

**Commissioned by the Ministry of Justice
in support of Transforming Rehabilitation**

**THE OFFENDER JOURNEY
from arrest to resettlement**

WHAT PRISONERS HAVE TO SAY

**Research Dialogues
by
Dialogue Associates and Prison Dialogue**

March 2014

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CONTENTS

SECTION	TITLE	PAGE
Content	Methodology	
Section 1	The Offender Journey	1
Section 2	Crisis of Entry / Re-entry	4
Section 3	Prison Sentence	6
Section 4	Crisis of Release	7
Section 5	Licence and Supervision	9
Section 6	Resettlement	10
Section 7	Female Prisoners	11
Section 8	Older Male Prisoners	12
Section 9	Male Muslim Prisoners	12

Methodology

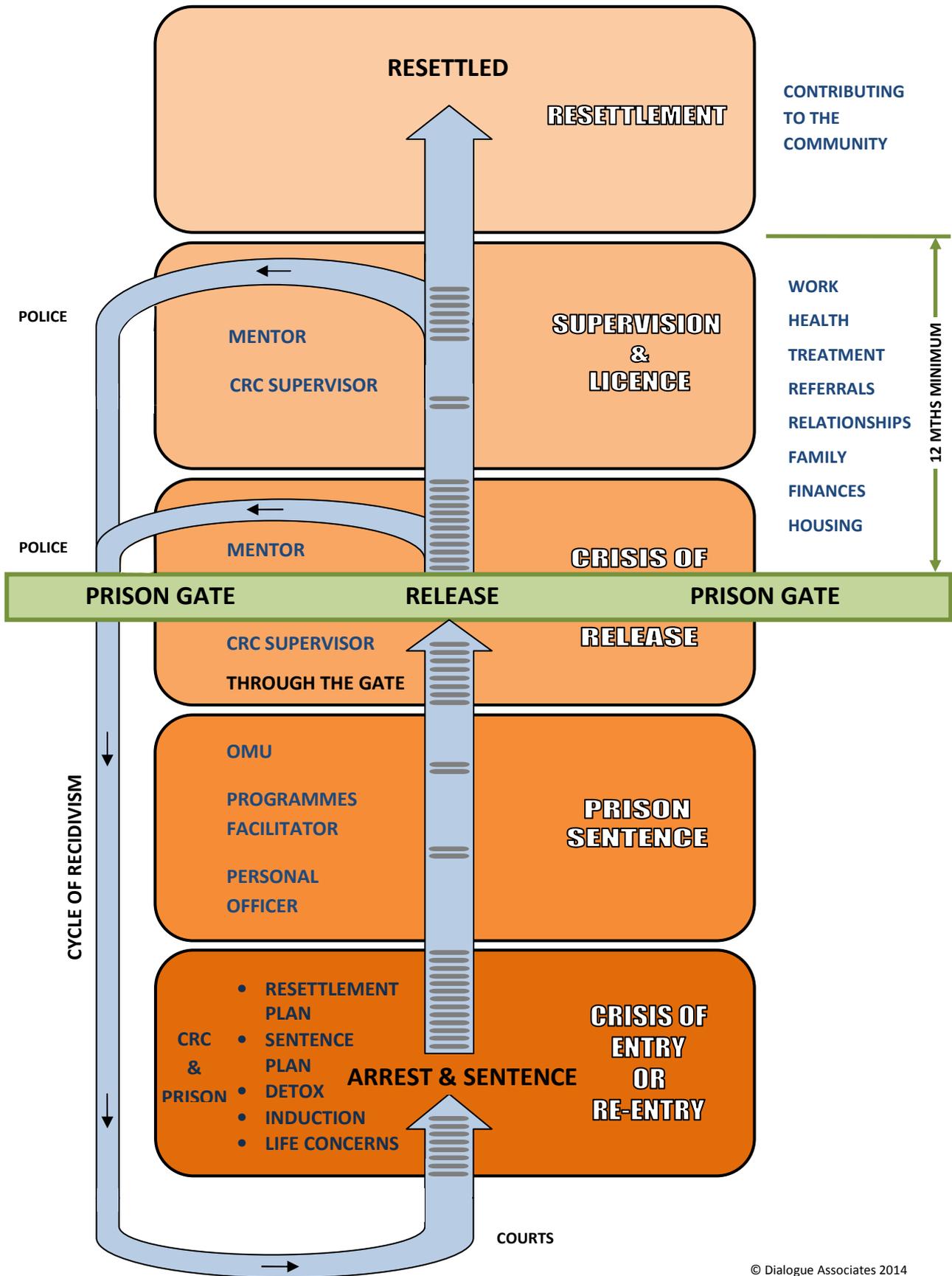
At the request of the Ministry of Justice, Dialogue was used to consult with prisoners about Transforming Rehabilitation. Dialogic Research as a methodology (rather than traditional focus groups, surveys or one-on-one interviews), is designed to find the authentic voice of those who are impacted by organisational changes but are otherwise excluded from influencing the design process.

129 prisoners (31 women, 99 men) took part in 10 Dialogue groups (of 7 to 20 participants) at HMPs Birmingham, Hewell, Foston Hall and Stoke Heath in March '14, with separate Dialogues for female prisoners, male Muslims and older male prisoners. The Ministry of Justice required the prisons to use protected characteristics to select a representational cross-section of prisoners.

At the start of each Dialogue the facilitators introduced themselves, and then the subject of the Dialogue by explaining the image of the generic Offender Journey (see p1). A check-in followed where participants each gave a fuller picture of their future journey by answering the question: "What will your life be like when you are resettled?" This set the sights for an open enquiry and Dialogue tracking the whole offender journey from arrest to resettlement. Sessions lasted for 2½ hours, including a coffee break. One of the facilitation team made notes throughout that the participants were welcome to check at any time. At the close of the Dialogue each person was invited make an audio-recorded comment – some declined to do so. The report that follows summarises the feedback and requests from the prisoners, based on their unique journeys. Some were experiencing their first time in prison, whilst others have trodden this path many times before.

The audio recordings available with this report (selected by content and audibility) have the additional power of hearing people tell their stories first-hand. A transcript is provided to help with regional accents. Prisoners agreed to the use of their recorded voice and signed a request form for copies of the report, that will be circulated to them and the prisons involved.

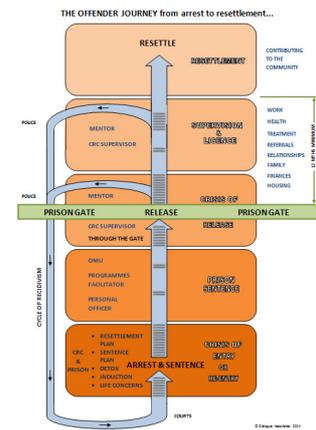
THE OFFENDER JOURNEY from arrest to resettlement...



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1. THE OFFENDER JOURNEY – from arrest to resettlement

Everyone has a unique journey through life, and every prisoner has the common experience of a broken journey. It is not until prisoners become authors of their own journey (rather than being dependent on other people, substances or the state) that they can successfully resettle in the community. Supervision has a key role in re-establishing successful journeys, and understanding the changing needs of an offender at any given time determines the best support and challenge to provide. The image of the generic Offender Journey depicts five steps from arrest to resettlement, namely: the Crisis of Entry/Re-entry; the Prison Sentence; the Crisis of Release; Licence/Supervision and Resettlement.

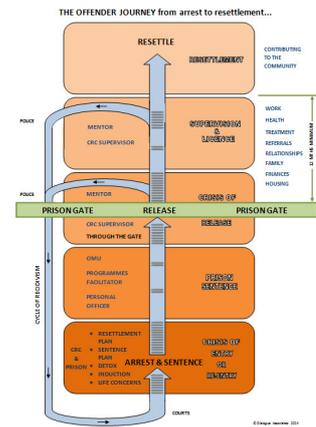


The offender is central to the entire journey, being the only person who experiences the whole thing, and whose progress is necessary for the success of the criminal justice system overall. At the start of each Dialogue session, the Offender Journey image was hand-drawn on a flip chart and described to frame the territory of the enquiry. All prisoners acknowledged the representation of the journey as self-evident, recognising the intensity of the crises (Entry/Re-entry and Release) and the extended stretches of inactivity whilst in prison. The offenders revealed that from their point of view there are a number of principles to take into account when providing supervision.

a) EVERY JOURNEY IS UNIQUE: Everybody's story is different. *He has a family to go to and he's 20 odd years younger than me. But I go out with no family. Each journey is practical, I was at Uni, training to be an accountant. I'm in for six months and want to go back to Uni when I get out, but I don't know how to go about it.* emotional, *A lot of us don't like being told what to do. We are lads growing up. We have to learn by our mistakes. We've got to help ourselves.* with key relationships *That's the only thing that bothers me, make sure that my family is alright.* and social concerns. *I fear retribution for me and my family when I get out, so we will need to sell our house and move elsewhere.*

b) NOBODY LEAVES PRISON WANTING TO COME BACK - breaking the inevitable cycle of recidivism: Despite prisoners knowing in theory that there are better options, there is an underlying sense of inevitability for many that they will return to prison again. *I've done the courses really and every course I've done has given me knowledge but it hasn't really helped me to stop me using drugs and to not offend really.* Some don't learn from their mistakes. *I've never accepted help. I've always thought I knew best since I first got in trouble when I was 16. I'm 32 now...* They don't have a clear picture of the life they want to lead. *I don't know, yet, what I need to keep me out of prison... I know if I'm off the drugs I'm more likely to stay out of prison.* and have become institutionalised. *... I've had the housing and that hasn't stopped me. It's having something to do probably, maybe it's a job. 'Cause I've only really had one job and that was when I was young, like 16 so I ain't worked for 10 or 11 years. Most of that time I've spent inside so I don't really know what I need to help me to change...* Some offenders are simply too dependent, and the lack skills and confidence to step off the treadmill. *Women don't want to come to jail you know, but with all this it's easier to sell your body.* The system provides support that can look good on paper, but in practice is often patchy and lacks continuity. Some offenders drop through the gaps. *NACRO will only see you when you've got 4 weeks left, but that isn't long enough to make plans.* Others find the hoops they are required to jump through stall progress. *Sometimes some of the targets they are setting you are almost impossible for you to fulfil basically.* At worst labelling based on the past sustains the broken journey.

I feel that I am judged for what I did. Who I am now is who I am... I am not who I was when I came in to prison. It is hard to progress when you are seen as an 'offender', not someone in resettlement. They need to see you as a person not a criminal. Treat you like individuals. They should assess your strengths, not just your weaknesses.



c) RELATE TO US AS PEOPLE - DON'T JUST TICK THE BOXES: *Everyone in this room is saying the same thing. We want to be viewed as individuals, not (the same as) the majority. Understanding requires deliberate interest in others. I want someone who will take the time to understand my needs. their strengths as well as their weaknesses. I think they focus on too much on what we can't do as opposed to what we can do, which, straightaway makes us work backwards. and leads to a meaningful resettlement plan. Tailor-made to individual needs rather than a set piece, set time and set courses. Relating to people starts with engagement. Body language and eye contact is important to build a relationship with your probation officer, but they don't even look at you. They are looking down at their form not at you. Listening. You need to have the opportunity to explain yourself, not be put in some box. Building a working relationship. I talked with my probation officer on video link for 10 minutes. We couldn't have a proper conversation. She had already missed an appointment to see me. We had no relationship. It is always rush, rush, rush. I was really angry and frustrated. I still am. That feeling just stays with you. And she will be supervising me when I get out and will have to try to get over that and work with her. Keeping in touch. My probation officer is sound. I have asked to stay with her. She keeps in touch, comes to see me, talks to my girlfriend. Explaining what you are doing and why, and intervening in the inevitable cycle of recidivism, not contributing to it. They just look at your file and they are prejudiced about you. They set you up to fail. Experienced mentors could help. They can say "well look I've been in your situation, I've done this, this and this to get myself to this situation where I am now".*

d) WORK WITH US - DON'T DO TO US: *They should ask us, work with us, not just tell us. Asking is different from telling. It gives you some choice, so you can learn to make choices and help yourself. Offenders can have good ideas about their own resettlement. The Probation Officers don't have all the answers, but you have the answers to your problems. So you have to help them to learn what you need. Personal responsibility is important for resettlement. We need to take responsibility for our own actions and get the ball rolling ourselves, not take the attitude I'm entitled to that. Forced compliance only lasts as long as the licence. You are just a number in a system. You are spoken at not with. They don't listen or hear what you are saying. Probation is about order and control. The wrong match of supervisor makes for harder work. She was not a day older than 25. She had been to University so she was telling me about life. How can a young Probation Officer like that be of help to me when I have brought up 5 children on my own and 4 of them have been to University? I have been through the University of Life. It is better to have a supervisor of a more similar age. Anyway, by the time I come out she will probably have moved on to another job.*

e) TIMING IS EVERYTHING: *Entering prison and leaving prison are different phases with different support needs. Entry is often a crisis for the offender, so is leaving. Communication may be more urgent for some at the Crisis of Entry. First of all, help before these ladies are even coming into prison. Down from probation, right through to court, to first coming in to prison. Whether it's your first time or your thirtieth time, it's going to be scary no matter what. At the Crisis of Release timely*

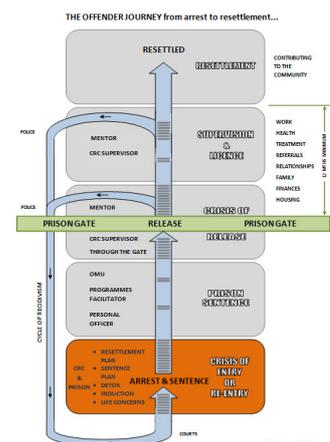
communication and follow-up action is crucial. *Consistency, more communication, and then when you do get to the point of release there needs to be more hands on.*

f) CONTINUITY: Continuity with the same named supervisor helps support communication. *If it's a stranger you aren't going to be as open.* and the working relationship. *You have to make a bond with your probation officer. I have had more than 10 of them over the years so it's hard to make the bond.* Through-the-gate. *I think that the resettlement part of your sentence, if you like, should start before you leave...* Remember that prisoners have families who are support the offender may be more effective for others. *What would help me right, it's my family right, once I get out of here I got to get back into a job and that family support is there...*

THE REQUEST: Supervisory support throughout the whole journey from arrest to resettlement. *They should be assigned to you, come and see you, set you targets, and have a prison partner who would work with you throughout your sentence.* Training with prisoners. *New supervisors need to come into groups like this to learn about prisoners and what they need.* The opportunity for groups to work together to address particular needs. *Could Probation work with groups of people in prison? A group of older prisoners have very different needs from a group of younger prisoners.*

2. CRISIS OF ENTRY/RE-ENTRY

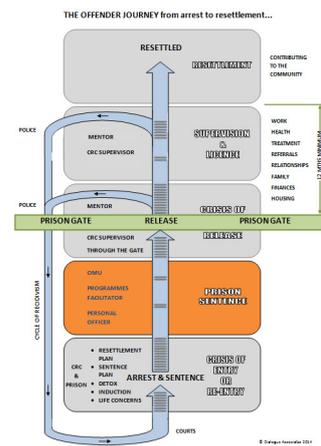
Few prisoners are cool calculating professional criminals for whom time in prison is an occupational hazard, but most suffer chaotic lives with some aspects that have run out of control. They find themselves in a game of snakes and ladders where it is hard work to climb up the board, and quick and easy to slide down. *You try and try, but you get knocked back, not rewarded. You start to think 'what is the point?' and just go back to what you know.* The less control the more the challenges. *And then I lost my flat, ended up on the street, and then I ended up back on drugs.* And when things are really going wrong it can sometimes seem easier to the offender to go back into prison. *When you are struggling, you've got nowhere to live, you don't get no support, then I just say "fuck it".* Part of the Crisis of Entry/Re-entry is driven by the intensity of activity demanded by the system despite the emotional, practical and social challenges facing the offender. Offenders go into court for sentencing, enter prison, undergo assessments, attend inductions, and participate in the drafting of sentence and resettlement plans. *When you come into prison they all want to talk to you. That is the first couple of weeks. Then when you want to talk to them during your sentence, you don't hear from anyone. Then when you are coming out, Probation want to see you and talk to you all over again. They only communicate with you when they want to – not when you need to.#*



a) THE EMOTIONS: Prisoners feel a range of different emotions as they enter prison like confusion, regret, despair... Many are stressed and can't think straight. *When you come into prison your head is up your arse. You just need time to get it out of your arse before they start assessments and plans.* If they have experienced the quick and easy descent down a snake back to square one, they can feel angry and frustrated with themselves and the system. *I've wasted my life... 22 years in prison.* Others feel relief. *I haven't got anywhere to live and I feel safer in prison. I do. I'd prefer to be in prison than*

3. PRISON SENTENCE – a wasted opportunity?

A prison sentence provides a contained opportunity for offenders to recognise why they are incarcerated, think about what needs to change if they are to avoid coming back, plan for the future and take some practical steps to make some of those changes. However, despite the efforts of individual staff, agencies and initiatives, the overall system sometimes frustrates rather than helping to realise the opportunity, especially for short-sentenced prisoners.



a) THE OPPORTUNITY: Some prisoners work on re-building confidence and skills, and think about the future. *Prison has worked for me. I put my hands up to what I done and the life I was living. I am on the resettlement wing, I am a model prisoner. I have an advocate and an alcohol mentor.* Some benefit from attending courses. *The TSP course made my relationship with my girlfriend so much better. I learnt patience and realised that I was controlling. If I'd done the course before I'd offended I would never have offended and I wouldn't be here.* Others from support from prison staff, OMU, Chaplaincy, other prison support groups etc. *The Imam here is from our generation and from our community. He knows where we are coming from on the street and our experience in prison, as well as being our Imam. He does a lot for us. He can talk to us on the level and represent us to authority too.* They can learn to take responsibility for their situation. *A lot of us don't like being told what to do. We have to learn by our mistakes. We've got to help ourselves.* For some prisoners the stability of prison is restorative, or at least a respite. *I haven't got anywhere to live and I feel safer in prison. I do, I'd prefer to be in prison than out there looking for somewhere to put my head down.*

b) THE FRUSTRATION: Many prisoners have little or no information, guidance or support from anyone during their prison sentence. *All the time I've been in prison I've not seen one person to discuss how I stop re-offending. I've never met my personal officer although their name is outside my door.* They find the system inefficient. *They put me on an alcohol awareness course – but I don't drink.* Impersonal and dehumanising. *I came in last Friday; they automatically stopped me off (the drugs I am on). I've been taking them now 19 years since from when all the shit was happening as a kid. But they've cut me straight off. But the doctors are saying you're not on them... it's like they must think I'm lying...* They have to rely on other people to meet their basic needs, and nothing is done. *I was homeless when I came in, I told them. I have been here for 8 weeks and I haven't seen anyone. Now I'm being released in 3 days, and I don't have anywhere to live.* It is easy to become impatient and angry. *Officers are quick to push you to someone else. Nothing ever gets done. You're left in frustration.* With long or repeated prison sentences prisoners can become institutionalised. *Jail has become like home... I am more comfortable here and I'm scared of going back out.* and find it hard to think of another future and lose skills for living independently. *I've wasted my life... 22 years in prison. I do want to change but don't know how to.* A lot of the training and education is irrelevant for finding work. *You learn to lay 50 bricks in prison and everyone thinks it's great. That will never get you a job.* and the prison routine de-skills people. *We only work 6-hour days because of the regime... Is it real work or just pretend?* With short prison sentences there isn't enough time for the prison to provide anything meaningful. Healthy family relationships are difficult to maintain. *3 of my children are in care now. I haven't seen them since I came in to prison.*

THE REQUEST: Maintain contact with prisoners throughout their sentence. *They should be assigned to you, come and see you, set you targets, and have a prison partner who would work with you throughout your sentence.* Use the opportunity to build on the relationship. *Build that bond whilst you're in prison so when you get out you're happy to see him 'cause you've already got that bond going.* And track how the prisoner is developing during their sentence. *Who I am now is who I am... I am not who I was when I came in to prison.* Provide more opportunities for prisoners to talk and think about their situation, their future and how to get there. *People need at least once a week to be sitting to talk, whether in a group or one to one, if they've got any issues anything like that. Not just to an officer, even if it's one of the other girls on the wing who they think that can be good for the job.* Support the family so that they can play a strong role in resettlement. *They should support your family when you are in prison, then they can support you better. Mentors for families would be good. And separate visiting halls for families so that you are happy for your kids to come in and you can keep that bond.* Make sure that work and educational activities link to realistic opportunities on release. *We need to be equipped to compete in the job market with courses like fork lift truck driving, JCB, CORGI, not just brick-laying or plastering. And people have to be realistic with us about what we are learning.* and provide simple life skills training that some prisoners need. *I don't know how to cook a meal, or budget.*

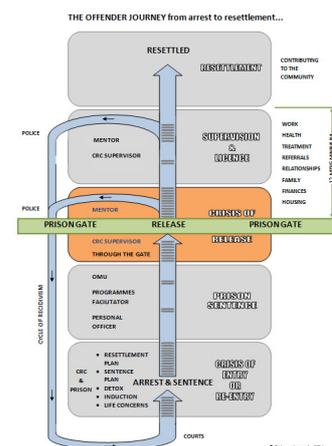
4. CRISIS OF RELEASE

As the release date approaches, prisoners start to think about the many challenges they will face. *It's much harder on the outside than on the inside.* Where will they live, what will they have to do to sign on, who will meet them at the gate, what will they wear....? When they cross the prison gates the challenges hit them immediately. *You're just thrown out there.* It takes time for life on the street to settle down and to gain a sense of normality.

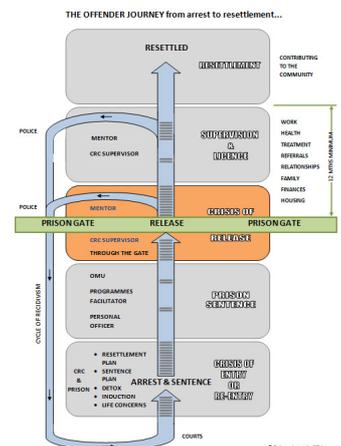
a) THE EMOTIONS: In the build up prisoners feel stress and anxiety about how their immediate practical needs will be met. *You are worrying a lot right... and when I saw what happened to Peter... he hadn't clue where he was going and he was worrying his head off for quite a while. So that's why I'm wondering what's going to happen to me. So it's worrying me what's going to happen to me a year come August.* They try to managing their own expectations, excited about being released but fearful of release too. *I'm very stressed. I'm coming up for my tag. I don't know if or when I'm gonna get it. I'm worried sick about it. But I'm just a number. Is anyone going to speak to me? No. You never see anyone face to face.*

And they feel the impact as they step over the prison threshold and onto the street. *When they open the gate and you get out, you stand there. It looks like one of those rides at the fairground whizzing around really fast, and no-one will stop it to let you get on.*

b) THE PRACTICAL: Prisoners have many practical concerns for release. Where they will live. *You've got to have accommodation. That's the platform, a rock to build on. Without it you can't do anything.* What it will be like. *You need decent accommodation. Not the dirty hostels that we are sent to.* Whether they will be required to go somewhere they don't want to go. *I don't want to be in a hostel full of crack heads and prostitutes.* How they will manage for money immediately. *You are thrown*



out of the gate with £46 if you're lucky. And get their benefits sorted out. *When I came out last time it took me 7 months to get my benefits back.* The basics, like what they will wear. *If you come out and you've got no clothes, you've got no clothes to go to a job interview and stuff like that, you don't feel confident enough. You don't feel right.* Looking after their health or drug treatment. *When my brother-in-law was released from prison he was OK. He has mental health problems, but there was no communication with the family, and he didn't have any medication. He was re-arrested and now he has been sectioned.* Things may have changed since they went inside - *Everything is computerised now ... Even collecting your pension you use a card with a PIN.* If they are on licence, they have to get to see their probation officer. *They don't give you enough time to get to probation that first day.* And manage the requirements of their licence. *I've been told I'll have to do a spell in XX (a probation hostel). That'll be setting me up to fail, it's full of alcoholics and druggies and I have somewhere better to go. I've got brothers and sisters I could stay with...* Circumstances can easily trip them up. *I had everything set up for me on release, housing, treatment the lot. I went straight to probation on the day I got out, and my boyfriend was in the waiting room. I never got in to see my probation officer because I went off with my boyfriend.*



c) THE RELATIONSHIPS: Relationships can be the most complex challenge.

Relationships with wives, husbands, and partners have to be renewed. *My wife said that she was going to sit me down and have a good talk about things when I come out. Things are different from when I came into prison. Prison has changed me and it's changed her too. She's been managing everything, and she's got her routines without me. You need to re-establish the bond. It will be like starting the relationship again.* The dynamics of the whole family are likely to have changed and will need to be understood and managed. *I've got 3 kids. My oldest lad is close to his mum and it's like he is the man of the house when I'm away. When I come out of prison, and I am trying to get my relationship back with my wife, he is in the middle. He resents me coming back. It is difficult and it is something we need to sort out. I don't know how to deal with it.* Families can make things more difficult. *Families put pressure on you when you come out. My mum will say "look what he has achieved while you've been in prison." You feel you have to succeed to compensate.*

d) THE SOCIAL: Prisoners may find themselves starting again in a new community.

They want to send me to Bangor. I have never even been to Bangor. I am 21 years old. How will I succeed somewhere I don't know anyone. Or returning to where they fear old friends will drag them back into crime *I know that I need to move out of my area – I'll re-offend if I go back.* Some fear facing disapproval or shame. *I fear retribution for me and my family when I get out so we will need to sell our house and move elsewhere.*

THE REQUEST: Continuous support through the prison gate, building on the relationship established in the Crisis of Entry, and carried through the prison sentence. Deliberate support during the crisis of release. *If the last 3 months of the sentence is spent on intense reintegration back into society then people will have a better chance of fitting into that society when they walk through the gate.* It could include support from other prisoners. *Like you have Insiders helping you settle into prison, or Listeners. Prisoners could be trained to do some of the work that the prison OMU should do, and don't have time for.* Emotional support is important to some prisoners, as well as practical

support. *I have a home and a family. I don't want to share these experiences with them, but I'll need to talk to someone about them.* Peer support could help. *There should be support groups for people coming up to release.*

MENTORS: Male prisoners welcome the opportunity to have a mentor. *Mentors need life experience and skills, not just have done a course.* Most men would prefer someone who has come through similar experiences to them. *You need someone confidential, who you can phone if you feel at risk, like an AA buddy. Who has been through it and understands the pressures you are going through.* Women are less convinced. *I don't want a mentor who's been in prison, no. You want a probation officer, a worker who you can trust, who cares and would always be there for you if you needed to phone them... you know.* A number of mentors could help with different needs. *Business mentors in who've run successful businesses and then they can give you ideas. You could have health care mentors.* Including family. *A mentor for family issues – I'd be happier talking to a woman about that.* Allocation of mentors matters, and sometimes re-allocation could help.

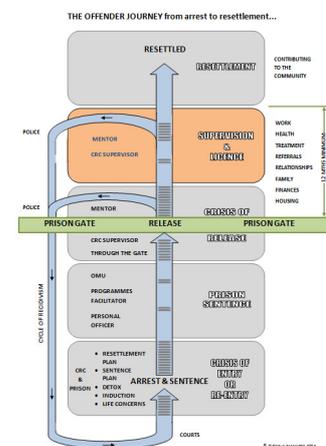
OTHER IDEAS: A mixed team around the offender. *You need a group of people around you to support you. Probation, for me the Imam, family, a mentor, all working together. Then you've got a more solid foundation to help out.* A Community Chaplaincy Team could provide important support and guidance for some. *The role that the Imam, or the Chaplain, plays in prison should be there to support you in the community too. We take their guidance, look up to them and trust them. In the community they would understand your experiences of prison and probation as well as as a Muslim.* A one stop shop. *When you get out there are too many organisations involved, it can make it confusing. There's probation, job centre, hostel, training, courses, police too. You need a one-stop shop where you can see everyone.*

5. LICENCE AND SUPERVISION – snakes and ladders

Once the immediate Crisis of Release is over people want to aim for stable housing, employment and family life. *If we had stability and somewhere to live then we'd be able to go on and get education or try and get employed or do courses.* The challenges that anyone would face are exacerbated by the impact of prison and, for some, the additional requirements of a licence.

a) CLIMBING THE LADDER TO RESETTLEMENT: A roof over the head doesn't necessarily make a home. *I don't know how to cook a meal, or budget. They sent me food parcels from the food bank with tins and things in it, but I've only got a kettle, so I can't cook any of it... 20 fucking tins!* People want the right

sort of housing. *There are good hostels. I was in one. It was clean, you had your own room, a key worker, they helped with budgeting and things like that. There was 24 hour support.* They want to find ways to earn a decent living. *I would work in the clothes I have on now if I could get a job. Prisoners are grafters. Lots of us work hard in prison and on the outside. We will do anything if we are given the chance.* and use their skills. *I'm a welder and just need the help to redo my certificates.* But there is a lot to navigate. *What do you have to do about reporting convictions when you apply for a job. We've all got different views. What are the rules?* and old habits to change. *When you are trying to stay clean and out of trouble you need something to do, otherwise the boredom sets in.* Some of the support really helps. *I had to see probation every week. It really worked for me. And I*



had support from a job agency and they got me work at Land Rover, sewing. I am a qualified tailor, I learned it in prison. They know all about me and my record. I work 3 days a week so that I can still do courses and everything else I have to do.

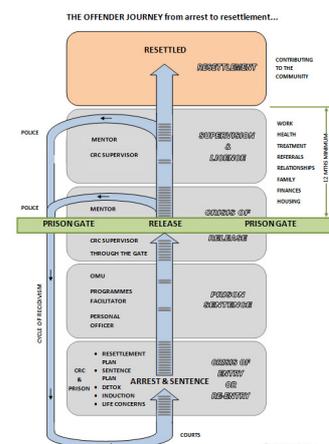
b) SLIDING DOWN SNAKES: It is hard to jump through all of the hoops. *The job centre place more requirements on you than anyone. I have to apply for so many jobs a week, jobs I know I won't get. And you have to be able to prove that you have applied, and that isn't always easy.* The easiest ways to work may not be above board. *I got a job through a friend. It was the only way I could find work, but it was cash in hand.* and conflict with licence requirements. *Probation wanted me to go the job centre. I don't want to sign on because I was working. I was being paid cash in hand. He'd book me job centre appointments I don't want to go to, he'll book me courses that I don't want to go to.* Family expectations can also conflict with licence requirements. *Probation want you to start with some voluntary work. I'd be happy with that, but my wife nags me to get a job as soon as I come out. I feel guilty about it, so if I can't find a job or make enough money I end up going back to crime.* They have to prove themselves. *You've got to get rid of the stigma, volunteer, prove that you don't want to offend.* and feel under excessive scrutiny. *Once you've been in jail you get targeted. Probation and police think you are still doing the same things.* Without stability it is easy to slide down the snake. *Because we've got no stability, that's where the re-offending comes from. The re-offending starts again and then you get back into the cycle of jail and then you get out, you've got know where to live.... Again and again... it's the way of life.*

THE REQUEST: Continue to understand changing needs and circumstances. Be available and responsive. *I've got a great probation officer. I ring her if I'm feeling stressed, any time of the day or night. They get things done, they give me priority.* Help with the issue that will make a difference for that person. *Could the supervisors help you with your relationship with the police?* Initiatives that lead to employment. *A certificate that they can take to any employer, where the government will give that employer say a grand for taking this person on for a trial period.* Real ways to become contributing members of society. *Not just making up mad courses to get you in a classroom and off the streets, just to make up numbers and tick the boxes.*

6. RESETTLEMENT

Some prisoners cannot see beyond the prison gate, or hostel life. They cannot picture life for them as a resettled member of the community. *You need to make people believe that they can change. I am institutionalised now. I've wasted my life... 22 years in prison. I do want to change but don't know how to.* Often it is a long journey that goes beyond supervision. *You should be able to self-refer to probation if you need it after your licence. You never know when problems come up.* Relationships and feelings need to be settled. *Resettlement will mean undoing the damage I have done to my family...*

Some know the direction they are aiming for in their life. *I want to achieve the basic things, my own spot, a normal job, and a normal wage. It would be really satisfying to have a wage that I'd earned legitimately.* And have a clear line of sight to get there. *All I want is a small flat with a garden at the front and back and someone to remind me to take my tablets because I forget.*



7. FEMALE PRISONERS

31 female prisoners participated in the Dialogues.

Female prisoners have many of the same experiences and requests as men, although the quality of their stories is rather different.

SHORTER SENTENCE: Many female offenders are caught in a permanent cycle of crisis – the Crisis of Re-entry rolls into the Crisis of Release relentlessly. They are running on empty. Just talking with a group of them about their experiences is an energetic and emotional roller coaster. The sentences are often short. *I'm in for 2 weeks for stealing some pork.* and the turnaround time minimal. *They put you in a hostel that is full of crack heads and prostitutes. So even if you have got the motivation to change by the time you get out there you get to the place where you're going within 2-3 weeks you're back in jail cause you're mixing with other criminals and other drugs addicts out there, it's a circle, the circle at some point has to be broken.* It can be easier to come back to prison than struggle on. *When you are struggling, you've got nowhere to live, you don't get no support, then I just say "fuck it".* After so long caught in the revolving door it is harder and harder to find accommodation. *I can't get in any hostels 'cos I've got a history of violence. I was homeless, so Jill put me up. I didn't have anything, she helped me out.* Each time they don't succeed another door closes. *I had a place, and brand new furniture in it.. all brand new. But my flat's been broken in to when I've been inside. The place is a mess. And they'll say it's my fault and I'm intentionally homeless and not eligible for housing now when I get out.* Many have drug problems, but without continuity they are just given more drugs rather than any therapeutic interventions. *I was on subutex outside, I had a script for it. They wouldn't give it to me in prison, they put me on methadone. I've never been on it before. I asked to get off it, but they won't let me. I'm due to be out on tag next week, but they haven't helped me with addiction.* Even the help they are offered does not seem to make sense. *The prison give you a piece of paper that you can take to a hotel promising to pay for 2 nights accommodation. But none of the hotels will take it. I asked one of the staff here if they have ever had to pay one, and they said never.*

THE REQUEST: Safety. *I haven't got anywhere to live and I feel safer in prison. I do, I'd prefer to be in prison than out there looking for somewhere to put my head down.* Caring, professional support. *I don't want a mentor who's been in prison, no. You want a probation officer, a worker who you can trust, who acers and would always be there for you if you needed to phone them.* People who are accessible and responsive. *I've got a great probation officer. I ring her if I'm feeling stressed, any time of the day or night. They get things done, they give me priority.*

LONGER SENTENCE: Women with longer sentences have the opportunity to settle into the prison routine and make fuller use of their time. *Prison has worked for me. I put my hands up to what I done and the life I was living. I am on the resettlement wing, I am a model prisoner. I have an advocate and an alcohol mentor.* Though that doesn't stop the emotional impact of imprisonment on them. *It is stressful. Everything is multiplied. It's going take me a long time to get over this.* or on their role in their families. *Even though you're in prison you are still a mother, a daughter, grandmother and a wife. While I've been I prison my father has died, my mother has arthritis and can't come to visit. I worry but I can't do anything. I wanted to be a grandmother and now I'm not there to see my grandchildren, to take them to school.* Some feel like they are forgotten victims. *They always interview the youngsters and focus on short-termers. I hope our voices are heard.*

THE REQUEST: Don't stigmatise us. *I don't want to be judged when I go out. We should be entitled to leave here and start life again.*

8. OLDER MALE PRISONERS

10 male prisoners over 60 years old participated in the Dialogues.

Older prisoners like to be consulted. *We don't feel old, but people see you as an old fart and tell you what to do. Why can't we put our own view forward too?* Like older relatives, they may have special needs, such as doorways wide enough for wheelchairs, regular dispensing of tablets, walking frames and support to sit down or get up. They like continuity. *Now they have told me I have to have a different Probation Officer. But I have had my Probation Officer for 10 years and I don't want to change to someone who doesn't know me.* They may be justified in thinking that younger Probation Officers do not appreciate their situation. *She was not a day older than 25. She had been to University so she was telling me about life. Where would anybody with a modicum of intelligence send a letter to a man of 73 that's supposedly been retired for nearly 8 years... the precise wording was: 'Go on some courses while you're in there so you can get gainful employment upon release'...* On normal location in prison with younger prisoners, older men can be taken advantage of and be bullied. *It is far better to have a separate wing for old timers. To survive on general location with kids you have to be fit and have a measure of arrogance – otherwise they will run all over you. Over the years they can lose outside contacts, suffer the death of family members and potentially become institutionalised. A lot of long-timers lose their family. They put you in Birmingham when your family is in Coventry. They say they do, but they really don't help you to keep contact with your family. They worry about their future. I fear retribution for me and my family when I get out so we will need to sell our house and move elsewhere. And can become detached from the pace of outside life. Everything is computerised now. Even collecting your pension you use a card with a PIN. How can Peter manage that? He doesn't understand how it works and his hand shakes too much to press the right buttons to get his money.*

9. MALE MUSLIM PRISONERS

21 Muslim men participated in the Dialogues.

Over the years there has been considerable improvement in decency and the respect shown for different religious groupings in prisons. *In multi-cultural communities like Birmingham most people understand needs of different religions, or they at least understand that people do have different needs. It might be different in other parts of the country, like Torquay...* There are real cultural and language differences to take into account when working with Muslim men. *Probation don't always understand the needs of your religion. They might give you an appointment when you have Friday prayers. If there is a death in the family... when a Muslim passes away you bury them quickly, the same day, within a few hours. If you miss an appointment because of a death in the family some Probation won't understand that.* Concerns relate to poor face-to-face communications with some Probation Staff who are often reported to be task-oriented and short on time, understanding and interest in their clients. *Body language and eye contact is important to build a relationship with your probation officer, but they don't even look at you. They are looking down at their form not at you.* The Imam and proposed mentors are seen as potentially helpful. *An Imam who cares, has a mission and is full-time to be available to prisoners on the wings, not just in prayers, makes a big difference. We are lucky here. The Imam is from our generation and from our community. He knows where we are coming from on the street and our experience in prison. He does a lot for us. He can talk to us on the level and represent us to authority too.*

THE REQUEST: A role for the Imam in the community. *When you are in prison you find your faith and take guidance from the Imam. That is such a good influence. You need that going when you are released too.* A team approach. *There should be a Chaplaincy Team for the Community Rehabilitation Companies too. The role that the Imam, or the Chaplain, plays in prison would be there to support you in the community too. They would understand your experiences of prison and probation.*