

New Leaf Initiative's Peer-Led Departure Lounge

“To try and make today
better than yesterday”

**A review of its
early months.**



About Us

The New Leaf Initiative CIC was founded in November 2014 as Prison to Employment specialists.

We provide intensive resettlement support to serving prisoners, people with convictions and those at risk of offending, helping them to move closer to the labour market whilst supporting a variety of other issues they may face in a holistic and person-centred way. This provision of genuine through-the-gate resettlement support from our resettlement workers, who offer unique mentoring support due to the fact that they have themselves experienced the criminal justice system and emerged the other side, support people to access training and other opportunities leading to employment and relevant holistic support which really does work in supporting people to desist from crime.

The New Leaf Initiative CIC have supported over 1200 prisoners and people with convictions in the following ways;

Education & Training

We deliver vocational training in-house and via training and employer partners, both in custody and out in the community. These have included:

- Construction training for clients to achieve Level 1 Health & Safety in a Construction Environment and obtain a 5-year CSCS card.
- Traineeships for 19-24-year-olds – providing a guaranteed job interview and work experience, alongside work preparatory and functional skills training
- Employability skills levels 1 and 2
- Award in Education and Training level 3 (PTLLS)
- Our very own 'Working it Out' course created to change mindsets, increase motivation and including occupational studies, rated as 97-100% positive by the community

Community Engagement & Mentoring

We provide holistic and person-centred support to people who wish to improve and change their lives, working closely to build relationships with those accessing our services, including:

- Benefits Applications
- Clothing and Food parcels
- Drug and Substance Treatment Referrals
- Family Support
- Housing & Accommodation referrals and support
- Photographic ID
- Mental Health Referrals
- CV Creation and work placements to build skills and confidence



Recruitment & Employer Engagement

New Leaf supports individuals to develop the skills and experience needed to secure employment. This includes developing employability skills, qualifications and gaining practical experience.

New Leaf has successfully partnered with organisations including:

- Avanti West Coast/Virgin Trains
- RMF Construction and the WMCA
- Amey
- Engie
- McCoys Contractors



Many of these have employed our candidates successfully, and we are continually looking for new employers to partner with and support.

Consultations, Research & Policy

New Leaf was born out of consultation with over 400 people who were serving sentences in the community. Our aim is to hear, value and amplify the voices of communities in custody and beyond.

This includes a focus on topics such as bullying issues, as well as creating a "Leaders with Lived Experience" forum around prison education. More recently we have conducted early days in custody inspections within the female estate to reduce self harm and suicide, as well as holding a roundtable event focussed on Prisoner Apprenticeships progression. We regularly feed into national consultations with our findings to positively shape policy and practise.

Keynote Talks and Motivational Sessions

We have delivered sessions in schools and in approximately 28 prisons nationally with 94% of prisoners giving positive feedback, evaluated by the National Careers Service in three geographical locations around the UK. The courses and sessions Inspire people, reducing stigmatisation and reoffending, encouraging prisoners and others to engage with services and education in custody and beyond, and invest in their futures, preparing them for release into the community.

The New Leaf Network

The New Leaf Network was created through collaboration between individuals and organisations with lived experience of the Criminal Justice System, with network members sharing their vision to support both returning citizens and organisations following release from prison.

"People with lived experience of the CJS unifying and supporting others to develop, personally and professionally"

In 2020 the New Leaf Network launched the first annual Leaders with Lived Experience (LLEx) CJS Conference and Awards ceremony for people with lived experience, specifically recognising outstanding individuals and organisations, alongside allies in the sector. Our 2021 conference and awards ceremony will be held this December.

If you would like to discuss any of our services or interventions, please get in touch and we'll be happy to support you.

Executive Summary - Introduction to the review

EP:IC were asked to conduct an independent review of New Leaf's emerging peer-led Departure Lounge, which exists to support returning citizens from HMP Birmingham back into the community. It is well understood that reoffending rates are uncomfortably high, especially for those serving short sentences (as is fairly common at HMP Birmingham). This initiative aims to support prison leavers in their early days in the community, across a range of needs, in an effort to 'break the cycle'.

"I needed help with absolutely everything, getting help with benefits, accommodation and being able to go and collect my key, anxiety and mental health, sorting out rehab"

Departure Lounge client

The Departure Lounge started in October 2020, having been delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic and has just been recommissioned for the next two years. New Leaf were keen to understand how the service was performing and what could be done to improve it further.

EP:IC undertook the review by speaking with staff at New Leaf, prison leavers who had been supported by the Departure Lounge and key stakeholders. We also worked with available New Leaf data including all the client notes taken from the start of the project.

Achievements and successes

- Between October 2020 and June 2021, the Departure Lounge engaged 155 men at the gate, 108 of these men registered with New Leaf to receive further support and 61 have gone on to access this support.
- The amount of support varied considerably between clients, but if needed, almost daily contact was made with service users to 'check in' that everything is ok. We found this provided people with well needed reassurances.
- New Leaf put extensive effort into contacting clients when they didn't answer. 80% of clients were contacted multiple times over the same issue following a non-response. Families and probation officers were also contacted to ensure support was given to as many as possible.
- The fact New Leaf was run and delivered by people with lived experience of the CJS was described as encouraging trust and inspiring change for prison leavers.

"I'd rather listen to someone who'd been through it and been in the same predicament in their past and knows exactly where I'm coming from."

Departure Lounge client

- The following outlines the support we saw evidenced through client notes
 - 64% of clients had a reference to a wellbeing check
 - 30% received some support in training and employment
 - 10 clients have been supported into active and ongoing employment
 - 24% of clients received basic provisions such as food parcels or access to clothing
 - New Leaf partnered with other local organisations to create opportunities for this support
 - 12% received support in their Housing / Accommodation, for example looking for available housing
 - 10% were supported to access substance misuse support such as referrals to services
 - 9% had support for acquiring ID such e.g. applying for citizenship card
 - 6% were supported in understanding benefits.

Barriers

The Departure Lounge was commissioned in 2019, but faced enormous challenges in terms of activating a service during a global pandemic. Working inside the prison has been impossible, as has recruiting prisoner reps to aid those who are nearing release. The Visitor Centre was utilised for a while, as was a local café, but both have been closed at various points in the pandemic. The Departure Lounge has continued however, running largely from the street, which was never the plan, and led to some questions about risk, and also about how clients wanted to be supported.

Another significant challenge has been the delay to a 'data sharing agreement' which would mean the prison and New Leaf can work much more collaboratively. This has meant Departure Lounge staff have not known who is leaving the prison and have not been able to prepare for this in the way they would like to. This has now been remedied and we understand there will be substantially more information flowing between departments, important for both support planning, the non-duplication of work and also for risk-management.

The lack of physical presence in the prison has meant word has not got around about the Departure Lounge as much as they might have hoped. Some probation officers have been very keen to work alongside New Leaf, others less so. This joined up approach would prove to be helpful for all involved. The newness of the service means that recording processes are still also new. As such, there were a few gaps in our understanding. New Leaf have a new case management system in place which will be capturing even more data which will continue to build a picture of how the service works, who benefits from it and how this works.

Recommendations

EP:IC made several recommendations to New Leaf.

- To build on learnings from the review in the ongoing development of the Case Management System, in terms of what would be useful to collect and analyse for ongoing monitoring purposes
- Opening up conversations about New Leaf's lone worker and safeguarding policies with the wider resettlement community so they can discuss / understand the New Leaf approach better.
- Now the data sharing agreement is in place, it would be prudent to work with resettlement services to outline roles and methods of collaborative practice to avoid duplication. Partnership working is key to success.
- Build awareness for those working and living in HMP Birmingham, although we were advised new materials have been developed, as well as a freephone number added to the list of numbers prisoners can call from the prison.
- Seek more networking opportunities with others running Departure Lounges across the country to share good practice.

There is no doubt the Departure Lounge has achieved a lot given the constraints faced. Its clients feel supported and guided, and importantly demonstrate some hope for the future. We close this summary with one of their quotes about the reason they work with the Departure Lounge.

“To try and make today better than yesterday”

Learn more about the New Leaf Initiative's Departure Lounge

Website: www.newleafcic.org

Email: admin@newleafcic.org

Freephone: 0300 102 3456

Post: 9 Allcock Street, Digbeth, B9 4DY

Twitter: [Marie-Claire@NewLeaf](https://twitter.com/Marie-Claire@NewLeaf)

Achievements and successes	Barriers	Solutions moving forwards
UK's first peer-led Departure Lounge	Global pandemic meant that there were no premises to work from for the majority of the first contract. Resettlement support workers stood outside the gates in all weather	Eased restrictions means that New Leaf staff can use visits centre and cafe once it reopens to better engage the men leaving custody.
Engaged 155 men at the gate, 108 of these men registered with New Leaf to receive further support with 91 separate outcomes achieved	Most clients the evaluators spoke to were unaware of the Peer support worker waiting for them outside the gate creating a cold calling vibe during gate-fever	Pre-release contact with the men will improve the engagement rates.
30% received some support with training and education with four clients accessing our CSCS training in the community.	Lack of ISA with probation meant that prisoners leaving custody were unaware of the service	Probation and Prison to support pre -release contact via the Freephone number and/or prison worker signposting men on release
9 clients supported into employment and 24% of clients received basic provisions such as food parcels or access to clothing	Concerns about risk management and lack of cohesion between through-the-gate services	ISA with NPS will reduce these issues and improve cohesion and partnership working
New Leaf signposted to 33 other local community organisations to provide specialist support	Complex nature of clients, lack of phones on release, and 60% reoffending rates of short -sentenced prisoners meant that it was difficult to maintain contact post release	Utilising the Freephone number pre -release will reduce surprise and rush at the gate and allow for preparation for release date
12% received support with Housing / Accommodation, 6% were supported in applying for benefits.	80% of clients were contacted multiple times over the same issue following a non-response. Probation COM's contacted with varying degrees of success	Probation reunification and improved processes around the 0/Lounge will improve information sharing and communication
10% were supported to access substance misuse support such as referrals to services	Service users telling us they had not received support such as prescriptions, onward travel warrants, information, etc	Information sharing will increase cohesion and communication between resettlement services
9% had support for acquiring ID from us	ID needed for this process, takes time for application	Prison ID photocards could be used.
Freephone resettlement support line set up	Prisoners are unaware of the number and service	New advertising has been produced
Clothing bank set up in reception in partnership with Mubarak Trust and CRC		

1	Introduction to this report	06
2	Our approach	06
3	Brief overview of the New Leaf Initiative	07
4	Why a Departure Lounge at HMP Birmingham?	08
5	Lessons from other Departure Lounges in use across the country	09
6	New Leaf's Departure Lounge	11
7	Who has accessed support?	13
8	The perception of New Leaf	15
9	What support is received?	17
10	Challenges identified	20
11	Summary & Recommendations	22

1. Introduction to this report

This report outlines the learning from the early months of New Leaf Initiative's Departure Lounge, currently in existence to support returning citizens from HMP Birmingham back into the community.

The Departure Lounge project commenced in October 2020, and New Leaf wanted to undertake an early reflections and operational review to ensure the service is meeting the needs of its service users in the best way it can. To this end, they commissioned external partners to conduct a review.

EP: IC were commissioned to produce this review. EP: IC is a research and involvement organisation, working within social justice. The team is formed from those with lived and learnt experience of criminal justice who share a vision of creating innovative real-world involvement to support positive change.

We present the background to the service along with early and emerging findings within this report.

2. Our approach

This review was achieved through adopting a mixed methods approach. Various sources of information were used throughout the process, including information contained on New Leaf's website and other online resources to inform us around Departure Lounge initiatives elsewhere.

We received documentation from New Leaf which helped us to build a picture of the model in practice, including early project proposals containing a flow chart of the anticipated departure lounge model, two delivery reports for HMP Birmingham which outlined work undertaken, and a self-referral letter from someone residing in HMP Birmingham outlining his position (with consent). We also received a HMIP Scrutiny Report, completed in January 2021, which provided helpful information about HMP Birmingham at the current time.

Additionally, we received two exports from the New Leaf database, one containing ethnicity and disability data, along with identified needs, and another which contained 931 engagement notes for 105 service users from October to May 2021.

We also generated our own primary data. We spoke to 14 service users who have worked with New Leaf and accessed the departure lounge in the last year, through either one to one interviews or within a small focus group. Due to the review taking place during the COVID-19 pandemic, all engagement was facilitated remotely and took place over the telephone or via an online platform. The way service users were engaged was decided by the interviewee.

There were significant challenges in engaging service users to interview. A list of departure lounge service users was provided by New Leaf, of which 52 had telephone numbers. Every individual on this list with a phone number was contacted to see if they would like to participate in the review and share their experiences of the departure lounge. However, most did not answer despite repeated attempts, and several telephone numbers were incorrect. Additionally, some answered and agreed to take part, but were then unavailable at the agreed time and an alternative suitable time was not found. We understand from previous work it is not uncommon for people who have recently left prison to disengage in services they perceive as being associated with the criminal justice system, often due to trust issues or simply wanting to move on from their experiences, which may have been the case for some of those who chose not to engage.

'Multiple and complex needs' are often more common in people exiting a local prison such as HMP Birmingham as discussed in the next section, and priority needs as a returning citizen can result in not being in a place to engage in a review of this nature. Additionally, this group are less likely to have stable accommodation with reduced access to a consistent phone / phone number or charging facilities which can limit opportunities for engagement. Upon analysis of the database at a later point of the review, we noted the challenge of making and maintaining contact with service users was also a significant feature of the work of departure lounge staff. Much time was spent 'following up' with service users, reminding them of appointments and rescheduling missed appointments.

Of those who did participate, consent was explained and agreed and nine interviews were undertaken. All interviews were audio-recorded and notes were taken. Additionally, a focus group with 5 service users was facilitated, running for 35 minutes. The group was conducted over Zoom and recorded for accuracy.

Further, eight relevant and key stakeholders were also interviewed, including the CEO of New Leaf and the governor at HMP Birmingham. Interviews were carried out using the telephone and notes were made of every interview.

Verbatim quotes from both service users and stakeholders have been used to illustrate points of learning throughout this report.

It is worth reflecting on the unusual times this review was conducted in. The pandemic remained highly disruptive, community restrictions remained in place to reduce the risk of the transmission of COVID-19 and the prison ran a highly limited regime in line with the National Framework for Prison Regime and Services.

3. Brief overview of the New Leaf Initiative

The New Leaf Initiative CIC are a Birmingham based organisation, who use peer led approaches to support and enable those with lived experience of the Criminal Justice System to provide a range of services for people with convictions. New Leaf's stated values include being transformative, credible, solution-focused, honest, brave and energetic with an aim to "utilise the valuable lived experiences of peer mentors and incentivise rehabilitation with the provision of genuine through-the-gate resettlement support, alongside training and opportunities leading to employment and desistance."

During an interview with the founder and CEO, Marie-Claire O'Brien, she explained New Leaf are "focused on supporting people into employment as a route away from crime and into a happier, more fulfilled life." She further explained how these values and the lived experience of the team had led to New Leaf proposing their departure lounge for returning citizens of HMP Birmingham, which was procured through the PEDPS in 2019. The Governor stated that prior to the commissioning of the project, he had been impressed by New Leaf's attitude towards people in (and returning from) prisons during a previous piece of work they had undertaken at the prison, as well as their level of understanding around how this cohort might think and the barriers they may face.

Delivery was significantly delayed due to COVID-19 but in partnership with the prison and the Visitors Centre contract holders, HALOW, delivery began on 26th October 2020. Specifically, this project was

launched to support residents during the critical hours after release, which were described by the governor of HMP Birmingham as the 'golden hours'. He recognised, through conversations with men recalled back to the prison, that the hours between release and initial appointments were problematic for many, especially for those with addiction or local associates who were also involved in the Criminal Justice System. He wanted a service which could intervene at that critical point to dissuade people from situations which may lead to their recall, and thus commissioned New Leaf's departure lounge.

New Leaf's peer-led departure lounge is one of several initiatives offered by the CIC across prisons and the community¹. Others include:

- **HMP Good-Wood Prison industry at HMP Hewell**
- **Visitors Council at HMP Birmingham**
- **Education and course delivery – including CSCS, traineeships and mindset courses**
- **New Leaf Co-operative CIC**
- **New Leaf Network – a network of ex-prisoners supporting others**
- **Consultations and focus groups for research**

New Leaf have also worked in partnership with HMP Birmingham, Prison Fellowship and Bahu Trust to provide a mini clothing bank to returning citizens, with new and used clothes available.

4. Why a Departure Lounge at HMP Birmingham?

Through their own and their service users' lived experience of prison release, New Leaf recognise leaving prison can be a daunting and often frightening prospect, having to build a new life with new routines, often away from others who might be considered to be both a support and a risk to offending. This is also recognised in wider literature².

HMP Birmingham is currently a category B local prison, holding over 900 men. It serves people who are on remand, recalled and sentenced prisoners, but is in transition to becoming a reception prison. Around two thirds of the population are currently on remand meaning access to truly rehabilitative support is limited; even more so since the pandemic and the regime restricted access to all internal services and support. The HMIP Scrutiny report also identifies that many of its convicted prisoners were serving short sentences with a high turnover within the prison, again with little or no time for rehabilitation or support to meet needs. Looking nationally, the latest report for the Ministry of Justice completed by the Office for National Statistics (published 27th May 2021), stated: 'Adults released from custody serving less than 12 months had a proven reoffending rate of 59.9%³ taken against an 'all adult reoffending rate' of 26.1%', which does demonstrate the need for supporting those with short sentences, such as those exiting HMP Birmingham.

In a recent study, Birmingham City University (2020⁴) found 81% of prison leavers (across the country rather than from HMP Birmingham specifically) had said they had received no help with preparing for release from prison, despite having high levels of need in terms of mental health, substance misuse and financial hardship. At HMP Birmingham, we understand there is an inhouse resettlement team, who told us they create a release plan for every person leaving the prison, as well as linking in with Liaison and Diversion teams from NHS Birmingham Solihull Mental Health Trust. They also have a revised

¹ Welcome to the New Leaf Initiative (newleafcic.org)

² This is me – how telling your life story honestly is paying dividends for people with complex lives. (2019). EDP Drug & Alcohol Services. <https://www.edp.org.uk/this-is-me-how-telling-your-life-story-honestly-is-paying-dividends-for-people-with-complex-lives/>

³ Proven reoffending statistics quarterly bulletin, January 2019 to March 2019 (publishing.service.gov.uk)

⁴ <https://www.bcu.ac.uk/news-events/news/more-than-80-per-cent-of-people-in-prison-say-they-received-no-help-preparing-for-release-new-research-finds?platform=hootsuite>

⁵ This strategy is not yet publicly available, but will be internally shared with providers for clarity around roles.

Resettlement Strategy which advocates for improved partnership working and details the range of available services within the prison for each strand of the strategy⁵.

The departure lounge addresses a broad range of needs including housing, employment, training, substance misuse, issues with family and relationships, physical and mental ill-health, self-harm and financial wellbeing.

Ensuring returning citizens are supported sufficiently is critical in the period immediately after release, this can be the difference between life and death. For those leaving prison with substance dependency there is an increased mortality risk and overdoses being the most frequent reason for death after release (Alex et al, 2017⁶).

5. Lessons from other Departure Lounges in use across the country

Departure lounges exist to provide both practical and emotional support to people at the point of release from custody. This support is intended to be in conjunction with that received in the prison, via existing Through The Gate services (TTG) and prison resettlement teams. Physical support should relate to a returning citizen's immediate needs, such as accessing clothing (such as a coat in winter), help with costs of transport to initial probation appointments where needed (given the release grant of £46 for everyone serving over 14 days until May 2021 where it was raised to £76), charging a phone that has been held in prison property or setting up an email address.

The practical longer term needs might include supporting applications for housing or signposting into third party services, health services and support with mental ill-health and recovery services. Ultimately, departure lounges aim to prevent a revolving door of re-offending and assist in reducing homelessness, by giving people the best possible chance of a fresh start in life (Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner Devon and Cornwall, 2018). Emotional support is offered in terms of reassurance and encouragement, as well as being a listening ear for immediate concerns.

Departure lounges have been incorporated into the release process in other prisons in England including HMP Lincoln, HMP Exeter, HMP Leeds and HMP Brixton. Every departure lounge will differ depending on various factors; including the population they are serving, the physical space available and regional availability of community services.

In a 2018 online briefing on the website for the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon and Cornwall, HMP Exeter's departure lounge was given positive feedback, with many prison leavers identifying that not only did they get support in the areas that they needed but the scheme had simultaneously increased their confidence in desisting from crime . The departure lounge also ran alongside a 'checkout lounge' which brings together prisoners and professionals who work in a range of services such as housing, substance dependency and employment a fortnight before release, with sessions taking place weekly in an informal setting (Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner Devon and Cornwall, 2018). One of the reasons stated for why the service was seen to be working was because services were able to work together to coordinate a person's journey back into society, making it 'less stressful' in terms of finding the necessary services needed for the individual⁹.

⁵ Alex, B., Weiss, D. B., Kaba, F., Rosner, Z., Lee, D., Lim, S., Venters, H., & MacDonald, R. (2017). Death After Jail Release: Matching to Improve Care Delivery. *Journal of Correctional Health Care*, 23(1), 83–87. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1078345816685311>

⁷ Pioneering project aims to reduce reoffending at Exeter Prison. (2018). Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner Devon and Cornwall. <https://www.devonandcornwall-pcc.gov.uk/news-and-blog/multimedia-hub/pioneering-project-aims-to-reduce-reoffending-at-exeter-prison/>

⁸ Ibid

⁹ This is me' – how telling your life story honestly is paying dividends for people with complex lives. (2019). EDP Drug & Alcohol Services. <https://www.edp.org.uk/this-is-me-how-telling-your-life-story-honestly-is-paying-dividends-for-people-with-complex-lives/>

The departure lounge at HMP Leeds is based in a building in the prison's car park where probation staff and partner agencies are located to provide holistic support. With the first 48 hours post release being so critical to returning citizens, having the departure lounge in the building next to the prison eases the transition for people and initial appointments are made meaningful and easy to access (West Yorkshire Community Rehabilitation Company, 2018¹⁰). The service manager at HMP Leeds evaluated their departure lounge and reported some people who had never previously engaged with probation are now doing so now because of the departure lounge and its location. This is a significant and important finding, relevant to the returning citizens from HMP Birmingham accessing New Leaf's service.

Informal discussions¹¹ with the delivery manager of the departure lounge at HMP Lincoln described the ultimate aim of the service as being to "make people feel like they have got a purpose for what is next in their life whilst empowering them to make better choices and get experience from knowledgeable practitioners". The departure lounge at HMP Lincoln has been in operation for five years, and changes have been made along the way as the service has progressed, having learnt from its successes and challenges. There have been numerous physical improvements; desks were removed to ensure the lounge did not feel too formal, the TV has been replaced by a fish tank as the TV was deferring attention from the services on offer and now a radio plays lightly in the background as an alternative to keep people engaged and provide an informal environment. Also, all writing up of contacts or meeting with service users is now completed after service users have left the lounge so conversations remain fluent and to help build rapport with those using the service. Providers expressed these factors contribute to a more relaxed 'front room' feel as opposed to a 'clinical office'. A further recommendation to the facilities was to ensure cordless phones and phone chargers are available. Often service users will sit down for a while for the purpose of charging their phone prior to leaving the prison, which presents as an opportunity to engage with services. Procedurally changes have been made also, with prison leavers prepped in advance in terms of what is available at the departure lounge. This has resulted in improved engagement with the service. Over time, the departure lounge has been able to dictate the specific sequence that people leave prison, meaning that the lounge can be more effectively managing the flow of returning citizens and appropriate support can be provided.

Recently, during the pandemic, departure lounges have been set up by MCT at HMP Brixton and HMP Wandsworth (MCT, 2020¹²). At HMP Brixton the lounge is set up as a socially distanced meeting place with information regarding COVID-19, whilst also providing practical and emotional support. This included free buses, housing support and welcoming family and friends who had arrived to meet them. At HMP Wandsworth there are suitable new clothes available for the men to choose from, which was well needed due to reduced travel options and difficulty in accessing clothing shops during the pandemic.

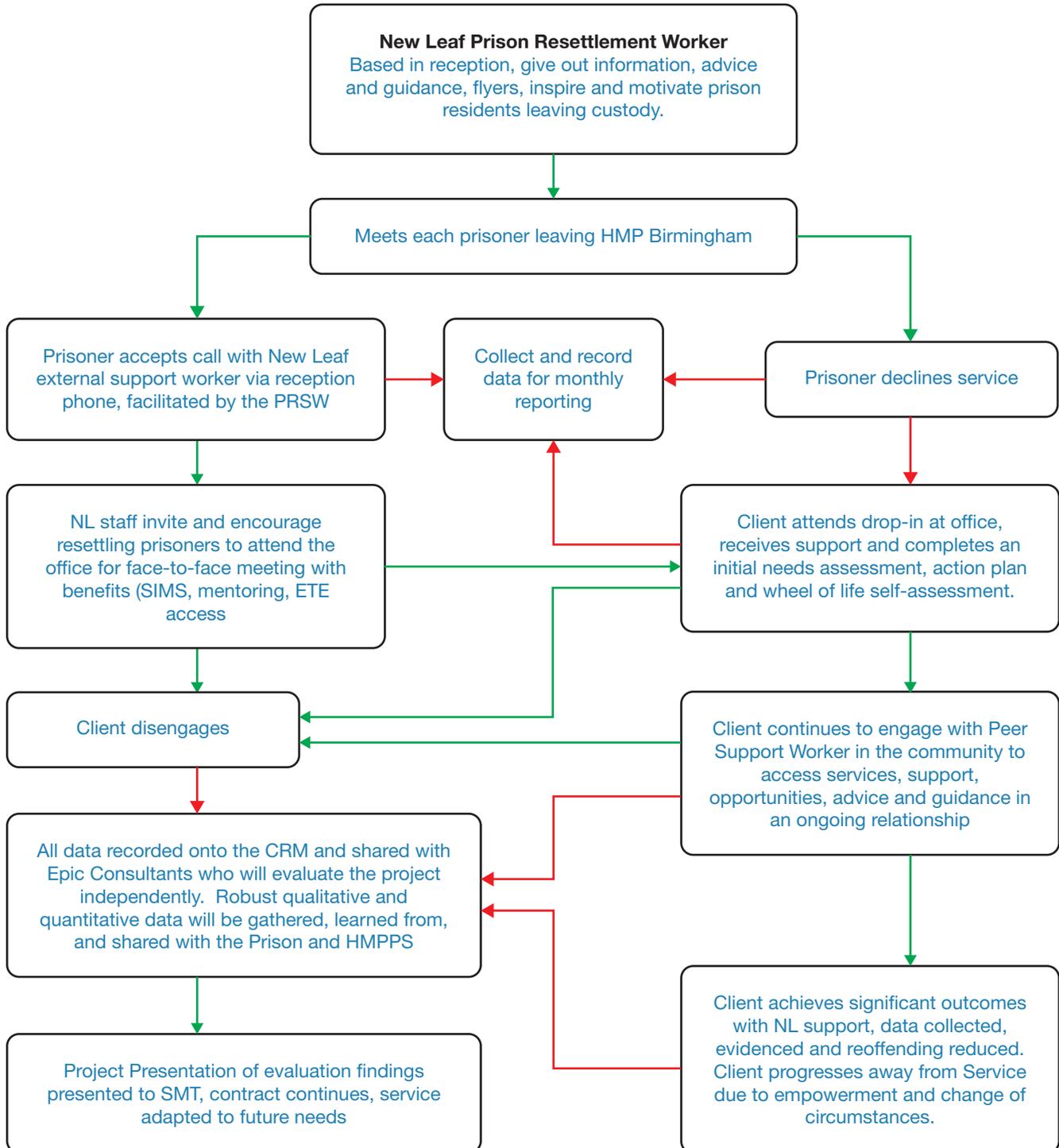
¹⁰ Departure Lounge takes off at HMP Leeds. (2018). West Yorkshire Community Rehabilitation Company. <http://www.westyorkshirecrc.co.uk/departure-lounge-takes-off-hmp-leeds/>

¹¹ The delivery manager at HMP Lincoln is keen to share learning and network with interested parties outside of Lincoln.

¹² Barker, A. (2020). Exploring MTC's new Departure Lounges. MTC. <https://www.mtcgroup.org.uk/2020/05/21/exploring-mtcs-new-departure-lounges/>

6. New Leaf's Departure Lounge

The following diagram outlines New Leaf's intended Departure Lounge delivery model, taken from an internal document.



There is no doubt the pandemic created challenges to mobilise the departure lounge in its entirety and the initial delivery model outlined above wasn't possible to fully implement. However, many of the elements of the lounge have been adapted into a viable alternative to meet many of the initial goals the service set out to provide whilst remaining COVID safe. The governor of the prison told us it was good to see the New Leaf staff continuing to respond to need during the lockdown period in early 2021, where prisoners were still being released with fewer services in operation.

The most significant change to the original plan was that New Leaf staff were not able to base themselves within the prison, in reception or in the Visitors Centre. Instead, exiting prisoners are met at the gate on release, by one of three departure lounge support workers, and initial engagement happens either at the gate or in a local café when restrictions allow. Meeting at the gate is not pre-planned with prison leavers. Rather, returning citizens are approached by a member of the team as they exit the gate. In addition, one of the initial visions for the departure lounge was to have current prisoners working as New Leaf representatives, taking on roles such as raising awareness and identifying people who may want or need to access the service. These important roles could build an important link to reception staff and better enable initial contact with New Leaf. As restrictions begin to ease and regime and services focus on restoration and recovery, New Leaf are optimistic these intentions can become a reality.

Additionally, unlike in the proposed model, there is currently not as much connectivity between the prison and the departure lounge as intended (as above). The hope or expectation was that a New Leaf worker would work more collaboratively with reception and resettlement staff at HMP Birmingham, knowing in advance some details of those exiting the establishment and who would be in need of the service.

A significant delay with the data sharing agreement (over a year) has meant New Leaf are not able to access information about who is due to be released on a particular day, or indeed if anyone is being released at all. One stakeholder told us this has resulted in a degree of 'cold calling' those being released, because New Leaf have had no information available to them and few alternatives to reach out. The data sharing agreement was finalised in April 2021, although is yet to be signed off. This has limited opportunity for all partners to work together, one of the early visions for the service.

From our stakeholder and service user engagement, we understand the lounge is promoted through leaflets and these are available to people in HMP Birmingham aimed at informing those preparing for release. TTG services in the prison told us returning citizens wait in Reception prior to release and are all spoken to about upcoming appointments etc, and at this point are advised of New Leaf's departure lounge and provided with information leaflets. Not all service users we spoke to recall seeing any promotional / informative material although were not sure whether this was provided to them. We do recognise the restrictions associated with COVID-19 may have affected the amount of promotional material seen and accessed by service users in terms of movement around the establishment or through paperwork. We spoke with the service user involvement lead at the prison who thought more work could be done as COVID restrictions ease in promoting the service across the whole prison community. We understand New Leaf have recently established a freephone number which has been added to the list of numbers prisoners at HMP Birmingham can access. This has been advertised through some new marketing materials, only recently supplied to the prison for distribution.

There is no physical space dedicated to the departure lounge. It was intended the departure lounge would operate from the visitor centre based a few hundred yards from the prison, which was closed in March 2020 in line with the community pandemic restrictions. Instead, currently, the departure lounge

is 'in name only' and New Leaf are utilising community resources. Once a person identifies they are interested in support, they have been invited to local café (where COVID restrictions have allowed) or for a street side conversation with a support worker who can provide further detail, collect more information relating to needs and provide any emotional support required. Whether the offer of an initial chat in a café is taken up or not – (and for some it is not an immediate wish or want), if a returning citizen is interested in support, contacts details are collected, or the details of a probation worker are taken so that contact can be made at a later date. Where possible, a needs assessment is done at this point, or an arrangement is made for this to be done soon after. The assessment is person centred and identifies immediate needs and encourages an asset-based approach to future planning. This aims to determine a way forward that focuses on strengths and goals and promotes longer-term positive outcomes for the service user.

Despite the setbacks, a report by the Chief Inspector of Prisons following a scrutiny visit to HMP Birmingham that took place between 24th November 2020 and 6th January described the Departure Lounge as a “promising initiative”. The governor too, stated the project had great potential as being a part of the resettlement package on offer at HMP Birmingham.

7. Who has accessed support?

Since the current delivery model became operational in October 2020, we understand the departure lounge has engaged with 155 men at the gate. Of these the total number of men who have gone on to be registered for further and ongoing support is 108.

Of those, 47 have never gone on to receive any specific support, mainly because they have not answered the phone or messages. Three service users fed back they did not continue engagement because they did not require the support they thought they would need. Several service users were supported if they had been recalled back to prison and were contacted while residing back in HMP Birmingham, as well as met at the gate (where a release had also happened). Looking at the data from the MOJ earlier suggesting almost 60% of prison leavers on short sentences will be reconvicted, it is considered a strength of the service that they confront this with realistic and unwavering support.

The information we were given from the database did however capture both disability and ethnicity of those who have accessed the service. Only one service user described themselves as having a disability. Ethnicity was stated for 63% of service users; 65% of those described themselves as being 'White', 17% were Asian, 13% identified as being of a mixed ethnicity. 5% were record as Black. The current ethnic breakdown of prisoners residing at HMP Birmingham is 57% White, 17% Asian, 17% Black, 7% mixed and 2% describing themselves as being from 'other' ethnic groups. This suggests proportionally less Black men (5% compared with 17%) are reaching the service compared with other ethnicities, and it might be a useful exercise to explore why this might be and what could be done to bridge any possible gaps.

The database is a new and evolving part of the service, in line with the new and evolving departure lounge, and we would recommend including the recording of more demographics within it, for example date of birth, or length of time in prison for example, so the service is able to see 'at a glance' who is accessing the lounge. This means New Leaf can tailor / amend interventions accordingly and target those who are under-represented. It would also benefit from showing the dates of first and last engagement, as well as frequency of support, so it is possible to understand more about involvement with the service.

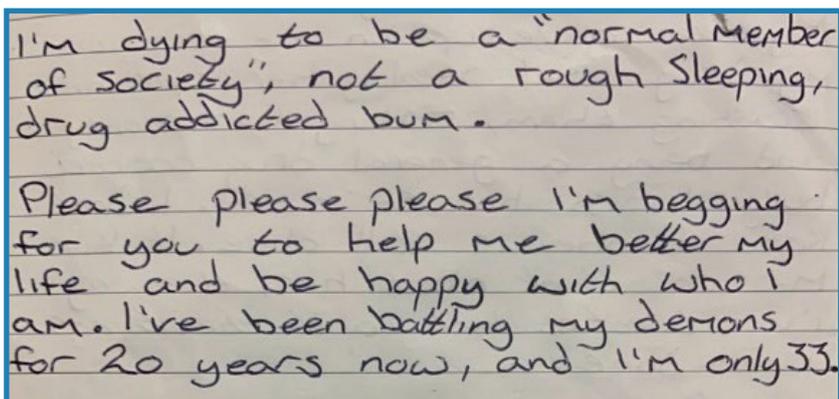
In terms of the needs of those accessing the service, some support needs are captured in the initial needs assessment although we did not have access to those records directly. Instead, we had a summary of all service users which refers to 'Support Required' alongside the notes from the database which explained in further detail the support needed. Within the 'Support Required' summary, the most common need was for employment support, with over a quarter (25%) requiring help. 21% needed support to access education or training as a means to securing work in the future.

As New Leaf initially formed to support people leaving prison into employment, it makes sense their initial assessment forms are designed to gather data on these areas of resettlement. However, New Leaf staff explained the departure lounge has meant more people in crisis are accessing their support than ever before. Staff explained those accessing services from the departure lounge often present with wider, interacting and complex needs. Certainly, reading the notes demonstrates to us many service users have substantial and pressing needs which are not necessarily recorded in the initial needs form. One member of our focus groups said:

"I needed help with absolutely everything, getting help with benefits, accommodation and being able to go and collect my key, anxiety and mental health, sorting out rehab"

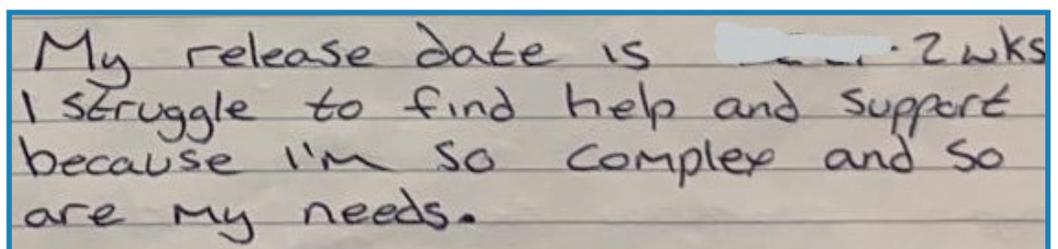
We noted from the database that two service users had sadly passed away before a relationship could be built with New Leaf, one of which was from a drugs overdose and the other cause is unknown. This highlights the intensity of need and support for some leaving prison.

Relatedly, we heard from a number of service users for whom the departure lounge represented a 'last chance' to a changed life. One referral letter shared (with consent) from a prospective New Leaf service user highlights the level of complexity experienced by some people exiting HMP Birmingham, which



I'm dying to be a "normal member of society", not a rough sleeping, drug addicted bum.

Please please please I'm begging for you to help me better my life and be happy with who I am. I've been battling my demons for 20 years now, and I'm only 33.



My release date is [redacted] 2wks
I struggle to find help and support because I'm so complex and so are my needs.

can lead to a struggle in finding the right support at a critical time.

8 The perception of New Leaf

In every service user interview we undertook, New Leaf were spoken about positively. It is worth reiterating, New Leaf gave us the contact details of everyone in their service user list, so our sample were not 'cherry-picked'.

Many we spoke to felt there was generally limited support for people on release from prison as they entered the community. Many of the service users talked about only being able to reach probation by phone 'if we're lucky and then they may or may not get back to us', with the pandemic appearing to have had an impact on this further. We noted significant barriers in accessing the right support.

"Once you've made that mistake of telling people about you and then they've let you down. People like us that have been through the system. We'll just lock you out."

Therefore, New Leaf were a welcome addition to the post-release landscape.

"Pre-release I felt I was being set up to fail, with nowhere to go to. So seeing New Leaf helped a lot"

As mentioned earlier, we understand from stakeholder interviews, that HMP Birmingham offer various opportunities for support before release by several services. Rather than these services acting in competition with each other, we perceive New Leaf as a further opportunity for people when the reality of release hits home and returning citizens recognise or come to terms with the challenges ahead.

"I found out about New Leaf from a lady outside, Lynne, from the gate she approached me and offered help with a few things"

"I was going through the routine of getting help with my release, as I do every time. I was struggling this time, I saw a leaflet on the wall for New Leaf. Took it down, took it to my cell, and wrote New Leaf a letter. I then saw Lynne outside the gate"

Many service users who had engaged with the departure lounge spoke of the caring nature of the support staff, describing them as 'going above and beyond'. If needed, almost daily contact was made with service users to 'check in' that everything is ok. We found this provided people with well needed reassurances and helped reduce anxieties. Even weekend contact was possible, enabling people to feel 'held and safe' in their support. Additionally, if the service user relocated outside Birmingham support was still available, meaning the service 'went with them' on their journey for as long as needed. This gave service users the impression staff were dedicated, caring, committed and that they could be trusted.

"It's the fact that Lynne phones me up nearly every day just to check if I'm ok and if there is anything I need. She'll even speak to me on a Saturday and a Sunday"

All stakeholders highlighted a shared experience, that New Leaf's support workers appeared to genuinely care for the welfare of people leaving custody and were there outside the gates, "whatever

the weather”, and indeed throughout the pandemic, to offer support to those who need it.

“Morally, there’s been such integrity, show they want to do the best for everyone that leaves, willing to go extra mile, they obviously care.”

One very noticeable finding upon analysis of the database notes is the number of times service users have been contacted despite not answering the phone. New Leaf staff did not give up on those who were more reluctant to engage. 84 service users, or 80%, were contacted multiple times over the same issue. One person was contacted 6 times about a missed appointment to support him in acquiring photo ID, and we observed 3 or 4 contacts over one issue appeared common. When service users did not answer the phone for longer periods, contact was also made with probation officers and family members, to ensure they knew there was support on offer. Consistency of support is valued in prison, but not always received¹³, so this is an important feature of the service, and signals to returning citizens they are worth investing in.

Service users highlighted having someone to talk to who had ‘lived experience’ as being particularly important to them.

“They know what they’re talking about, half of them have been through addiction problems and other issues they’re not just reading it from a book, they are experts by experience. Me and the lads here were just saying, I’d rather listen to someone who’d been through it and been in the same predicament in their past and knows exactly where I’m coming from. Rather than someone who’d just read it from a book for 3 years.”

One service user mentioned the lived experience of New Leaf staff members was motivating and inspiring.

“It’s good to see someone who’s come out the other side of it,”

A discussion was then had around the benefits of lived experience within organisations such as New Leaf and improved trust came out as a major theme, particularly important within criminal justice where trust between services and those using them can be a challenge. Many felt the breaking of trust between traditional services and themselves led to being demotivated in accessing future support as they’d ‘been let down too many times in the past’. It was apparent service users trusted the information they were given by New Leaf, more as a consequence of it coming from a lived experience-led organisation using peer-led approaches.

Additionally, service users told us they felt the team’s demonstrated compassion and empathy was in part a result of them having been there themselves, which enhanced service users’ motivation to engage with the service, not because they had to, but because they wanted to.

We observed in the notes there was often an effort to make and maintain contact with people’s probation officers. In a quarter of cases, we saw evidence of this. Sometimes, this resulted in a positive relationship where support was offered to the service user from both teams. We noted updates were shared between New Leaf and probation, such as new addresses, new telephone numbers or where referrals to other agencies had been made.

A couple of service users told us their probation officers were very supportive of their work with New Leaf.

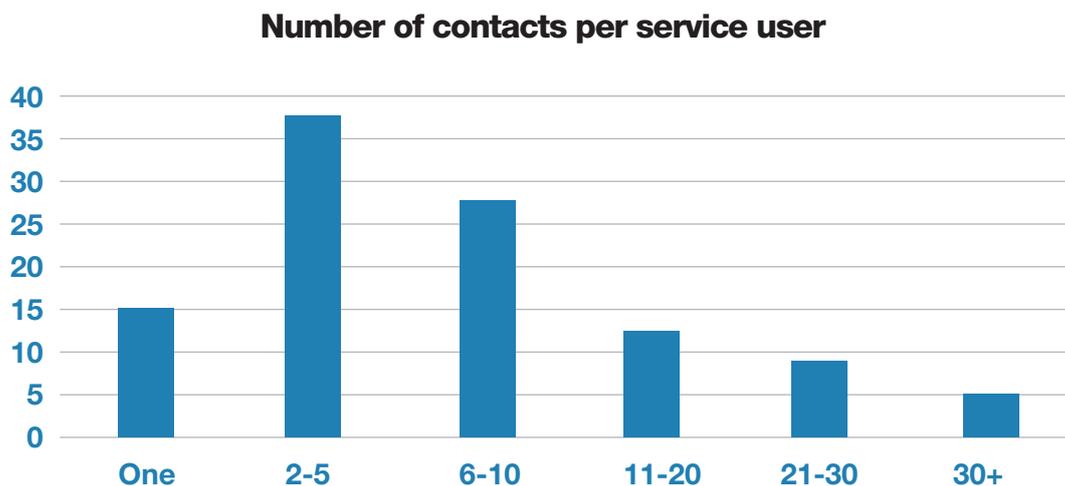
“They were happy that if we were in New Leaf’s hands then they would leave us alone knowing we’re getting support”

In other cases, there were messages left but no evidence of returned calls from probation staff.

9. What support is received?

The notes on the database were substantial in number and content to provide us with a useful insight into the service provided by the departure lounge. As previously mentioned, the latest figures available to May 2021 show 931 engagements with 105 registered service users. It is evident more notes were available for the more recent service users, which may be a result of more robust data recording and monitoring in recent months. The range of number of contacts per service user was between 1 and 45.

The graph below gives a helpful graphical representation of the number of contacts per service user.



Much of the support given is related to ‘immediate here & now’ needs and the length of time spent with service users can be fairly short post-release, although this is not clear.

Emotional Support

As mentioned above, first and foremost, a friendly face and the offer of support was actually seen to be an intervention in itself, with several of the service users we spoke to commenting how it helped them to feel calmer post-release and manage the overwhelming feelings of space on walking through the gates. The release from prison was described as being emotionally and physically challenging, and sometimes even isolating.

“It’s a lot, when you first get released (...) Everything like seems too much, when you’re in prison, it’s nice and basic. Everyone just does their own thing. But when you come out here there’s constant noise from the traffic, people shouting, they’re in your personal space. It’s an eye opener.”

Wellbeing checks were mentioned within the notes for 64% of service users, which was mostly a simple brief intervention asking how someone is. However, service users inferred they were emotionally

supported through each interaction. People felt this helped them in building a trusting relationship where they could be honest in outlining what help they needed, and be more open to receiving this help.

“I can talk to her about anything that is on my mind.”

Alleviation of Poverty

Basic provisions were offered in almost a quarter of all cases. This included 16% accessing clothing from either New Leaf stock, or from a temporary support service during the pandemic, Ware and Share¹⁴, which has now closed. Records were made of service user's sizes and needs throughout the notes. One note simply stated: “Wearing prison issues clothes and pumps. Has no other clothing”

Mobile telephones were distributed, as well as items such as bedding, toiletries and a sleeping bag on one occasion.

21% of returning citizens who engaged with the departure lounge utilised New Leaf's links to food parcel providers. The collection of food parcels from the New Leaf offices appeared to be a useful mechanism by which to also facilitate conversations with people about their wider needs, as and when they were ready to open up and accept help, which may be several weeks after receiving initial food parcels.

Employment and Training

30% of service users have notes relating to acquiring support for employment and training. Support to access a Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card was one of the most frequently listed area of support given, which can be a critical first step towards employment and diversion from crime. Some were offered additional support to create a CV. There were multiple examples of New Leaf exploring college options with people, looking into the courses available and considering entry requirements.

We did see a record for 10 individuals who New Leaf supported into employment, including lived experience roles, construction and other manual work such as car washing. Considering the complexity of many of the men leaving custody at HMP Birmingham, this has been viewed as a significant success and is the main reason New Leaf were taken on as subcontractors under the PEDPS funding. In every case where ongoing notes were provided, the work appears to have propelled the returning citizen forward in other areas of life.

Wider support

The database notes provided evidence of support given in other areas for some service users. Common areas of need / support are included in the table below.

Housing / Accommodation	e.g. support looking for available housing, putting in applications to obtain accommodation	12%
Substance Dependency	e.g. referral to treatment and recovery services	10%
Obtaining ID	e.g. applying for citizenship card	9%
Managing finances	e.g. Support to understand and access benefits	6%

Other areas of support were also evidenced. For example, help gaining an emergency dentist, securing a mental health assessment, advocacy with a solicitor and accessing a bank account.

Some people needed help with just one of the areas of support mentioned above, others had multiple support needs. The following case study gives an example of the wide-ranging support one man received through the departure lounge over a 3 month period. He has been given the pseudonym David for confidentiality reasons.

David was approached outside the prison on his release date, and accepted he needed help to live successfully in the community. He gave his telephone number to the Departure Lounge support worker and after a couple of false starts, David met with them at the New Leaf offices.

Basic needs were supported initially, such as obtaining a food parcel and provision of clothes from the New Leaf supplies. David did not have a secure place to stay and New Leaf supported him to start his applications to local housing providers as well starting the search for private rental properties.

He secured a temporary property and was supported when the cooker broke, through New Leaf accessing the landlord and maintaining pressure to have the cooker fixed / replaced. He was then supported to apply to other housing support services, for example 'Homes Direct'.

Throughout the early days working with David, he missed several appointments and did not always answer the phone nor reply to messages, but the team continued efforts to engage with him, to not lose momentum.

He did continue to access food parcels from New Leaf and stated he was more motivated and prepared to accept help after some time. As such, New Leaf provided advocacy for David when he needed it with his solicitor. His preparedness to accept help began to extend outwards, to his probation officer and other agencies.

New Leaf worked with David's probation officer to ensure information was shared and the probation officer was made aware of when applications were made and when David needed additional support.

New Leaf also informed the probation officer of the two addresses David has been placed in since leaving custody in March 2021. Clear and successful outcomes for David, within 3 months have been:

- *His improved engagement with probation*
- *Referrals for more suitable housing and placement in new stable housing*
- *Apprenticeship and growing interest in college*
- *Engagement with Change Grow Live and NA*
- *Application for a Citizen Card and bank account.*

It is worth noting that where New Leaf were not able to support a specific need, there was evidence of working alongside or signposting to other agencies. Agencies referred to included:

Right Start	Sandwell Homeless Services	SIFA Fireside
CGL	Changes UK	Claremont living
Ware and Share	Custodian	Legal & Housing Services Ltd
Hanwood House	Job Change	Move on Housing
Salma Food Bank	Yellow Ribbon (Housing Support in Stafford)	MK Accommodation
Renovare	Clifton Housing	Turning Point
Job Change	Springfield Housing	NHS Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Trust

Working with other community services was valued by those who accessed the lounge.

“You've got those that are doing wrong, and they've got no issues, but you've got those that are doing wrong because they don't know any better. So, having organisations like [New Leaf's] is about saying to organisations on our behalf “what more can you do for that individual?” You may not realise he's there, because he's been pushed aside by the local authority social services.”

10. Challenges identified

Challenges mainly emerged from stakeholders rather than from those using the service. Many of the stakeholders raised risk management and data sharing as an issue and a barrier to future effective partnership working.

Challenges were highlighted regarding the safety of New Leaf staff, especially because the data sharing agreement had not been in place, and the support worker was not aware of the specific risks attached to individuals leaving prison. There was concern shown regarding the support workers, who were clearly dedicated to the role. One stakeholder told us:

“Prison have a responsibility to do what's best for the men but also to protect the public. There was no info sharing agreement, so its been difficult for CRCs to share information about risk and people without consent. So, for example, if they are a risk to lone females. Probation staff, and also some male workers wouldn't see these men on their own, but New Leaf will. New Leaf are managing this risk on their own.”

New Leaf had hoped the data sharing agreement would be in place long before April 2021 when it was finally drafted (but still not signed). This could have helped mitigate some of these challenges. However, in its absence, New Leaf have commented they did not want to see risk being a barrier to engagement and support, making the decision to reach out to all returning citizens to offer an opportunity for support. They reported all interactions are in view of the prison gate where CCTV is in operation and any future engagements taking place by phone or in a public area. The notes in the database demonstrate risk is discussed and escalated in house when there is a concern regarding safety.

Some stakeholders were concerned New Leaf would undertake support meetings in more private settings. Transparency around risk management may go some way to alleviate concerns. However, the fact a signed data sharing agreement now looks to be imminent will now allow for significant understanding of any risks and working with them.

A further challenge was raised relating to New Leaf providing support which could potentially conflict with the support received from Probation. While it was not seen to be the fault of New Leaf, an example was given of a service user missing an appointment Probation had set for him regarding accommodation, because he was getting the help via alternative means with the support of New Leaf. The fact the service user accessed support for his housing is an important one not to lose sight of, but this does indicate the importance of a positive working relationship between stakeholders and the value of information sharing between them (which we have seen evidence of).

Some concerns were raised around the blurring of roles and responsibilities with a couple of stakeholders wondering if there was a duplication of work and/or support. Increasing communication and shared meetings may reduce this perception and enable all support services to focus on different priorities. The governor was clear in his vision that New Leaf occupy an important seat around the table in terms of the resettlement of men from HMP Birmingham, and that coordinated, cooperative partnership working is vital to the success of the resettlement strategy, and to the departure lounge.

The absence of a physical space was raised as something needing attention, but this was very much impacted by the pandemic. As mentioned, the departure lounge was intended to operate from the visitors centre at HMP Birmingham, but it was highlighted that aside from the closure of the centre due to the pandemic, some returning citizens were not keen to go into the visitor centre on release, and preferred to go somewhere not associated with the prison (i.e. the café). Additionally, several stakeholders advocated for a space inside the prison, whereby work could be done in advance of leaving, with the promise of support on release from New Leaf. This would simultaneously reduce the 'cold call' element of the work.

Currently New Leaf have a unique position of 'catching' people as they leave, and are therefore not currently associated with being 'inside'. This may be of benefit to their engagement. Yet, 'gate fever' was also raised several times as having the potential to affect engagement.

“Prison releases don't really have a need to go over to the [visitor] centre, I think it would work better if New Leaf could go over to prison reception and engage with them before they get out of the gate. Many prisoners have 'gate fever' and that's a barrier to engagement especially once out of the gate and all other statutory commitments have to be adhered to. I think an explanation at reception would be best”

The final challenge raised by stakeholders was in relation to service users telling New Leaf they had accessed no help, when this was not the truth. Several stakeholders said it is important to have an open mind when hearing a service user's version of events as this can cause unnecessary stain on relationships. This could be resolved by increased partnership working.

“It's a manageable challenge but men will say XYZ has happened, and New Leaf will believe them and have a view which gets fed back to CRC, but it may not have actually happened.”

A final challenge was noted by EP: IC. The current database does not contain easily accessible data, nor everything that happens with service users. This would not only be beneficial for monitoring the

changing needs of the service as it evolves, but would also benefit the organisation in providing evidence when required, for example to funders. We understand a new case management system is in the process of being implemented but it will need to record a raft of information to truly ensure the service can be fully evidenced and evaluated in the future. We are open to discussions around what would be helpful.

11. Summary & Recommendations

New Leaf's departure lounge is an emerging service, with huge opportunity to positively impact returning citizens. Looking at reconviction data¹⁵, and the population at HMP Birmingham, this is clearly a need for a 'Through the Gate' service at the prison, and the addition of New Leaf's Departure Lounge to those already in operation (such as Liaison and Diversion and internal resettlement teams) has the potential to ensure people released from the prison can have their immediate needs identified and these are supported in a holistic and enabling way. The governor of HMP Birmingham told us: "I can see this service ramping up, but I want it to ramp up as a whole prison community", referring to how New Leaf provide an important piece in the resettlement puzzle. He spoke of how the system could continue to evolve and grow, in a way where every released prisoner has a multi-disciplinary team consider their case to ensure all needs are supported.

The departure lounge has ridden the storm of a challenging national landscape in its first year and it is to be commended for the tenacity of its staff and volunteers despite these changes. The team has grown to three support staff dedicated to support and there is a more robust back-office support function assisting with data collection and case management. New Leaf have rolled out a new case management system during this first 6 months of operation and worked hard to build relationships with critical partners to strengthen the support.

There is very clear evidence of important and impactful work being undertaken. Over 900 engagement notes for just over 100 returning citizens, within an 8 month period gave us an important window into their work. Service users received emotional and practical support, of varying degrees and intensity according to the needs of the service user. The peer-led approach and lived experience of the team was shown to be an important feature of the service, particularly in terms of trust, engagement and relatability.

Many returning citizens have far reaching needs which are complex, and can be difficult to maintain contact with, even if early engagement happens at the gate. However, support workers did not 'give up' on those who did not engage, creating opportunities for people to engage at a time or space more 'ready' for them. They persevered, showing service users they were worth investing in, demonstrating both commitment and care.

Some service users we spoke to felt New Leaf had helped them where no one had previously, and they felt New Leaf genuinely cared for them.

15 Proven reoffending statistics quarterly bulletin, January 2019 to March 2019 (publishing.service.gov.uk)

Returning citizens were provided immediate help, meeting a range of needs:

- 64% were given emotional support
- 25% were offered basic provisions (including 21% accepting food parcels and 16% accepting clothing)
- 30% have had help relating to training and employment, with 10 men securing employment with the help of the New Leaf departure lounge.
- 12% have been supported with securing housing
- 10% have been helped with substance dependency
- 9% have been helped to access ID
- 6% have accessed help regarding their finances

Support workers appear to form good relationships with probation, sometimes working collaboratively to support service users. On other occasions, there is no reference to a response from probation so these relationships have not been formed. This appears not only a wasted opportunity but also can lead to some duplication in work.

Within our focus group with service users, there was a sense that the service offered a 'ticket out' of the life that had led them to prison. A ticket they were willing to take, because of the component parts we have highlighted here as being critical to the New Leaf model:

“Trust, empathy, authenticity, not giving up, lived experience and genuine care.”

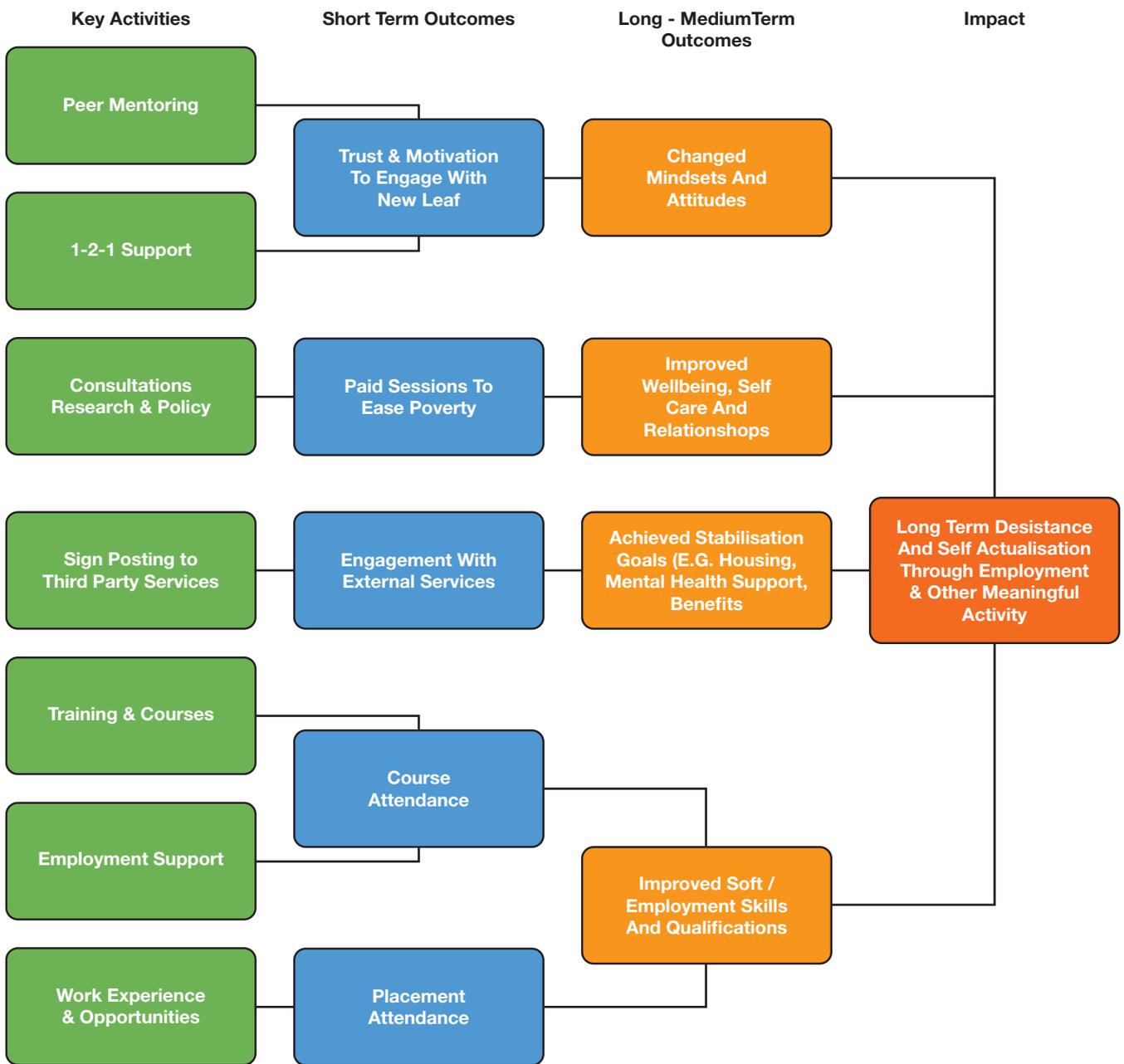
When asked what his motivation for working with the Departure Lounge was, one person said:

“To try and make today better than yesterday”

The departure lounge does not yet have a physical home at HMP Birmingham, yet, in some ways, this has given a little space for the organisation to decide, along with its stakeholders, where the best place for the service would be and how to operate 'virtually'.

Relationships with staff at HMP Birmingham are generally positive. In a similar way to the service users we spoke to, the New Leaf team were undoubtedly seen to be genuine and caring, although working more inside the prison following the easing of pandemic restrictions will be helpful to ensure everyone is clear on roles and any questions can be addressed in real time, as well as ensuring people can be diverted into the service if it is deemed beneficial to them.

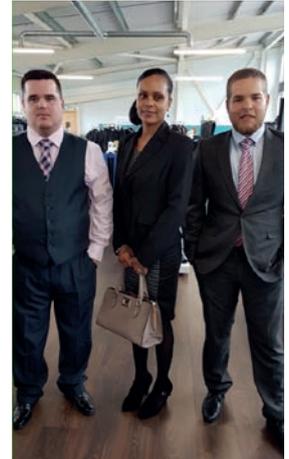
At this stage, we are just presenting some of the early learning, and it is too soon to see whether the departure lounge can support long-term desistance outlined in their outcomes framework. However, we can be confident that all the short term outcomes can be achieved through this service, as well as seeing some of the long-medium outcomes referred to by service users within interviews and the focus group.



Recommendations from the EP: IC team

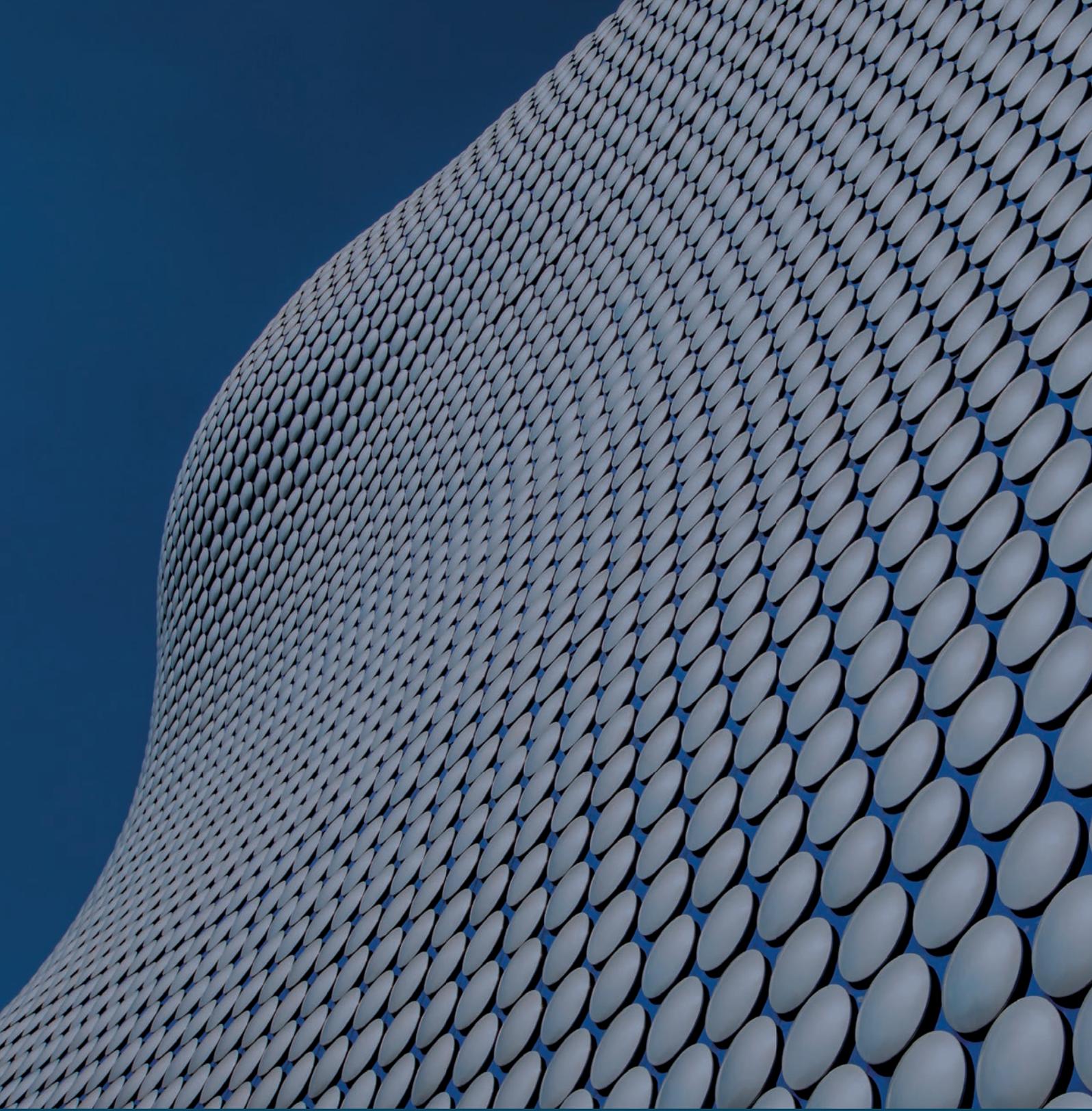
- 1) As the team broadens, and the numbers of people working with the departure lounge increases, it is advisable to consider the way work is recorded. This can be a challenge for a small organisation, as it can be seen as unnecessary bureaucracy and to detract from the 'real work' of a front line service. We understand this dilemma, and would recommend a conversation to explore possible options to ensure any evaluation and monitoring is not arduous to the team or those who use the service, but provides enough (accessible) data for easy reporting and evaluations to take place. It will also benefit the organisation in the sense of providing data for funding applications, identifying strengths and also identifying gaps in provision. Monitoring progress accurately can also be used as a motivating tool to help service users recognise how much they have achieved, complimenting their person-centred strength-based approach to support.
- 2) A new case management system has been recently introduced and earlier data from the initial database is now being operated alongside and migrated across to the new system to improve future data management. This work is being carried out by an inhouse IT support worker. Work with EP: IC or another specialist service to explore what might be useful to capture in the new database¹⁶. Suggestions include:
 - a. Start and End dates of engagement
 - b. Demographics, such as number of times exiting prison, sentence length
 - c. The outcomes being reached with each interaction
 - d. Reconviction data (if possible via Probation)
- 3) The different perceptions of risk can affect the way stakeholders understand how New Leaf work with returning citizens. This remains an important point to address since it might affect confidence in referring people to the service and managing misleading perceptions by stakeholders and New Leaf staff. Being transparent about risk management to partners would be useful to ensure their understanding of safeguarding measures.
- 4) Once the draft data sharing agreement is in place, it would be prudent to work with resettlement services to outline roles and methods of collaborative practice to avoid duplication. Partnership working is clearly key to making this initiative as successful as possible.
- 5) Several service users told us they were not aware of New Leaf before leaving prison. It would be beneficial to explore how to build awareness as restrictions reduce. This may include utilising the community hub in prison; managed by the Emotional Wellbeing Reps. Increase promotion through the newly designed leaflets through leaflets, posters and information packs. These could be made available through the Visitors Centre to promote the service to families and seek their help to motivate the uptake to those they are visiting. They could be more widely available on the wings, internal probation and the resettlement service within the prison. Additionally, more information on the website would be helpful to raise awareness.
- 6) It would be useful to connect with other services running departure lounges across the country, to identify areas of good practice and to have a likeminded and supportive network with whom to discuss potential ideas for overcoming challenges.

¹⁶ We did not see the full database in operation, nor do we know of upcoming plans, but this is based on what was available to EP: IC at the time of this review.



shaw trust





research@epicconsultants.co.uk
www.epicconsultants.co.uk

