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THE OFFENDER JOURNEY - from arrest to resettlement WHAT PRISONERS HAVE TO SAY

**AUDIO RECORDINGS OF PRISONERS TALKING ABOUT
THEIR EXPERIENCES ON THE RESETTLEMENT JOURNEY**
from Research Dialogues, in prison, by Dialogue Associates, March 2014

Try standing in their shoes as you listen to their voices...

After 8 weeks in prison, 3 days before release I still don't know where I will be living...

I'm going to bring up about the housing, because I'm in a situation where I'm being released in three days and I'll be on the streets, back in the same situation, I don't know what to do about it so there's got to be help for ... I know there's a lot of people out there that are homeless, in the prison as well, but there's too many.

I've been caught in a revolving door for 15 years. It's easy, but it's wrong for me and for the community

Well being a PPO which is a priority prolific offender for the last 15 years I think support is the main key, the more support you get the more chance you've got of staying out there. It's OK to go to court OK you've done things; you've got to pay your penalties for that which I've got no problem coming to prison. Coming to prison is easy for me to do, that would be the easiest thing for me to do, cause I'll do my time, my little bit of time and then I'll get out and I'm OK. But the thing is there's no support out there and the support that they do give you is OK. We'll 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 out there, it's a circle, the circle at some point has to be broken. You can't just keep continuing, continuing and continuing to make the same mistakes, I m making mistakes but also this criminal justice system is making the same mistakes as I am because they're not doing anything about it. There's no resettlement needs in place, there is no under 12 month sentence, you're not on license, you're only at risk. Basically the police will have charged, for myself personally now I just have gone and handed myself in to a police station telling them that I was wanted because I wanted to get these charges out of the way. And, I've told them about everything that I can think of and asked them to enquire if there is anything else I am wanted for, being told no however I just got a letter in the post saying that I am now wanted in the West Mercia area for other things. They've got a responsibility, a job to do ,do it that's all I'm saying cause we're getting nowhere are we. It's the same faces for the last 20 years; it's the same faces all the time. It needs to change, it's wrong and it's not just wrong for me, it's wrong for the community because I'm impacting, whatever I do I'm impacting on the tax payer, so obviously do something about it. You can't just keep sending people to prison, it's not the answer. This is easy. It's easy. You don't have to worry about electric, you don't have to worry about food, don't have to worry about medication; everything comes to you on a plate. You go behind your door and you watch Jeremy Kyle. It's easy so it's up to them really; it's not in my hands it's in their hands.

So what do you need?

Support accommodation, single living. Being taught to live on your own responsibly, maintaining your bills. Making sure you have to go to your appointments. All of these things have got to be cheaper than sending people to prison.

For me its decent accommodation away from drug users and the possibility of a job

What I feel I would need personally, is to come out to housing, preferably a decent house and not shared accommodation where I'm going to be around other drug users who will trigger me getting back in to an old drug habit. And somewhere of my own basically. And some kind of possibility of a job to stop the boredom and not having anything to do in the day time and stuff like that. And having a bit of money as well so you don't have to do crimes to fund my habit and what not. Basically the simple things.

I'm over 80 years old and at my age we're worriers. I worry about where I will end up in 17 months time

I worry a lot right, and that, and when I saw what happened to Colin - I only know that he went outside and he hadn't clue where he was going and I know that he was worrying his head off for quite a while and that actually as to where he was going to go. So that's why I'm wondering what's going to happen to me, although I have a third eldest daughter that I say is stuck with me. I lost my home, the place I was living with was out housing 21, I lost that when I came here because my wife died a few years ago so they let me stop there and then I did something wrong and I found myself in here. So it's worrying me what's going to happen to me a year come August.

I've gone from pride to blame to debt to homelessness and back onto drugs...the slippery slope

Back in 2006 I had a flat it was a lovely flat done it out, I was proud of my flat, it was my first flat, I was only young, because I'd been in and out of hostels from a younger age with my mum and in and out of women refuges all around. I've not just lived in Walsall, I've lived in Kidderminster, I've lived everywhere just to get a roof over my head. Anyway, I was in jail now, got out and someone had broken into my flat, they left all in my flat, everything. I got the blame all the neighbours were pointing their fingers at me, it's you it's you, and it wasn't. So what it was I didn't pay my housing benefit up to 3 months while I was inside. Which wasn't my fault, and they're saying I owe 3000 or something for housing benefits, but how can I pay that when I'm in prison when they'd stopped it all. And then I lost my flat, ended up on the street and then ended up back on the drugs

In a bureaucratic Catch 22 that puts me in debt

This sentence I'm serving now is 14 weeks and that just breaches the threshold of 13 weeks of allowing me to keep my flat so on release of this, cause I don't want to lose my flat I'm going to be coming out to a lot of arrears and there's going to be no help in paying that arrears and I don't think there's enough focus on the individuals needs because if I was to give up my flat I bet I'd be homeless when I get out this prison sentence so its Catch 22 for the sake of one week so there needs to be more focus on the individual's needs and a bit more flexibility in that sort of thing.

Yeah better to give you that one extra week than you be homeless and have to start all over again.

Or stuck in the arrears with a lot of debt which affects credit ratings and things like that.

I don't really know what will keep me out of prison

I've just said what I said that 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. *Do you know what else would make a difference on top of the courses?* I don't know really because I've had the housing and that hasn't stopped me, it's having something to do probably, maybe it's a job. Because I've only really had one job and that was when I was young, like 16 so I haven't worked for 10-11 years. Most of that time I've spent inside so I don't really know what I need to help me to change and most people know what they need to help them to change, it's our job. But is it going to help to change, no I don't know. A job might keep me busy, so it might keep me occupied so I won't be thinking about going out committing crimes cause I'll have the money but I don't know what I'll use the money for. Whether I'll still be using it to feed a habit, or spend on clothes or whatever. *I think in that case you need somebody who can get to know you and help you understand what will help.* I don't know, yet, what I need to keep me out of prison, I think, I know if I'm off the drugs I'm more likely to stay out of prison cause that's the only reason I'm ever in prison is because of the drugs so I know that will probably most likely keep me out of jail, and somewhere to live really. Its boredom as well, so I don't know.

I want the IT qualification, but the skills are useless – the software is redundant

Yeah I'd kind of echo exactly what was just said, I mean even talking about the IT courses, there's one that's offered here, for example, okay you get an IT qualification to maybe level 2 in certain software but the problem is that the software you're using is 5 or 6 years out of date. So if you're looking at something relative to what you can use on the outside, it's pointless because the information you've learnt is out of date, it's redundant.

Walking out through that prison gate is a shock, a crisis - we need intensive reintegration work to fit back into society

I feel that the last stages of a prison sentence have got to be spent on more intense reintegration to society. So the actual impact of walking through that gate has lessened and you're more prepared for the moment that you walk through that gate when you actually walk through that gate. At the moment I mean open jails are slightly different, but every other category jail is too much of a shock to the system just to walk through that gate and nothing. Where as if for the last 3 months of the sentence is spent on a intense reintegration back into society then people will have a better chance of fitting into that society when they walk through the gate, that's what I think the whole process should concentrate on and support at the time they get through that gate and onwards.

We need to work with our supervisors in prison and know our goals for when we're released

Well I think that we been talking about how these new CRCs that are coming in to replace Probation and going to be privately run companies just making sure that's it's not just a low cost high profit exercise, they want to make a profit but they actually need to do something productive with us to help us rehabilitate. I think that's why we are in here to think about what we can do when we go out, not just meet them for the first time when we get released and them saying right you need to stick this condition, this condition and this condition. You know then beforehand so when you're released you've already met them several times, you both know exactly what you are looking to achieve and you've got a realistic goal there, so you can resettle, so you can get your own stable job and your own stable home.

Everybody is on a unique journey and we each have different needs on release

Well everybody is treated the same because over the years that is a process they've adopted. It's the easier way of handling situations but everybody isn't the same as I pointed out. That guy's needs are totally different to mine, although we as it happens are in prison for a similar length of time, if things go according to plan. But on release situations change, he has a family to go to and he's 20 odd years younger than me. But I go out with no family, now although at the moment I can sit here and I'm quite able to stand my corner and deal with situations but during the process of being in prison not only am I going to lose contact with the outside directly and what goes on within society out there I'm going to lose some of my faculties that I've got now and I'm not going to be the same guy at 81 that I was when I came in so you're going to have a lot more worries. 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'... and when I called her about it she said but you were working the day before you were arrested. And yes I was 70 years old doing a part time job. They just don't follow things up.

People working together with my family to support me would work better

Obviously if you've got probation, the chaplain, your family, all working together you've got more solid foundation to help out so at least you're communicating, it's not like you're going there and coming back, you're not really just going for your appointment where you're just another number, at least then you're talking and end up like bonds, they've got more feelings toward you to help you out and keep you off the bad path and keep you on the straight and narrow.

Specialised mentors with experience covering business, healthcare, etc is what we need

It's hard to say, the mentors they need to get in, it's no good having mentors that have just done a course and completed it. They need to get mentors who have got experience, like business mentors. They should get business mentors in who've run successful businesses and then they can give you ideas, someone who might want to start a business up and have business mentors to do that. You could have health care mentors, there's all sorts of mentors you can have for different things and then instead of just getting these ones who've just completed a course and then bringing them into do it. They need someone with experience and who have been in mentoring for a number of months and years even then just getting these mentors who've have just passed a test and haven't got no life experience and no experience of no previous mentoring.

I need a mentor who has been in my situation, who I can respect

The mentor I think is just ensuring it's not just a one size fits all approach, I think you do need a mixture of different people there from a number of different backgrounds, different convictions, I think one of the lads said earlier on about you do need people there who have been through the scenario, it's pointless having people doing mentoring and it's a bit of a part time thing, they've done a course so they think I'll go mentor ex-offenders. They need to really understand what the process is and what you go through obviously whilst you're in here and when you get out and you can relate to a bit more. There's that mutual respect and 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. Again, it makes it more a more realistic goal for you to aim for, you think right actually it can be done, it's not just something that's really far off, it's something tangible that you can really get your hands into.

And mentoring support for my family as much as for me

I think there should be more support for your partner and maybe your children when you're doing your custody or whatever, some kind of support group or a person, who maybe just looks in once in a while, see if there's anything they can do for your partner or your family.

The hoops to jump through are almost impossible for me. No help to get me off drugs - just more medication

You come out of jail and go to sign on and now they're sanctioning you for stupid things. Like anything you do you they're saying you have to prove. Just if I say I phoned up and applied for this job to say, just say Farm Foods for example, they're saying I have to prove that I've done that and it's like how do I prove it, if you know what I mean? And basically if you don't prove it after 3 times of not being able to prove that you've done this job then you get sanctioned. There's other things, like missing an appointment if you were sick one day, I suffer from epilepsy, so I got sanctioned for number one I couldn't prove that I had phoned up, made a phone call and applied for a job. One time I had an epileptic fit so I couldn't make an appointment and another time I never wrote down that about a job that I'd applied for on the internet so they then sanctioned me so that was four weeks with no money. So basically you've just got out of jail and I was struggling anyway, no accommodation or anything and it's like they're setting you up, setting you targets that some of them are impossible to fulfil. So you've got no money and how are you going to survive then? Sometimes some of the targets they are setting you are almost impossible for you to fulfil basically. *And that's just the job centre that's not...* Yeah that's just the job centre alone. *That's not supervision or probation?* Yeah another point is even like I had a drug problem so I'm going to the place I was going to was S... And to me I'm not getting no help, not offering me group work, not even one on one. I'll go there, see that Doctor. *How are you today Mr ... I'm fine, they start us 30ml, is that helping? No I'm still feeling a bit rough in the morning. Oh, OK I'll put you up to 40ml then.* Next week, not getting no help or assessments or nothing off my drug worker. Basically the only thing that is doing is putting me up and up and up on methadone. That's the only help I'm getting, whatever problem I've got, they're just medicating you more. There's no sort of help to try and get me off drugs. The only thing I'm getting is medicated up and up, so whatever I say I'm struggling sleeping, ok we'll put you on diazepam, so I'm already on a higher dose of methadone and then I'm on diazepam but there's no other sort of help to try and get me off the drugs or to try deal with the problem of why I'm on the drugs in the first place.

I am just into prison, they have stopped my anxiety medication and I am getting panic attacks

I'm ill. I can't keep being ill and I can't sleep. My sleeping patterns all over the place. I'm not resting. Plus I'm supposed to be on my Citalopram which I should take every single day for my anxiety. What they done is now is, they said they were going to confirm it from the doctors, what we on, Friday? Right I came in last Friday; they automatically stopped me off I've been taking them now 19 years since from when all the shit was happening as a kid. Sorry about my language. But they've cut me straight off. But the doctors are saying you're not on them. They've phoned the wrong surgery, they've phoned my old doctors surgery and I said no I'm back with my old doctor surgery, the ones that I've been with for 15 years. That's making my mood swings even worse. Everyone's different, I suffer from panic attacks now, it's like they must think I'm lying...

I need to talk to someone other than my family and people who've been in prison. Mentors who'd give you a fresh slant would be good

I think that there should be more support in here, not just if you've alcohol issues or drug issues, just general support. Consistency, more communication so when you do get to the point of resettlement there needs to be more hands on. Not just think well you've got family to go back to and you've got a roof over your head then you're going to be fine. No. It's about just having that other support, yeah we can talk to people that have been in prison as well. But sometimes we don't want to speak to people who have been in prison and we don't want to speak to our family, we need that other support network that you've got no attachments to .So it's not your family, it's not someone you've been in prison with, its someone else. I think there should be some of that buddy systems put in place, mentor systems put in place and kind of look at it more like a fresh start.

I say start re-settlement early and cut the cloth to suit the need

I think that the re-settlement part of your sentence, if you like, should start before you leave prison and be tailor made to individual needs rather than a set piece, set time and set courses.

An offender, an ex-offender or a person in re-settlement?

I think we should be seen as a person and not as a criminal when we're released and be offered better guidance and better educational courses or qualifications to get a job and get stability.

I can see why girls go out and re-offend

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 vary no matter what. First nighters are a great thing but I definitely think there needs to be something in place where it's carrying on all the time. People need at least once a week to be sitting, whether in a group or one to one if they've got any issues, anything like that, they can talk, not just to an officer or even if it's one of the other girls on the wing who they think that can be good for the job, there is that, maybe something worth looking at. Regarding people who have short sentences and life and people who are here for life or years, me personally I can't see how these people can personally cope, I'm here for a very short period of time, this is difficult enough for me. Prison is not easy; the hardest part is having the support, that isn't the support. I can see why girls will go out and reoffend, I won't personally, but I can see why. Regarding tag I think its wrong how you're never thought you'd be getting out on your tag date, you're not involved, they don't know you, you're literally a prison number. I don't see myself as a human being, I see myself as A4488DD and I will strongly believe that whoever is on the tag, whatever you're on for to have that opportunity be in front of that person to talk to them and everyone should be entitled to leave here and start life again.