taking part in the project?
6. Does this different feeling help you in other areas of your daily life? (prompt for notions about identity)
7. Can you describe why you think that you haven't changed?
8. Do you put the change in yourself down to just the project, or do you think it might have something to do with the other activities you're taking part in?
9. Has the way you approach or take part in other activities changed while you've been taking part in the creative project? (prompting about taking part in ETE, psychological interventions, etc)
10. Has the way in which you work with and relate to the other participants in the project changed over time?
11. Has the way in which you work with or relate to the arts practitioner changed over the time of the project?

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12. What do you think of the practitioners now? (after some time, links into question in setting the scene )
  13. Has the way in which you work with or relate to CJS staff changed over the time of the project?
  14. Has the way in which you relate to other important people changed over the time of the project? (prompt for who is important to them)
  15. You've noted that your relationships with X have changed over the time of the project. Do you think that it's down to the project, or is it about other things?
  16. The project is about X, but do you think that any of the things that you've learnt would help you in other areas of your life?
  17. Have you learnt any skills on the project that you could apply to other areas of your life, or the lives of the people who are important to you?

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## Concluding

1. Can you describe whether, or how, the project is lived up to your expectations of it?
2. How is it different from the way in which it was originally explained to you?
3. What will happen at the end of the activity?
4. What will you do with the book/painting/piece of music/play that you've created?
5. What would you want to happen with the book/painting/piece of music/play that you created?
6. What would it mean to you if X happened to your book/painting/piece of music/play that you created?
7. Would you take part in the activity again?
8. (For positive responses) When the project comes to an end, how do you hope to keep up the positive things that have happened?
9. Can you describe whether you think these positive things might have an impact on other things in your life? (prompt for impact on other activities, behaviour change, relationship change, change in self identity)
10. How long do you think that the positive impact might last?
11. Do you think that the positive elements might last until after your sentence ends?
12. You've not enjoyed the project and you think it's had a bad impact on you. How do you think you might start to make things better?

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## Interview schedule – practitioners

This set of questions should be used as a starting point for any discussion with people running the projects – they are termed practitioners, even though this may not be an appropriate name for all. As with the participants, a prescribed set of questions cannot be put to all practitioners, because of difference in ‘type’ of offender, arts intervention and location of the intervention. The interviewing process should be about developing a ‘conversation with a purpose’, and should be part of the intervention (participant) observation process, rather than a set of formal interviews. Interviews may be one to one with the researcher, but might also take the form of group discussions, which may take place numerous times while the researcher is observing the activities. The language used in the interviews needs to be tailored to each setting and ‘type’ of participant– for example, ‘projects’ might be interpreted as ‘classes’ or ‘activities’. Clearly, types of language such as ‘arts practitioner’ are not appropriate in an informal interview setting, and these questions again need to be tailored by the research team in each case study. Some of the questions to be asked about set up and management of the project might not be answered by the practitioners, and telephone conversations may need to be held with the managers of projects. Much of the information will also be collected in the documentary data collection.

Informed consent will be gained from the participants. This consent may be verbal consent. Each participant will be given an information sheet about the research project, with a set of FAQs attached. These will outline why they have been chosen to take part, what the research team might expect of them, what they can expect of the research team (including qualified confidentiality), what might happen to the information that they give to the research team, and, of course, their right to withdraw at any point.

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## Project management and set up

1. Can you describe the project? Prompting for
  - Arts activity
  - Set up of organisation
  - Modes of delivery
  - Other areas of delivery
  - Fit within other activities run by the CJS agency
  - (Funding)
  - ‘Types’ of participants
  - Project aims & objectives
  - Project outcomes & outputs
2. Can you describe how participants are selected?
3. If you have no say in the selection of participants, are the participants always appropriate for the project?
4. Can you describe how the project is set up and managed by your organisation and the CJS agency? (also to be collected through the documentary evidence collection process)
5. Is the project welcomed by all staff in the CJS?
6. If you need to, how do you counter any negative attitudes from CJS staff or potential participants?

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## Availability of resources

1. Do you have all the resources you need to run the project as you would like? (resources may include CJS staffing, equipment, accommodation)
2. What are you missing? What is plentiful?
3. What could be improved?
4. Have you had to compete with other projects or interventions for resources?

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## Theories of change and participation

1. You described the project aims and objectives as X, could you tell me a little more about what you hope to achieve during the project?
2. What is the ethos behind your practice? How do you think it might have an impact on people's behaviour?
3. Can you describe how and why you think your project might change people's offending behaviour?
4. Do you feel that the project has a role in the reduction of reoffending? Directly or indirectly?
5. Can you describe whether you think that arts practice might differ from other (ETE, drugs/alcohol, health & mental health, psychological, etc) interventions run by the CJS agency.
6. If you think that arts practice might be different, can you explain why this is the case?
7. Do you think that the project complements other types of work done by the CJS? (prompt also for evidence of conflicting aims in other/same areas of the CJS)
8. Do you encourage continuation of the project after your delivery? (prompting for practical examples of how this might be done and by whom – explore peer to peer learning and follow ups by the CJS agency)
9. If the participants experience a change in attitude/change in behaviour/change in relationships/change in personal identity (thinking about positive changes), how do you think that this is sustained after the lifetime of the project?

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## Measuring change

1. Do you collect information on participants?
  2. How do you measure whether the participants have found the project a positive experience?
  3. What do you think is a good outcome for the project participants? (prompting for changes in behaviour and attitude and impact on other elements within the CJS)
  4. Do you think your interpretation of a good outcome is the same as the interpretation of the project participants?
  5. How do you know if you've met your aims and objectives?
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# Participant observation data collection prompts

As with the interview schedules, the nature of the participant observation will be flexible, with the site of the project, the nature of the project and the nature of the participants having a bearing on how and what is observed. The participant observation will not be intrusive, and it is likely that there will be much more focus on the observation elements, rather than the participation. This element of the research should be useful if done on every occasion that the research team visits, rather than as an element of one visit. With this in mind, the research team will consider not only the points raised below, but changes over the time of either the project or the research team visits.

## Space in which the project is being run

1. Size & location & light
2. Rehearsal/creation space fit for practical purpose?
3. Performance/exhibition space fit for purpose?
4. How is the space managed and used by the practitioners?
5. How is the space managed by the CJS staff?
6. How is the space used by the participants?

## Resources

1. What types of resources are available? Including the number of staff from the project and the CJS agency
2. Are these fit for purpose? Consider age and condition of the resources and the amount of resources

## Relationships

1. Relationships between participants
2. Relationships between participants and practitioners -- are there any particular issues based on gender lines?
3. Relationships between participants and CJS staff – are there any particular issues based on gender lines?
4. Individual engagement with the project
5. Group engagement with the project

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