Leading with Conviction: The Unique Complexities Faced by Ex-Prisoner Entrepreneurs Working Within the Criminal Justice System

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Abstract

This action research study is focussed on ex-prisoner entrepreneurs who are working within the Criminal Justice System and seeks to identify the unique complexities they face in developing and delivering their services. Such studies are important in order to contribute towards an empirical evidence base researchers and commissioners can call upon, whilst filling some of the gaps in current research which focus on lower level service-user involvement, peer mentoring, employment and prisoner entrepreneurship and are lacking in the hierarchical views of leaders with lived experience of the system they are trying to support, challenge and change. These voices are essential when faced with the prospect of having to do more for less money in a creaking and groaning Criminal Justice System. Methodological pluralism was utilised to gather data for the study which consisted of an online survey completed by 44 respondents and four in-depth qualitative interviews with successful and credible entrepreneurs to give breadth and additional depth to the research. Due to the authors unique tripartite positionality as a social entrepreneur, researcher and ex-prisoner, auto-ethnographic knowledge was also deployed to give further insight into specific issues and progressions within the sector. We asked the question what barriers do ex-prisoner entrepreneurs delivering services within the Criminal Justice System face and what solutions are needed? The answers evidenced a plethora of unique complexities so far unexplored in service-user or entrepreneurial research, including security clearance issues, funding shortages and a lack of suitable or sustainable collaborations and equitable opportunities, disclosure and credibility issues and a refusal to be assimilated into the pervasive 'System'. We explore solutions to these problems using the innovative views of people who, due to internal feelings of responsibility and generativity, plus external needs for credible services, created their own successful organisations to engage and support their communities. We look at mechanisms of peer mentoring and authentic service-user engagement and how they support not just desistance, but also leadership and service development, analysing the dynamics which make them so effective and the platforms we can use to reach and support people on a National level to improve service provision for the staff and people still trapped within our troubled Criminal Justice System.

Chapter 1: Introduction

"For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others". *Nelson Mandela*

Much has been written over recent years about the relevance of service-user involvement. This development has been ground-breaking, opening the doors to policy makers and giving service-users a voice in how to deliver services with more efficacy and by whom, whilst challenging decision-makers and the system by holding them to account. In the field of Criminal Justice, this has never been more important; stark budget cuts of at least 24% since 2010, and staff reductions of 41% over four years (CFE, 2016) have made employing younger and inexperienced staff necessary in order to maintain order and regime (MOJ, 2019). This coupled with the National privatisation of various services, have triggered a National Prison and Probation crisis, witnessing the highest rates of violence, suicide, recalls on license, self-harm and drug-taking ever recorded (PRT, 2018). This culmination of chaos has meant that statutory services, supporting organisations and the third sector must work smarter rather than harder if they are to tackle the problems so readily reported by mainstream media.

Despite positivity surrounding service-user involvement, recent research shines a light on the remaining gaps and long-standing issues with utilising service-users in such a way. Tokenism, as well as fear that they may lose their innovative and solution-focussed way of thinking, instead becoming assimilated into the pervasive problem of 'The System' they initially sought to challenge and help to develop, remain topical. How do we ensure that the people with lived experience of services, past and present, remain congruent and innovative, whilst growing and progressing personally and professionally? In the Empirical research to date, there are gaps which this study seeks to fill; What happens post-service-user involvement? How do we develop community leaders who can influence change? What services do leaders with lived experience, defined as people who use their first-hand experience of a social issue to create positive change for, and with, communities and people they share those experiences with (TNLCF, 2019), deliver, and why? What is it that drives such a person to re-enter the world of Criminal Justice when they are finally free from their own sentences and how do they make sense of their journey? What are the barriers and complexities they face when journeying

back into Her Majesties Prison and Probation Service during difficult times of austerity and funding cuts and how and why do they remain steadfast in the courage of their convictions; determined to support a criminal justice system that, within certain elements we shall explore, seems to remain reticent about true redemption and rehabilitation?

This action-research study utilises quantitative and qualitative data to unpick some of the unique complexities faced by entrepreneurs with convictions now giving back into the system, coined as the virtuous cycle as opposed to the vicious cycle of reoffending (CFE 2016:10), in an effort to help them to continue to support a creaking and groaning criminal justice system, and most importantly, the staff and people trapped within it. We will ask the question 'What are the barriers you face as entrepreneurs with convictions and how can we overcome these barriers?'

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Literature about the utilisation of lived experience within the world of Criminal Justice is currently centred around four core themes; Service-user involvement, Peer Mentoring, Employment and Prisoner Entrepreneurship. During this literature review, we will seek to explore each theme in detail, identifying any gaps and links to theories such as Desistance theory and the theory of Mimesis (Girard 1962, cited in Buck 2017).

Service-user involvement

Service-user involvement in relation to people with convictions is identified by Revolving Doors Agency as emulating a ladder of participation:

Ladder of Participation
Full Control
Service-users control decision making at the highest level
Sharing Power
Service-users share decisions and responsibilities, influencing and determining outcomes
Participation
Service-users can make suggestions and influence outcomes
Consultation
Service-users are asked what they think but have limited influence
Information
Service-users are told what is happening but have no influence
No Control
Service-users are passive Consumers

Revolving Doors Agency, Ladder of Participation (2016:5)

In January 2006, the committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe created a new rule 50 requiring that prisoners be encouraged to discuss matters relating to the general conditions of imprisonment with prison administrations (Bishop 2006). In custody,

service-user involvement includes Prisoner councils, Prisoner forums and Prisoner consultations conducted by various agencies including the prison itself. Although not a new phenomenon, popularity has dramatically increased over recent years and reinforces notions of personal control, agency and responsibility, enhanced by the ability to exercise solution-focussed behaviour on behalf of the prison community. This reciprocity is believed to feed into theories around generativity and mutual aid, however, there is a lack of research about the efficacy of service-user involvement (Bishop 2006, Weaver 2012) coupled with tensions around staff needs being overlooked in favour of prisoner or service-user needs. Despite these tensions, most staff within studies indicate positive effects on prisons or services utilising such methods of communication and consultation, and most importantly, a reduction in reoffending through increased compliance and credibility of interventions (Bishop 2006, PRT 2011). Service-user involvement also spills into the delivery of interventions, such as peer advisors both in custody and out, peer counsellors or supporters and peer mentors or case workers.

Peer mentoring

Peer mentoring and formalised peer support has been a growing trend over recent years and can be defined as relatable role models who talk the same talk and have travelled similar journeys to mentees they are supporting, mirroring rehabilitation in action (Buck 2018, Beyond Youth Custody 2019:6). This mechanism of support was further popularised in 2012 when Chris Grayling delivered his infamous speech which stated that *"often it will be the former offender gone straight that is best placed to steer the young prisoner back onto the straight and narrow"* (Grayling 2012). It is estimated that in parts of England, peer mentors make up 92% of the Criminal Justice mentors currently deployed (Willoughby 2013) and the case for peer mentoring rests upon certain key prepositions including positive role modelling, being relatable to service users, cost-effectiveness and having an ability to build resilience and social capital (Fletcher 2012) coupled with core conditions or characteristics which include caring, listening and encouraging (Buck 2018). This however produces tensions within the field of Criminal Justice which is concerned with control, risk management and punishment as opposed to caring (Buck 2015:23). Encouragingly, Desistance theory galvanises a move away from processes and systems which are done 'to people to rehabilitate them', and instead shifts towards relationships, co-production and the importance of social support

and advocacy in building social capital (McNeil 2007, Maruna 2001, Weaver 2013, Smith 2018, Beyond Youth Custody 2019, Faulkner 2012).

These key concepts within Desistance theory organically align with the characteristics of peer mentoring, securing it as an effective tool for tackling recidivism and supporting rehabilitative endeavours despite a lack of robust data, triggering calls from academics to fill the research gaps (Maruna 2001:130, Buck 2018). There is also a lack of theoretical underpinning relating to peer interventions which Academics are seeking to build (Maruna 2001). Buck (2017) describes a mechanism of Mimesis, originally theorised by Rene Girard (1962 cited in Buck 2017) as being responsible for increasing the desire of mentees to desist from crime, mimicking their role models, however Maruna when discussing the importance of the construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of self-stories and internal narratives in promoting rehabilitation, and analysing other mutual aid mechanisms such as Alcoholics Anonymous which has introduced millions to the 12-steps programme, argues that the premise of peer interventions is centred upon personal story-telling and as such, contains no theory and is 'far from mere mimicry' (Maruna 2001:113). Instead he counters, peer interventions are concerned only with narrating personal experience to rebuild positive internal narratives and instil hope and belief in recipients around attainable goals.

Motivation and hope are believed to be critical in the early stages of Desistance (Burnett and Maruna 2004, Lebel et al 2008) and factors which support such changes include someone believing in the individual, distance from the label of offender, and an internal narrative which identifies a more constructive, less stigmatised role (Weaver 2013:436). Congruently, Maruna also places narrative reconstruction at the root of all correctional practice (2001:113).

Despite the lack of robust empirical data on peer mentoring's efficacy in reducing re-offending, the utilisation of the lived experiences of former prisoners and people with convictions by National organisations such as the St Giles Trust and the Princes Trust shows an appetite for such individuals and their engagement skills. St Giles state that clients who participate in their mentoring programmes show recidivism rates of 40% less than the National average. In a Princes Trust report (2008 cited in Weaver 2012:2) 65% of young people interviewed said they would like mentors to help them reduce reoffending, and of those, 71% said they would prefer someone with previous convictions whom they could relate to. There is still scepticism and reticence from some

prison and probation staff, and organisations utilising volunteers in custody. In Clinks Report, Valuing Volunteers in Prison, 15% of those interviewed felt that having a criminal record was likely to affect the chance of successfully integrating into the prison to provide support, and in the service-user focus groups conducted for the report, some ex-service-users reported positive responses from staff, whilst others indicated negative reactions (Clinks 2016:24)

Employment

Desistance literature emphasises the importance of opportunity (Maruna, 2001). Reoffending is almost halved when employment is attained (Chant et al 2008), but only approximately one quarter of the 66,000 released ex-prisoners find themselves in employment two years after release (MOJ 2011, Chant 2008, CFE 2016). Despite volunteering and casual employment opportunities supporting the journey towards sustainable employment and creating the positive internal narrative and re-labelling that is so important in desistance theories, an analysis of the St Giles Trust Peer to the Future project revealed that only 3% of mentees (7 out of 143) and 8 peer advisors out of a possible 43, managed to find employment following completion of the evaluation (TSIP, 2015). Disturbing given that 68% of offenders believe that having a job is the single most important factor in reducing reoffending rates which currently stand between 46-60% (CFE 2016, Social Exclusion Unit 2002).

A recent report shines a light on some of the issues around the social sectors inability or unwillingness to value lived experience in equitable and meaningful ways. Instead people with lived experience are often viewed as 'tokenistic informants' rather than change-makers or leaders of change (Sandhu 2017:7, CJA 2019:5). There is a push to volunteer, and this is not to be negated as a worthless pastime – upskilling and confidence building are an essential part in any personal development journey; but developing leaders with lived experience is also essential if socially impactful organisations and Institutions are to remain congruent; willing to listen, act upon and employ the troubleshooting insights of those who have been through the system and emerged successfully on the other side. The opportunity to engage in generative activities such as mentoring, volunteering and employment has been shown to ameliorate the effects of a stigmatised identity, re-establish a sense of worth and a sense of citizenship (Weaver 2012:15), however the road to employment for people

with convictions is often not an easy transition; A 2010 survey by Working Links of 300 employers found that only 18% had hired someone with a criminal conviction during the previous three years, and almost three quarters admitted that a conviction disclosure would culminate in rejection of that applicant in favour of a similarly qualified candidate without convictions (Working Links, 2010, cited in CFE 2016:11). An obvious solution to this barrier is the prospect of self-employment and entrepreneurship.

Prisoner Entrepreneurship

Prisoner entrepreneurship is a relatively new phenomena in research terms, if not reality. Baumol (1990) pertains that the number of entrepreneurs in a given location remains largely static – what fluctuates is their propensity to be productive, non-productive or destructive based on opportunities to self-actualise. 79% of prisoners in the Centre for Entrepreneurs study said they would like to start their own business compared with around 40% of the general population (2016:6). Reasons for this include a naturally occurring psychometric match with characteristics displayed by entrepreneurs. In a study comparing inmates entrepreneurial aptitude with a variety of entrepreneurial and non-entrepreneurial groups, inmates scored higher than all, apart from 'fast-growth entrepreneurs' (Sonfield et al 2001) bolstering Baumol's research. A propensity to take risks and a sense of having little to lose and everything to gain which dissuades 43% of the British public, could also be cited as instrumental (CFE 2016).

Examples of user-led organisations pepper the world of social entrepreneurship, and leaders with lived expertise have been affecting change world-wide through policy, practice and research for centuries (Earle 2017, Sandhu 2017). Security and credibility concerns have dominated this movement within the field of criminal justice however, restricting the growth that mental health, social justice, community development, disability and age-based sectors have enjoyed (Sandhu 2017). The risk averse culture within Criminal Justice Institutions have meant that instances of visible leaders with lived experience have only during the last decade or so, begun to appear, with contractual opportunities rare due to a perceived inability to adhere to statutory requirements around processes and procedures or contractual issues regarding the historic convictions of staff members (Concilium 2009:63). Despite this, there are many successful and credible ex-prisoner led organisations such as Women in Prison founded by Chris Tchaikovsky, User Voice founded and led by Mark Johnson, Prosper4 by Michael

Corrigan, Email-a-Prisoner by Derek Jones, the Convict Criminology UK movement led by Rod Earle and Andreas Aresti and colleagues, and a plethora of other long-standing and emerging organisations. This study will seek to fill the gaps in modern research literature which largely focusses upon lower level peer mentoring and service user involvement of people who are still 'in' the problem and is lacking in hierarchical views and voices of leaders with lived expertise who are 'out' and creating the solution. We will ask the question, what barriers do you face in developing and delivering your service, and how can we support you?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Epistemological Position

The study was conducted with a Feminist Interpretivist stance. Ann Oakley (1981) argued that the feminist way of conducting interviews is superior to the more dominant and masculine way of conducting research which tends to incorporate elements of objectivity, detachment, hierarchy and discovering scientific knowledge without the significant help of the interviewee. This approach was unsuitable for this study given that many of the participants knew about the authors background and professional stance prior to engaging with it, aligning it organically with a feminist Interpretivist epistemology. Interpretivism, like feminist research, clashes with Positivism as it is more concerned with an empathetic understanding of Human interaction and Human behaviour, rather than statistical knowledge alone (Bryamn, 2012:28). The Feminist approach to interviewing counters the masculine by 'giving something back in return' and treating the research as a collaborative effort, (Haralambos et al, 2004), similarly to the way Insider status is utilised.

Research Aims and Question

The study aims to contribute to emerging leaders with lived experience research, lacking in hierarchical views due to a focus on lower-level service user involvement, participation and peer mentoring. It offers some insight into the tokenism of service-user involvement and the need to 'do it right', as well as the mechanism of peer mentoring and the potential of it to support leadership development. The survey sought to uncover many ex-prisoner entrepreneurs' views on the barriers they face to running projects and organisations in the CJS and support they feel would be useful moving forwards. It was however also important to explore Individuals journeys into entrepreneurship which was why interviews were utilised; to further dissect the barriers and challenges of being leaders with lived experience whilst simultaneously becoming credible in their field. We wanted to explore their commitment to generativity and asked how these leaders with lived experience feel they are utilised by mainstream prime providers, feeding into the action research element of creating a practical solution to the barriers discussed. We wanted to ask the question, what complexities do ex-

prisoners running organisations in the criminal justice system face, and how can we support them?

Methodological Approach

Methodological pluralism was adopted within this auto-ethnographic action research study to gather suitable breadth of fieldwork data, and some depth. The mixed methods used to gather data included both quantitative and qualitative data aimed at bridging the divide between the two data sets (Bryman 2012). Initial data gathering took place via an online survey, and the quantitative results gave a solid base from which to galvanise the action-research project by allowing us to register interested organisations, whilst collecting data about the challenges and obstacles participants faced. This subsequently reduced some of the limitations around generalisability apparent in other qualitative studies. Despite the utilisation of mixed methods, qualitative research was the main method for this study because of its inductive view of the relationship between theory and research, where the former is generated out of the latter. It was important to get a rich and deep understanding of the data by examining the internal narratives participants created about their perspectives, and subsequently, their external descriptions of their journeys and experiences. (Bryman, 2012: 380).

The study is also auto-ethnographic due to my 'Insider' status within the context of my unique tripartite positionality created by being an entrepreneur, ex-prisoner and researcher which afforded me a great deal of access and benefits, as well as associated risks. (Warr, 2016). Ethnography is defined as *"The study of people or groups at first-hand over a period of time, using participant observation or interviews to learn about social behaviour"* (Giddens, 2001:646). As noted in many ethnographic studies, the process of gaining trust and acceptance can be difficult, with some researchers always regarded as 'outsiders' in communities that are not their own (Goffman, 2014:245). In Convict Criminology, Earle discusses the view that ex-prisoners have another more direct source of knowledge than reading or conducting research – themselves (Earle, 2017: 116) and this was utilised throughout the research and the process of writing up findings.

Methods

A survey-monkey link was posted on social media sites LinkedIn and Twitter, to gather statistical data and expressions of Interest from leaders with convictions. Following 44 responses which produced generalisable and relatively broad, if somewhat shallow data, four participants were asked to take part in one-to-one semi-structured interviews. Despite some limitations which include lack of objectivity and generalisability, being interpretive and time-dependant (Kvale, 1983), Interviews remain one of the most familiar and popular strategies for collecting qualitative data from participants and were chosen to give depth to this study due to their ability to explore reasons, perspectives and nuances. The methodological pluralism deployed balanced the limitations of both methods of data collection.

The study is Action Research which can be defined as an 'approach in which the action-researcher and members of a community or social setting collaborate on the diagnosis of a problem and unite in the development of a practical solution or outcome', (Bryman, 2012:397). This allows us the opportunity to test hypothesis generated by the survey results and the subsequent interview analysis.

Sampling and Data Analysis Techniques

Snowball sampling was utilised due to contacts already accrued via the professional relationships formed, coupled with the suspected small-scale of the target participant group, (Haralambos, 2004:896). The data from the survey was interpreted and collated for use during interview planning. The interviews themselves were transcribed personally giving ample opportunity to examine the nuances of tone, language used, and triangulating this with the survey data. The data from the transcriptions were analysed using experiential thematic analysis which involves coding the data into emergent themes and sub-themes to identify patterns and hypothesis based on the experiences of interview participants. (Bryman, 2012)

Ethical considerations

One of the limitations of ethnographic studies is the risk of becoming an Insider, as it may encourage the researcher to lose objectivity and their researcher perspective. (Giddens, 2001, Earle, 2017. Bryman, 2012). This potential requires reflexivity to ensure consideration has been given as to how a researcher's pre-existing knowledge, emotion

and values may affect the research, and a sensitivity to their social and political location in time and social space is also important, (Bryman, 2012:393). My own reflexivity meant considering the likely reduction in objectivity, whilst still attempting to gather participants undiluted and unbiased experiences. An advantage of this positionality as a colleague and ex-prisoner meant I was able to reduce hierarchical power as the researcher and maintain a valuable engagement tool. Integrating reciprocity, both as a feminist researcher and as an insider, reduced the power differentials greatly (DiCicco-Bloom, 2006, Davies 2015).

Another ethical consideration was my ability to secure £16,000 worth of funding to conduct the research and galvanise an Action Research project to tackle the issues raised by the participants. Whilst this was a positive for my organisation, The New Leaf Initiative CIC which acted as gate-keeper for the study, it was also important to disclose to the Institution and participants prior to conducting the research, to ensure total transparency within the researcher/participant relationship.

Full ethical approval was given by the University of Warwick, see appendices 1.1, and for the participant combined information and consent form signed by all participants, see appendices 1.2.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

The survey-monkey questionnaire invited people with lived expertise of the criminal justice system who are now running their own organisations and/or projects supporting prisoners and people with convictions, to take part. Of the 44 respondents, 40 people fit the required criteria, answering yes to the question regarding their lived experience. On closer inspection of the responses however, four had only professional experience rather than relative personal experience meaning there was some confusion about the term. Lived expertise can be defined as 'Knowledge, insights, understanding and wisdom gathered through lived experience' (Sandhu, 2017). There were other unsuitable respondents within the cohort which included people who do not work in the Criminal Justice System, a foreign national and one duplication. We will therefore focus our attention on the 35 people who fit the required criteria and the further four interview participants; Steve, Sarah, James and John who are credible and successful social entrepreneurs with convictions.

Service-User Involvement:

Much service-user involvement resides at the lower end of the ladder of participation (Revolving Doors Agency, 2015), where service-users remain passive consumers with little say in how services are delivered, or who are at best, informants rather than change-makers.

James: "I was asked if I wanted to be on some service-user group, and I got quite frustrated with it because it wasn't going anywhere, it was just a talking shop about services I didn't want to be in…"

Both James and Steve talked about participating in service-user involvement, of seeing flaws and challenging services, but feeling this was viewed as either tokenistic or being disruptive.

Steve "I was trying to put structure into these places that I knew they needed […] so I was pushing against something and they weren't really interested […] I'm quite disruptive anyway, you know I've always had that kind of nature in me […] I'd see that the system weren't working, and I was against the system, I mean really I was banned from meetings…"

Tokenism is a widely reported issue with service-user involvement from both participants and facilitators, who can see it as a box-ticking exercise to keep funders at bay, used as evidence that communities are involved in decision-making processes when this is not the case. Feedback forms which are unactioned or not filled out correctly due to apathy and lack of buy-in, quarterly forums which are poorly advertised in terms of both who, what, when, where and how, but also a lack of transparency about the outcomes of such meetings, all feed into a sense of tokenism which creates inertia amongst practitioners and service-users alike (Sandhu, 2017.

James: "I've looked at organisations when they are bidding for business, they do it in such a cliched way to keep the commissioner happy – it's not meaningful, and also when it is consultation it's often service-user consultation, they forget that your perspective when you're 'in' is different to when you're 'out', so they're consulting with people who are in the system but how often do they talk to someone who has been out for 10-15 years and ask the question"

This issue of valuable reflection is very current and one of the gaps this study is seeking to fill. The lack of hierarchical views of people who have exited the system and have been successful in their attempts to rehabilitate *and* create solutions for those still trapped based on their own experiences of what doesn't work, is integral to creating a knowledge-base that decision-makers can tap into. The social and cultural resources and wisdom these leaders have, their ability to spot the gaps in service provision based on what they, and their own service-users have experienced, is invaluable. Their unique ability to engage the groups that mainstream providers say are 'hardest-to-reach' but who are in fact crying out to be heard, makes them essential during times of austerity where we must work smarter rather than harder. Many of the survey respondents are involved in delivering service-user involvement projects; utilising them could mitigate feelings of tokenism, assuming they are utilised, equitably valued and that results are suitably communicated to participants. By not meaningfully and equitably involving experts by experience at the highest levels, we risk failing to understand and grasp the issues at stake for the communities we purport to serve (Sandhu, 2017:41).

James: "I think there should be more focus on qualitative work, there should be a bigger push on lived experience".

Steve: "I think that […] more investment into leaders with lived experience".

Encouragingly some commissioners are awake to this issue. The Police and Crime Commissioners office in Birmingham has recently commissioned The New Leaf Initiative CIC, gate-keeper of this study, to create a consultative body of hierarchical knowledge and experts of the system; socially impactful change-makers who are part of the solution and who can critique strategies and fine-tune policies prior to implementation. This is a two-stage approach; firstly, service-user consultations identify the issues and generate suggestions from the community experiencing the social problem, secondly, professional consultants who are equitably valued give their time and knowledge, critiquing the final solution prior to mobilisation. The Criminal Justice Alliance, a coalition of 150 organisations have outlined a need for focus on lived experience in their 2019-2022 strategy 'Connecting for Change' and have formed an expert group from organisations such as St Giles Trust, User Voice, The New Leaf Initiative, Forward Trust and more, to provide advice, support and expertise on its work (CJA, 2019). The Prison Reform Trust has recently launched its Prisoner Policy Network (2018) which aims to ensure prisoners experiences inform prison policy nationally. The Shaw Trust, one of the 25 largest charities in the UK, is seeking to recruit a leader with lived experience onto their Board of Trustees to better serve their beneficiaries. This progression is essential if we are to deliver the best services with the least amount of money available.

The Power of Peer Interventions:

Steve: "…he ended up going to Weston and got clean and phoned me at a point in my life when I was suicidal with a gun and I wanted to kill myself […] he was like 'come down here' so he was instrumental really that he […] talked me into coming down […] so when I met up with this recovery community of people who thought like me, felt like me, similar things had happened to them […] it made sense, like bloody hell, I've been looking for these all my life…"

All interviewees had extremely positive experiences of interventions by people they could relate to. Mentoring is defined as 'having experience in a particular field and imparting this specific knowledge, acting as an advisor, counsellor, guide, tutor or teacher' (Bresser 2010), or as the Coaching and Mentoring Network state, it is where an experienced person, the mentor, is willing to share knowledge with someone less experienced in a relationship of mutual trust (Clutterbuck, 2013).

James: "… that coincided with meeting someone who had been in the same position as me… it was a short time but what he did, is really touch me, made me feel like I can do this […] I imagined spending the rest of my life in turmoil […] and he wasn't a cliché […] yeah that's the way I wanted to be…"

Sarah: "…that's another person that was an ex-offender […] he was just the best! It was a course in there on social enterprise and it was just wicked […] and I wrote my business plan in prison."

This is in-line with desistance theory which tells us that the core conditions of effective criminal justice interventions centre around principles of empathy, genuineness and the establishment of a working alliance (McNeil 2006, cited in Buck 2018). Synonymous with hope and motivation, the phenomena of peer mentoring is widely documented and sought after, despite not being empirically evidenced, by service-users and organisations alike. Gill Buck discusses mimesis as one of the motivating dynamics of peer mentoring, or the mimicry of desire as theorised by Girard (1962, cited in Buck 2016); of wanting what others want. Maruna (2001) however analyses the mechanism of Alcoholics anonymous, a world-wide peer-support programme that has supported millions away from substance misuse and finds it to be more than this. One interviewee seemed to agree when talking about what his mentor gave to him;

James: "It was a new way of believing, it was much more than thinking, it was me realising that […] there's a reason you got here, the world isn't completely fair, but you have a way out."

These beliefs which interviewees spoke of, seemed to stem from meeting someone who was firstly a relatable role model, but who also made their end goal *attainable.* Attainability has not been explored as a main motivating dynamic of peer interventions, but this study seeks to place it at the forefront of instilling hope in those we support. Role models are powerful, but when relatable they help us to believe something that was previously impossible, is possible, perhaps for the first time. The desire can already exist, but the saying that 'everything is impossible, until it is done' rings true with relatable role models. The belief that 'if it's possible for her, then it is possible for me' can be credited as a catalyst for every step in the identification, or progression towards a goal. Often it doesn't need to be part of a long process, sometimes a chance meeting can create the energy from which life-changing decisions spring from.

James: "I'll never forget […] the way that I felt touched that day by just such a simple thing, that if I've got an army of people who can touch people like that, then the world will change in a good way. In the nicest way you could ever change."

Peer support and mentoring was viewed as important by the survey respondents and the interviewees in their reflections about journeys into leadership.

Steve: "I'd like to be able to reach out and help people who are passionate, and entrepreneurial, wanna make a difference in their community but haven't got the resources about them, and I just think that I can help him set up and talk to him and mentor him".

Peer mentoring is valuable for the recipient, but it is also important for the mentor, especially given the lack of equitable opportunities available and additional employment barriers post-release.

Employment:

Sarah runs a construction and property clearance company and has done for the past four years. Last year her company turned over £300,000 and she employs ten people permanently, many with convictions.

Sarah: "I tried to get a job when I come out, but no-one would have me. Bearing in mind, I've got a foundation degree in community health studies, community health and social care, a BA honours in health and social care…"

Employment has obvious benefits for prisoners and the criminal justice system. Once in employment, prisoners are almost half as likely to reoffend. Despite these encouraging statistics, and as seen above, it is easier said than done with only 36% of prison leavers saying that they had been in any type of employment within two years (CFE, 2016). The reasons for this include stigma, high demand for jobs including from those without convictions, a benefits system that historically penalised work for the most disadvantaged, and sometimes a lack of experience or necessary skills and motivation to succeed.

Sarah: "He was shocking, he was a lifer, he'd done just under twelve years. Put him in a job, he brought his friend to work with him, unprofessional. Took hm to another job and he kicked off because the staff wouldn't bring him home".

We should further explore mechanisms for allowing people to gain skills and experience in work environments whereby they can make mistakes without these being detrimental to the employer or employee, but rather, absorbed by people and institutions who understand that desistance is a process of personal development and who can support this.

Recently, there has been a huge drive to increase opportunities for those in and leaving custody with the implementation of the New Futures Network (HMGov, 2019). This is a positive move, but as we see above, people must be given the support to become employable or we risk damaging the credibility of employing those with convictions. This reveals another concern relating to risk and the employment of this group; many in the sector resent the fact that employers are being called upon to employ people with convictions, yet the system itself creates filtering processes to eject such candidates at the earliest opportunity. Even large third sector organisations can be guilty of employing middle-class white people with degrees instead of having a diverse mix of employees that represent the communities they are supporting.

James: "I think then there has to be more scrutiny […] there has to be more of a focus around rehabilitation in the truest sense of the word. Don't go around telling Tesco's that they should be employing ex-offenders if you don't do it yourself!"

The Spirit of Prisoner Entrepreneurs:

Because they understand the difficulty of finding employment, entrepreneurs with convictions are more likely to recruit others with convictions; of the four businesses interviewed, at least 60 jobs were available for those with prior convictions, providing a socially impactful basis for propagating such initiatives. When asked to discuss why they felt they had become entrepreneurs, participants revealed their internal drivers.

John: "I think the entrepreneurial part of me was always there, I enjoy business, I enjoy building something […] so self-employment is the only thing I really feel I can do based on just how I feel I'm wired"

The data further evidences Baumols theory of entrepreneurialism which suggested that the number of entrepreneurs in a given society is constant, but what fluctuates is the opportunity to focus this in a productive, non-productive or destructive way. He blames incentive structures and Institutions for this lack of opportunity and identified some key

characteristics exhibited by prisoners such as a need for autonomy and a willingness to disregard conventions, also associated with entrepreneurship (Baumol, 1990). Interview participants always had the entrepreneurial spirit, but it came out sideways rather than in a focussed, generative way.

Sarah: "I was always going to set my own business up. My Mom's got her own business, my Sister, my Dad, my grandad, its normal […] My crime was me being entrepreneurial, because I was brought up thinking it was a crime to be poor…"

A 2002 study conducted by Robert Fairlie (1999, cited in CFE, 2016:10) established a statistical link between being a young drug dealer and setting up one's own business in later life, not attributable to any other known factors. If the theory holds true then it should be public policy to ensure that those who exhibit such traits are given opportunity to refocus their efforts in a productive way (CFE, 2016:10).

Steve: "I've always been quite entrepreneurial in the wrong way, and I can't seem to sit still for a minute…"

Participants also discussed the loneliness of being entrepreneurs and the difficulties they had faced and how they had overcome feelings of despair, usually through meeting peers they could again, relate to. This aligned with the survey results where respondents requested peer support, networking and best practice platforms.

Steve: "I suppose meeting other social entrepreneurs […] it's just kind of been a revelation that they've suffered the same thing, and it's like 'thank god it's not just me! […] because it's been a lonely journey really, where I've only had limited information from people, even setting up policies, procedures, processes […] so that peer support would be yeah, yeah, yeah…"

The Virtuous Cycle of Generativity:

The generative phenomenon is well documented in certain sectors such as mental health and substance misuse; the willingness and drive to use one's own experiences to encourage others is a common one, however in the world of criminal justice, this hunger for generativity can be viewed as insincere or 'risky'. Despite this, and due to the increasing utilisation of lived experience in engaging those who struggle with recidivism and complex issues, a delinquent history can be reworked into a source of wisdom in a mechanism of mutual aid such as peer advisor, mentor and the less well-researched

social entrepreneur with convictions. As Maruna explores, generativity is a product of both inner drives and social demands which is particularly complex for former prisoners who face external stigma and internalised shame which can sometimes lead to further reoffending (2001:118). As discussed previously, desistance theory outlines the importance of reconstructing a positive internal narrative that creates distance between the person and the term 'offender'; this can be created by creating a new role and label for oneself that is grounded in existential meaning and fulfilment in helping others.

John: "…going to prison also helped me really work out what's important in life, you could have all the money in the world, but if you've not made the world a better place, your existence is pointless".

Steve: "you know true happiness is when I'm giving something of myself and helping somebody else, that's when I feel really connected to the world".

Generative actions, according to Maruna, seem to address many of the issues faced by ex-prisoners. They provide an alternative source of existential meaning and achievement, they somewhat relieve a sense of guilt and shame caused by historic actions; they create a legitimate role for themselves in supporting others to desist, and they act as a therapeutic intervention, reinforcing the need to stay 'straight' (2001:118). In the interviews conducted with the successful entrepreneurs, many of these reasons became redundant. Many had successful careers prior to becoming social entrepreneurs, many of them had years of desistance time under their belt and had relinquished much of their shame through their resettlement into the community and normal civic life. The generative aspects were viewed much more as an inability to turn one's back out of responsibility to those who remained trapped. This sense of *responsibility* is therefore another element of generativity previously unexplored.

James: "There was that immediate question, do you want to make some money and just leave to never come back again and turn your back on all the stuff that made you unhappy in the first place? But the driving force was […] I wanted to help other people because I knew there were lots of people like me who didn't belong there but just didn't know how to get out, and I felt like I had a sense of responsibility to go out and find people like me."

Innovation vs Assimilation:

A multiple-choice survey question around service-delivery revealed a rich variety of services being offered by respondents with the top five including education, training and employment (ETE), mentoring, Information, advice and guidance, motivational work with prisoners and people with convictions and service user involvement.

During Interviews, participants revealed why they had set up their services which included a lack of credibility of existing services. Steve's last sentence ended 16 years ago. His company turned over £1.2 million last year, and he almost exclusively employs people with lived experience who offer substance misuse support.

Steve "Well, I'd been in and out of the Criminal Justice System, and in and out of addiction since I was thirteen […] and I never really got into any kind of treatment services […] I'd just kind of get locked up and come out and do the same thing again and I didn't know of any service that attracted me or would work for me […] I just created a service for me basically, when it weren't there."

James specialises in educational course delivery and his organisation turned over £1.6 million last year. He also spoke about assimilation into a system he blamed for years of extended criminality and drug use, having had 103 previous convictions and serving 15 sentences, his last one ending 15 years ago.

James: "I see that system as the reason I was in there for 20 years, so you can't change something by being the same as it […] to compromise your values and change just to work in the system, you'll end up looking more like the system than you will yourself and I don't want to be that […] by using that valued subject knowledge expertise we can change the system, nothing will ever be perfect but we can always make it better..."

When asked what makes their organisations different from other providers, participants gave some interesting answers.

James: I think we're different from a lot of organisations in that we don't see people as victims with, who are powerless, who have no skills, we see them as highly skilled, but sometimes those skill-sets get them in trouble […] we challenge labels and we challenge over-medicalisation and I think that's what really puts us right on the edge of innovation there, because to me those are things that instil further hopelessness".

Issues and Barriers

When asked about the issues or barriers organisations are currently facing, the most frequent survey responses included funding, security clearance issues and collaborations.

Security:

Sarah: "I can't go for a police contract, because I'm an ex-offender, I've gone for a few, but no..."

Working in Criminal Justice with criminal convictions is complex due to issues of security and risk management. Security vetting for people with historic convictions differs from those without and is called Standard Plus Vetting as described within Prison Service Instruction (PSI) 27/2014 which was reviewed in 2014 and which expired in 2018. It allows for people refused clearance from NOMS due to convictions to reapply and be granted access to an establishment by a Governor or CRC manager signing off on the 'risk', albeit for a period of no longer than 12 months before a review is deemed necessary (NOMS 2014, Unlock 2019). As described, the process is laborious, and must be undertaken for each establishment the person wishes to work in which can feel unnecessarily punitive given the length of time someone may have desisted for. This coupled with the work they wish to do supporting the nine pathways to reducing reoffending and the consequential thinking from their own imprisonment raise the question, how could HMPPS better support entrepreneurs and employees with convictions to do the work they are called to do as discussed above.

James: "...you know I get you have to have boundaries and all that stuff, but you still have to have some emotional attachment to the idea that people do get better, and they do leave and get on with their lives. If you don't believe in that, then you shouldn't come anywhere near this system..."

Despite this concern it is acknowledged that there are people who get rearrested upon release, or who work tirelessly to infiltrate organisations using any means possible to get drugs back into the prisons to make money, making the perceived risk more feasible. A colleague was recently shocked when the van he was taking into the prison was found to have a plethora of mobile phones and other contraband inside, raising the need for an investigation. Despite this, his organisation continues to work with the prison and

prisoners as it was a worker of his that was guilty of the crime. This is one instance of known corruption within an ex-prisoner led organisation, but corruption also exists amongst prison staff. A special anti-corruption task force has recently been deployed by the Justice Secretary David Gauke (MOJ, 2019) to find these officers and stop them from profiting illegally from the prison estate. The sad fact is that corruption exists and we should make efforts to protect both the hard-working staff and vulnerable prisoners, but to what degree should we penalise people and organisations who utilise their lived experiences to engage those furthest away from desistance with unnecessarily laborious and punitive processes and procedures?

John: "It can be the death of an organisation as it's so slow, waiting for prison clearance, a prison wants to commission you, but you have to wait three months for someone on license or off license to be cleared to work there, that could be quite damaging to an organisation".

A freedom of information act might be useful to see if there is any additional risk to security in relation to social entrepreneurs who have previous convictions or whether this is a perceived risk only.

James: "The probation and prison service would not operate without the idea of rehabilitation, but don't practise it themselves. I've got tutors who have come out of the criminal justice system and I'm constantly going onto boards to ask if my tutors can work in establishments […] and the inconsistency is staggering. We're an organisation 13 years old that has a good reputation, you should expect that we have all the safeguarding processes and policies in place, but yet you're going to cause 3-6 months block on every single tutor, despite the fact we DBS them? And the DBS itself doesn't tell you what to do, it doesn't say 'don't employ the person', it's so subjective it encourages more subjectivity 'cos there is no clear guidance, you could get in one prison and not the other".

Funding:

"Not enough time or money to meet demands" Qualitative response in the survey data

The funding crisis and subsequent landscape of the social sector makes it increasingly challenging for organisations to do anything outside of operating for survival. Funding issues were the number one issues facing our survey respondents with 29 people stating

it as their top barrier. Survival means ultimately operating in self-interest rather than being able to focus on the needs of the community we are supporting, potentially creating a dip in quality of service provision (Sandhu, 2017). Many organisations are reliant on grants, especially early on whilst proving their efficacy and piloting projects or ideas.

Steve: "I suppose most people would say funding […] but because we aren't funded by one person, or we're not funded by one local authority we've got diverse revenue streams, so we're not dependant on any of it"

These diverse revenue streams include contracts and collaborations with Prime providers, but organisations are often having to subsidise projects when sub-contracting due to a lack of full-cost recovery from commissioners (Clinks, 2018).

Collaborations:

Some of the interview participants voiced concerns over how they were utilised by prime providers and commissioners, also mentioned in the survey data.

"Taken advantage of by big organisations expecting something for nothing and using us as bid-candy without actually using us". Qualitative survey response.

John: "I don't think the CJS sector utilises the VCSE sector correctly, and I think contracts tend to go out to massive providers and the voluntary sector is kind of just taken for granted…"

James: "I feel like we're being used for outputs and not outcomes. I think sometimes we're too ambitious, not for the ex-prisoner, service-users, the human being […] but often for the services".

The focus on processes rather than people was mentioned many times, typical of the criticisms facing current practice. Research literature identifies a need to move away from this, instead calling for a renewed focus on relationships, co-production, restructuring positive internal narratives and building of social capital:
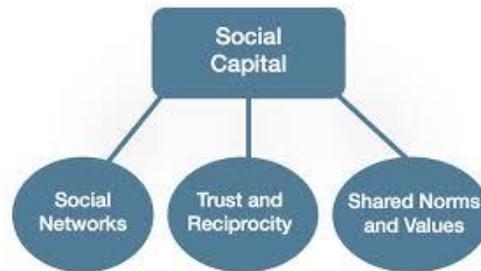
This relational and values-based approach is a far-cry from the transactional managerialist style typical of the criminal justice system and its prime providers, evidenced via a prioritisation of beurocratic processes and reactive targets. This can stifle the flow of innovation during the process of collaborating with smaller services as larger organisation attempt to improve their culture, practice and engagement of communities. The transformational leadership styles of many of the charismatic, proactive smaller organisations sometimes leads to personal and professional clashes caused by mounting frustrations. These collaborations are often viewed as low-level manipulation from both sides rather than utilising each parties' best attributes:

James: "their success is that they've completed one part of the process, and we're often used to complete them. We ignore that and continue regardless, they can have their process, we'll get our message across […] I didn't come in here for KPI's (laughs) I came here to free people, not keep them locked in!"

On hypothesizing why external organisations such as the voluntary sector are not better utilised by criminal Justice commissioners, John made a valid point:

John: "I think it's liquidity of resource if anything, they probably accept quality from the voluntary sector is better […] but I think the genuine motive is 'we've got a budget to spend, let's spend it on our existing staff'…"

Just as the desistance process extends beyond the criminal justice system, so should collaborative resettlement and desistance approaches extend beyond the practices and proclivities of the justice sector (Weaver, 2012:11). There is a way to work together and this is being achieved in certain areas with certain prime providers and commissioners such as the Shaw Trust who are recruiting leaders with lived expertise for their Board of Trustees, or the PCC in Birmingham who is about to tender for local grass-roots and community-led groups and consortia to deliver interventions rather than the prime providers who seem to get the contracts, but perhaps not always the results.

James: "I remember the best commissioners I ever spoke to, would talk to you, would ask you, would spend time with you […] were always seen as revolutionary in the way they work, they had the best outcomes".

Currently, contracts can be very prescriptive in terms of geography and outputs, constraining the vision of engagement specialists with lived expertise who value informal approaches to achieve outcomes rather than beurocratic processes, procedures and key performance indicators.

John: "I would like the voluntary sector to be commissioned on results not on a prescriptive input, so I don't want the commissioners to be looking at our organisation and to say we want you to intervene in the X, Y Z following ways, instead tell us what you want not what you want us to do".

Collaborations amongst the third sector are rare, potentially due to the competitive commissioning and grant-making landscape. This is however changing, with some commissioners favouring local consortiums of grass-roots organisations over larger prime providers. One such initiative is the Police and Crime Commissioner in Birmingham who is tendering for a local consortium to deliver criminal justice interventions in the City. Another is the National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF, 2019) who fund cross-sector, locally based and local and National partnerships through their Partnerships programme. This consortium/partnership approach is integral to encourage partnerships between smaller organisations who can then challenge the monopolisation of prime providers whilst creating more credibility and sustainability around their combined services.

Disclosure and Credibility:

Disclosing our background and histories in the form of storytelling allows us to engage the hardest to reach in powerful ways, acting as a valuable tool to break down stereotypes and change mindsets (Davies, 2015). Sometimes this transparency and story-telling makes us more credible and authentic and can be energising to those who feel they no longer have anything to hide

Steve: "I feel I have a responsibility to share that. I appreciate that I'm lucky, I lead my own organisation, there's no-one that's gonna hear anything about me that's gonna change what I do, there's nothing out there […] that anyone's got over me, and I feel all

liberated with that, where you know I've come from a life of shame, guilt and abuse, and violence and all that sort of stuff, and you don't talk to no-one about it, everything's a secret, whereas I live my life now completely transparent".

Others felt pressurised, either internally or externally and viewed their histories as information they had little control over, especially when discussing the media or third parties and the way they often disclose without consideration.

John: "I have this feeling that I need to be overly honest a lot of the time, and we see a lot of our candidates that have that, so that people don't think I've lied to them in some way if they go away and google me,"

Sarah: The council didn't (know) at first […] Paul from UnLtd, he's gone […] 'You do know Sarah's an ex-offender, don't you?'

When asked about whether she shares with service users or anybody about her lived experience, Sarah vehemently rejected the idea.

Sarah: I just never do it! I don't know why […] I think I'm embarrassed to a certain degree. If anyone ever brought it up, I'd be offended, what's it got to do with anything I'm doing? Unless it's going to enlighten, unless it's going to prison and I can say this is what I did, this is how you can change..."

James spoke with emotionality about the stigma and judgements telling his unique story can trigger.

James: "So I am open with it, for the right group of people for the right reasons, and I'm very clear about what those reasons are – I won't just be used to become another cliché […] I can say look I've worked for the DWP, I've worked for the NHS I've done all that and now I'm a Director and they're like oh yes, and then I say, 'but when I was 15 I was homeless sleeping in a bin-shed'. Some people say 'what you've done that? How did you get from there to here'? and others who go 'jumped up service-user then'. It really, really frustrates me, because I think it's about the distance travelled. That's why I say I'm selective about who I tell, because to me, that's a personal thing sleeping in a bin shed […] I remember the cold. I remember the smell. I remember the indignity. So when […] someone looks down on me I'm really offended by it. Its more than just a story […] so that's why I use it very sparingly, because it can be very tiring on your emotions."

This sense of willingness to 'use their story' to engage the people who need to hear it most – people who need hope, belief and motivation, the key factors believed to bring about change (Weaver, 2013:436), was apparent in three out of the four interviews. However, in all but one of the interviews, there was also a huge sense of vulnerability around a need to protect their story in relation to different groups who may try to 'use their story' against them, in a judgemental or voyeuristic way. In this sense, disclosure can limit leaders with lived experience, reducing us to our stories and preventing us from becoming credible change-makers by leading people to believe we are unsuited or unable to rise to the challenge of leadership roles (Sandhu, 2017:79).

"Being judged and not always taken seriously {…} not being recognised as a leader".
Qualitative survey response.

Many people are concerned that skills and expertise tend to be prioritised over lived experience and ability. This brings judgements about the way people present themselves, the language used and the gravitas this brings (Sandhu, 2017:72).

Sarah: "Organisation is a weak point for me. I'm very nice, I don't want to upset anyone, but you see if I get pissed off […] it's like a volcano; so it's people skills too, they're not the best."

Steve: "…because I was still early on in my recovery, and I'd come from the streets so like, I had no professional training, the way I used to talk even, there was probably no credibility […] I was mixed between my old world and this new kind of world, and I wanted to be in the new one, but I didn't know how to act in it, so you know that would have held me back a little bit as well…"

This concept wasn't rejected for its unfairness but rather accepted by interviewees who had felt driven to develop and professionalise themselves to become who they were meant to be. Professional development was viewed as an important and ongoing process by the respondents. They had all engaged in volunteering, work and running other businesses, accredited courses and college and university qualifications along their journey away from Prison and into the world of social entrepreneurship. This was a busy and productive time for them as they sought to play catch up on time lost. It was viewed positively and with fondness and most importantly, it was deemed a necessary part of 'the journey' in becoming leaders and developing themselves.

Steve: "I started my own business, plumbing […] so that was paying for my living, and then I was volunteering, because I wanted to help people; then I'm finishing work and volunteering and doing night-shifts […] sitting down with people, sponsoring people, I mean it was just manic! I've done a lot of development around social enterprise and around leadership as well."

James: "I wanted to educate myself, and start getting some skills and catching up on things like using a computer and all the basic stuff I couldn't do before. I started doing some volunteering, getting a few training packages, I worked for a couple of voluntary charities, and for the NHS, I was also studying at the time doing psychology, sociology, biology, maths, English, computers; I just went mad to get as much information and knowledge and certificates as I could. I knew I'd wasted a long time…"

Credibility for those transitioning from service-user to work as professionals is something that people are expected to work hard to achieve, maybe even more-so when being employed by a leader with lived experience. Whilst there was a preference to employ others with lived experience, our interviewees were vocal about the fact that this decision is always based on skills rather than being a guarantee and that processes exist to protect and serve vulnerable service-users.

Steve: "…the reality is, a load of people should be nowhere near a vulnerable adult, a lot of people come into this stuff and think 'oooh, i wanna do that', and it's like nah, there's like a vetting process with us, and people have to go through the training and volunteering and there's a lot of supervision".

Useful Support:

In relation to what a supportive network could and should offer, survey respondents had a variety of suggestions which included networking, employment opportunities for service-users, raising business profile, bid-writing support, accredited qualifications, consortium partnerships, sustainability and business and peer mentoring, directly mirroring the solutions voiced by interview participants and outlined throughout this study.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In conclusion to the research question, what barriers do ex-prisoner entrepreneurs face and how can we help them to overcome these, discussing gaps in current research, we reflect upon the responses and literature. Service-user involvement is often seen as tokenistic and inauthentic, treating participants as informants in a bid to keep commissioners and grant-makers happy, rather than as change-makers. By utilising service-users at multiple levels, those in the problem and those now living in the solution, commissioners can create viable programmes of support for the communities they serve. To do this, there needs to be a renewed focus on qualitative research and data, and more investment into developing consultative bodies of hierarchical views and voices, and valuing said voices in an equitable and meaningful way; through governance, employment and contractual opportunities. Conversely, peer mentoring and other peer interventions are not seen as tokenistic, rather they are viewed as powerful and meaningful mechanisms through which to support the desistance and change-process. Focussed on belief, hope and motivation, there are still gaps in the research surrounding theoretical underpinnings and the specific dynamics attributable to making peer mentoring so effective and this study sought to explore attainability as a motivating dynamic within these relationships. Respondents to the survey voiced a need for leadership and business mentoring, and encouragingly, interview participants are motivated to support and give back to those at the start of their leadership journeys. More investment would enable this to become a reality, and mechanisms such as on-line forums and peer support platforms need to be explored in more detail as part of the ongoing action-research project.

Employment is a necessary, yet unrealistic goal for many due to employers preferring to give opportunities to those without convictions. There is growing resentment towards statutory and third sector agencies who encourage mainstream employers to take on people with convictions and yet do not themselves; filtering them via processes. We need to decide whether we believe in true rehabilitation and true redemption and if so, scrutinise these institutions and insist that they practice what they preach, giving equitable employment opportunities to people with convictions. For those who wish to explore self-employment, theories behind Prisoner entrepreneurship show that many prisoners exhibit characteristics which are likely to make them successful entrepreneurs. Policy makers need to assist in creating self-employment and business ownership

opportunities to motivate them economically away from crime and towards pro-social behaviours.

Generativity, viewed within this study as the driving force behind why social entrepreneurs with convictions do what they do, is again, lacking in hierarchical views which this study sought to remedy. These hierarchical views are valuable as they place renewed importance on a sense of responsibility to those still trapped in the system. This internal sense of duty, and the social need for new and innovative services coupled with a natural propensity to run our own services or businesses should be expanded upon and utilised by commissioners concerned with quality delivery.

As discussed above, the lack of credible services are inspiring leaders with lived expertise and professional skills to emerge. In a drive to do better than is being done, they exhibit different values, different leadership styles, and have different drivers which give them a formidable energy. Their ability to engage the hardest-to-reach whilst changing labels and language into a more positive and person-centred sphere is triggering commissioners and funders to move away from old frameworks of commissioning, thereby tackling one of the biggest issues our leaders face; funding. The second largest challenge identified by the survey results was security issues. Laborious and outdated processes which delay and further punish those wishing to give back to the system must be scrutinised and adapted to encourage user-led interventions as desistance theory suggests. An FOI request about actual vs perceived risk would be welcomed, but as the (PSI) 27/2014 has now expired, we would begin by urging the MOJ and HMPPS to reconsider their vetting processes for people with convictions now working as professionals, especially those who have a proven track record and key clearance in other establishments, so that additional support can flow to those who need it most; staff and prisoners.

Funding and collaboration issues included being taken advantage of by large prime providers who promote rigid processes, using organisations for outputs within reactive targets and absorbing them within benign procedures that are done 'onto' people, rather than creating collaborative programmes which are person centred, values-based and outcome focussed. Yet in the same way the criminal Justice system needs to work smarter, rather than harder, as do the third sector and smaller organisations. By collaborating effectively together, forming consortiums and partnerships, we can utilise each-others best attributes and challenge the monopolisation of the sector by larger

primes, capitalising on the changing funding and commissioning landscape which looks as if it is beginning to favour such movements. This should be expanded upon nationally and evaluated to prove efficacy and is another starting point for the action-research element of this study.

Disclosure and storytelling have a positive impact on service users and some commissioners and corporates, but in the wrong hands, leaders with lived expertise can be left feeling judged, stigmatised, vulnerable and emotional. Storytelling is part of what we do, and potentially the magic ingredient at the root of peer interventions which engages the hardest-to-reach and allows them to see what is attainable for them too; but nobody owns our story apart from us. The need to develop resilience and the capacity to know when to share and when not to, is integral to being viewed as a credible and capable leader. Each of the identified solutions voiced throughout this study will mobilise a new wave of hierarchical knowledge, support and leadership that will challenge and stretch existing services, creating better quality provision throughout the social sector, centred around service-user needs.

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