

## Scheme to crack cycle of offending

By [Martin Lea](#)

DORCHESTER Prison is the first jail in the country to run a scheme which tries to crack the cycle of offending.

Launched last year, Prison Dialogue gives inmates a chance to talk about their concerns and prepare them for the outside world while at the same time improving relations with staff.

It is a voluntary scheme aimed at repeat offenders and tries to tackle the issues that might lead them to commit crime again before they are released.

After a successful pilot, the work at Dorset's 'local' prison is now set to be extended.

Senior project worker Vince Miller said although the relationship was good between staff and inmates, it was acknowledged that the same faces were coming back to prison and there was a limited amount of understanding as to why this was the case.

Support from the Dorset Criminal Justice Board, the Tudor Trust, John Paul Getty Jr Charitable Trust and Network for Social Change helped to set up the not-for-profit Prison Dialogue to tackle the issue.

Working with Dorset Police, Probation Service and community agencies, Prison Dialogue runs weekly sessions in the prison which provide an open environment for prisoners ill-prepared for the outside world to talk freely about any concerns and issues. The sessions are also run out in the community for prolific offenders in deprived areas where hard drug addiction is an issue.

Vince Miller said: "Our aim isn't to flag up areas where intervention isn't working because Dorset does some good forward-thinking work.

"But the offender group is difficult to engage. These are people locked up for a period of time who are then put outside without any preparation. They're in a state of crisis and combined with drug addiction they get back into the offender cycle."

Prisoners focus purely on their daily existence but the scheme gets them thinking about their long-term future, Mr Miller explains.



TALKING HEADS: Leaders of the Dialogue Project at Dorchester Prison, Senior Officer Reducing Re-Offending Steven Patterson and Senior Project Worker Vince Miller

"We're talking about a shift from hopelessness towards empowerment and responsibility," he said.

Prison Dialogue 'engaged' 41 prisoners in its first year including five in the community and there is evidence that some of these people are remaining crime-free although it's early days yet.

"When you are dealing with people who have been involved in this lifestyle for a long period of time you can't expect to flick a switch and make it all go away," Mr Miller admits.

"We have to allow people space to commit to changing."

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