

Through the Gate: the implementation, management and delivery of resettlement service provision for short-term prisoners.

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Abstract

This paper draws upon research documenting the implementation, management and delivery of Through the Gate service provision in one case study area across an 18-month period. In referring to interviews and focus groups with professionals, male prisoners, and the families of these men, the paper provides a critical examination of the practice implications of administering Through the Gate provision in a resettlement prison. In doing so we reflect upon the changes in organisational structures, the evolution of occupational culture(s), and on the impact on multi-agency partnership working practice evident within this Transforming Rehabilitation led period of transitional change.

Keywords

Transforming Rehabilitation, Through the Gate, resettlement, Community Rehabilitation Company, privatisation.

Introduction

In 2013 the launching of the *Transforming Rehabilitation* (TR) Agenda represented an attempt by the government to revolutionise the management of offenders and to restructure the delivery of rehabilitation services in England and Wales. One of the key drivers for the reform was to extend post-release licence supervision and rehabilitation support to those who had served less than 12-months in prison. In 2015 58% of prisoners starting a custodial sentence were sentenced to less than 12-months (Ministry of Justice, 2016a) and the ‘stubbornly’ high reoffending rate of this group – measured at 60% within 12-months of release (Ministry of Justice, 2016b) – was routinely used by the architects of TR to justify the need for reform.

The rolling out of the policy in May 2015 saw the re-designation of 89 of the 123 prisons in England and Wales (HMIP, 2016) as *resettlement prisons* tasked with establishing an integrated approach to service delivery. Through the Gate resettlement services, delivered by local Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRC), were required to help prisoners maintain or find accommodation; provide assistance with finance, benefits and debt; and to support them to enter education, training and employment. These were, in the main, not entirely new services in many prisons but were rebranded under the ‘Through the Gate’ (hereafter TTG) policy. This renewal of branding was considered to be important in making arrangements less fragmented and more innovative in their approach, drawing upon new and existing partnership arrangements to support prisoners.

However, by 2016, 12-months on from the policy implementation, a joint Inspectorate of Prisons and Probation report found that the CRCs efforts were ‘pedestrian at best’ (CJI, 2016: 3), that ‘work at the low of intensity we found was unlikely to achieve the aim of resettlement’ (CJI, 2016: 4) and that provision was ‘some distance from the original vision of a seamless service’ (CJI, 2016: 3). Less than a year later the Inspectorate published a further damning report (CJI, 2017: 3) that suggested CRCs ‘are making little difference’ to the prospects of prisoners on their release, that the overall picture was ‘bleak’ and that TTG services were ‘not well enough integrated’ into prisons. A picture was emerging of a confused network of organisations working to different agendas, with diversified priorities, and of systemic flaws in channels of communication and working that rendered processes inefficient. Prisoners were not reporting improvements in their experience of resettlement services and despite significant efforts in restructuring services there was little evidence of impact.

In this paper we draw on 18-months of observational and interview based research in one case study prison to add empirical rigour to these headline findings and to understand the

experiences of professionals, prisoners and their families during this period of great change in the administration of resettlement services. Our research activity allowed us to observe change from the inside, and through multiple tracked interviews, capture the experience of those involved through a period of considerable upheaval. At a time when the government has announced its intention to prematurely end the contracts of CRC providers and to re-align CRC contract package areas (see Ministry of Justice, 2018a) we feel it is important that learning from the experience of implementing TR in its first iteration is taken forward. As a consequence, in this paper we will map out the methods used in our case study and then, in turn, capture key themes from the research activity conducted with the professionals charged with delivering TTG provision; groups of prisoners engaging resettlement services within and through the prison gate; and then of their families during and after their sentences were completed. We conclude by discussing the three most pertinent findings for the practice community emergent through our research, namely, interrogating structural flaws in practice delivery; the health of the professional practice climate; and the missed opportunity to negotiate a fully cohesive notion of 'resettlement'. The pulling together of these three themes help us contribute to the dialogues that need to take place about how impending changes need to enhance the prospects for helping prisoners make better choices and access more appropriate forms of support to assist their desistance from offending.

Research Project and Methodology

This research project was based in a Category B resettlement prison in England. Though we worked in partnership to negotiate access and logistical support with the host prison and the local CRC who had the contractual obligation to deliver rehabilitation services there, we were independently funded and obtained NOMS ethical approval to conduct the fieldwork. An ambition of the strategic leaders within prison and probation services who sanctioned the research, was that it would generate dialogue and share good practice in the furtherance of the on-going learning and development work of partners involved in delivering rehabilitation services within the prison. Resettlement services within the prison are contracted to the CRC but are delivered by a third sector partnerⁱ, who provide their services on a sub-contractual basis. In effect, the third sector partner has responsibility for delivering resettlement services 'to the gate' with follow-up support and supervision provided by the responsible officer in the community who is employed directly by the CRC or the National Probation Service (NPS).

Our research explored the extent to which staff, prisoners and their families engaged with the resettlement process whilst gauging how this changed across time. We sought to examine the logistical capacity of the prison to facilitate resettlement pathways from prisoners and to identify and explore the role played by change agents - individuals, their families, prison staff,

partner agencies - in developing resettlement processes. Our research activity stretched from January 2016 until December 2017 and consisted of three sweeps of activity between January 2016-June 2016; July 2016-December 2016; and January 2017 and June 2017. In total we engaged 154 individuals in the research. In this paper we draw on research activity drawn from interview and focus group data generated with three identifiable groups. Our 'Professionals' cohort of 39 participants were drawn from across HM Prison Service, NPS/CRC Probation Officers/Case Managers, Voluntary and Third Sector partners. Senior managers in the prison initially identified this group yet this snowballed as we learned of other relevant individuals involved in the resettlement process. Our 'Prisoners' sample comprised 96 individuals serving sentences of 12-months or less and included 18 tracker cases whom we interviewed on multiple occasions through their resettlement journey in and beyond prisonⁱⁱ. This group were drawn from automatically generated lists which indicated all those serving sentences of 12-months or less who were either within the final 12-weeks of their sentence (focus groups) or were due to enter the final 12-weeks of their sentence (tracker cases)ⁱⁱⁱ. Finally, our 'Families' cohort consisted of 11 family members of the tracker cases with some of these again interviewed on multiple occasions. Interviews and focus groups took place both within the prison and community with access facilitated by senior prison and CRC managers.

To provide some further context to the research findings the period during which the fieldwork took place was one of the most challenging in the prison's recent history. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons ~~would~~^{iv} conducted a number of unannounced inspections throughout 2016 and 2017 – including one at our case study prison – that were routinely critical of the conditions and palpable threats of violence they encountered. Amongst others, at HMP Mount the Inspectorate considered that in terms of the ambition to train and rehabilitate 'it was absolutely failing' (HMIP 2018a: 6); in HMP Wandsworth that cultural change was required to stimulate greater focus on rehabilitation 'cannot be doubted' (HMIP 2018b: 5); that HMP Wormwood Scrubs continued to be blighted by the 'intractability and persistence of failure' (HMIP 2017: 5); whilst in HMP Liverpool the inspection team struggled to recall 'having seen worse conditions' (HMIP 2018c: 6). By the summer of 2018 four prisons – HMP Birmingham, HMP Bedford; HMP Exeter and HMP Nottingham – were issued with urgent notification orders^{iv} such was the level of concern. In an earlier work we have discussed the challenges of delivering rehabilitative intervention work amidst a penal crisis (see Taylor et al., 2017) and the squalid living conditions of the prison, coupled with the cultures of violence and use of psychoactive substances that appeared to stimulate prisoner's anxiety was consistent with our experiences of conducting fieldwork at this time. Practitioners routinely reported the deep anxieties they had about their ability to operate and function within this environment and family members too expressed concerns about the welfare of

their loved ones. However, it was the personal accounts of prisoners themselves of the sense of threat and inhumanity they felt characterised their traumatic experiences of the prison that were the most powerful. A key theme that ran through the cited Inspectorate reports above was that prisoners reported feeling unsafe within prison and we feel this is consistent – powerfully so – with the deep-rooted anxieties we found amongst prisoners.

Findings

Professionals

An overriding concern for professionals of all sectors was the speed with which the TR reforms were embedded, and the failure of policy makers to clearly articulate the vision for the practice models the reform agenda was seeking to make manifest. Even by the end of the research, nearly three years on from the rolling out of TTG provision practitioners in the field – from all agencies – still felt that the hasty introduction of change was undermining operational practice;

It was driven through too quickly and as a result I don't think things were embedded enough with the scale of the change required. It wasn't implemented in a staged approach, if I'm honest, I still think we're suffering because of that now. (Prison Service Staff)

Deep concerns were expressed about flaws in working practices where work was being unnecessarily duplicated by partners, communication channels hadn't functioned effectively, and, at their worst, current working forms were considered inefficient and superfluous to the task of delivering rehabilitation services. The conducting of the initial screening test, for example, as part of the prisoner's induction to the prison was cited as a serious area of concern by the joint inspection team where no routine checks were made of previous convictions and the limited time and resources to execute the screening process meant few staff looked for other information on prisoners (CJJI, 2016). In our case study area the staff who had to conduct screening processes, similarly, reported their dismay at the limited time and lack of private space to conduct full reviews of the service users they were engaging. From the very start of the process professionals were concerned about the failure to get the mechanisms functioning and to appropriately galvanise the service user's participation;

We're not getting induction right, it's still one day when others have five days and they have more receptions than we do...we have to improve induction, [it] is the best time to get information to people, providing you're not overloading that person. If you try and give all that same information on one day, if you came in the previous day, this is your first night in custody I'm bothered about my family. I'm bothered about my job.

I'm bothered about my finances. I'm not interested in going on an English Language course over in education, it's not a priority. (Prison Service Staff)

The enduring anxieties around dysfunctional induction processes were characteristic of broader concerns professionals reported around the failure to sufficiently bed in the models and principles envisioned within the reforms. The absence of joined-up IT systems and databases, for example, meant it was difficult to capture real-time information on individuals and for partners to share intelligence and insights from engaging service users. But worse still there appeared to be a breakdown in professional relationships where cynicism towards the wider reform agenda encouraged some to view new colleagues with suspicion;

This is the issue when you come to private companies, who does what?...[it used to be] the offender supervisor [was] somebody qualified to the same level as you are, same objectives, same goals, same targets. So you would go in, you would meet in a three-way meeting with the offender, you would talk about the criminogenic need, the offending behaviour, and move on to the resettlement stuff. [All that] has just been rebranded and packaged. Somebody is making a lot of money for doing absolutely nothing and has ruined a system that was effective. (Prison Service Staff)

Regardless of TTG it's my case. I go and do [my own] sentence plan with that person and if I'm making a decision that's a decision I'll have with that person and they're plans I'll put in place because I'm managing that individual's license...they [CRC] might have the contract and they may be responsible for delivering those services, but we're managing the case. (NPS Staff)

The above quotes from a member of the offender management unit and a probation officer respectively, whilst perhaps more extreme than others, did capture the sentiment of many of those engaged in resettlement work in prisons who had been deeply unsettled by the scale and scope of reform. The combination of being uncertain about how defined operational boundaries had been drawn and, at worst, about the credentials of new organisations and colleagues to deliver services compromised the integrity of service provision. In cases where professionals routinely dismissed the initial screening assessments they would require service users to undergo renewed questioning, duplicating work and confusing inmates in the process. A number of the Inspection reports (HMIP, 2018b and 2018c) similarly recorded how damaging such systemic shortcomings in negotiating meaningful joined-up working at this early stage was to resettlement interventions later on in the sentence.

For CRC staff, or more specifically third sector partners subcontracted to the CRC, it was a difficult working environment to operate within, in and through. During the 18-months of fieldwork there was a high turnover of staff owing to the intense tensions and frustrations practitioners experienced. At the core of third sector partner staff concerns was the sense

that nobody had ever fully explained their role and there was a feeling that of uniformed prison staff '90% didn't know what a CRC was and what they should be doing' (Prison Service Staff). In time staff numbers did increase and the third sector partner was better able to import good practice from other areas they worked in and their senior managers did secure greater managerial influence to help improve access to the prisoners. The overall experience for the third sector partner was however one of frustration at having to establish their professional credentials to deliver rehabilitation and to articulate how their practice expertise in working with marginalised populations could be mobilised for good within the CRC. All professionals reported, and our observational research captured, the renewed efforts that were made to navigate the silo working that derailed resettlement provision. However, the overwhelming general sense was that much more co-ordination and shared working practices were needed to bolster integrated working;

Too much has been about what we still need to work on. I say 'we' as it's not just about the CRC, it's about the partners and the prisoners themselves. It's about that joined-up approach. At the moment, I think it's quite stilted. That bit, then that bit, then this bit... the focus should always have been about how do WE [partners] together take ownership of that to understand what the individual's needs are and start to identify, early doors. What does this person need to sustain what they've done in prison and to make it real in the community? It's sourcing local community interventions and support that will allow them to continue with that. That's all of us in that. (CRC Practitioner)

Professionals, as a collective, reported that progress had been made to embed new working structures and to promote the importance of resettlement thinking in the prison beyond the immediate realms of the Offender Management Unit and the work of the CRC. They all recognised too that delivering rehabilitation services in the prison was exceptionally challenging. The conditions were poor and there was a 'churn' (Prison Service Staff) of high numbers of prisoners on short-term sentences that made engaging in productive work difficult. However, their overall sense was that resettlement services were fragmented with too many disjointed elements that was leading to the duplication of effort and partners were ignorant of the roles and responsibilities of other organisations. In an increasingly complex practice landscape within the prison the uncertainty over whose responsibility it was to lead on the implementation of the TR reforms and then govern the operation of the dispersed functioning parts meant professionals found this period incredibly unsettling.

Prisoners

Throughout the research, the most pervasive theme in interviews with prisoners was the sense that the wider prison environment induced extreme feelings of negativity and frustration. The Inspection Reports (HMIP, 20117, 2018a, 2018b and 2018c) collectively

identified what they considered to be - at times - squalid living conditions, of built up uncollected rubbish, and of cells being unhygienic. The prisoners in our sample similarly reported a lack of hot water, faulty lighting, and a sense of being 'treated like cattle' in what they construed to be inhumane conditions. Prison lockdowns were routine occurrences and often prisoners would only be out of their cells for short periods;

You feel a burden, I know you're a prisoner, I know you're being punished, but you feel a burden about everything in here. You've got to tell yourself, I'm still a fucking human being here. (Prisoner)

The assessment of the prison climate presented by prisoners was bleak and led some inmates to empathise with prison officers who they considered 'overworked and underpaid' (Prisoner) and unable to stem the relentless tide of antagonism stimulated by the conditions that the men reported. Scott (2016) has talked about prison cultures characterised by such fatalism as places of 'dehabilitation'. In our case study area the vivid accounts provided by prisoners of how unsafe and insecure they felt emphasised how intractable the prospects of achieving positive intervention outcomes had become.

In their reflections on engaging with rehabilitation services prisoners were generally negative in their assessment of the support available to them. They articulated resettlement as re-integration back into the community and entailing support around accommodation, employment, mental health, and drug and alcohol support but believed that these were not being adequately addressed. Not one of our cohort could name an individual who was overseeing their resettlement and very few could identify which organisations they had engaged with. Similarly, none of this cohort reported knowledge of having a resettlement plan whilst only a small number acknowledged having been offered/attended a pre-release course. Many considered that there was no strategy in place to support prisoners and when they did access support they judged that this was ad hoc, and had little optimism that support would be sustained;

I'm out on Wednesday, so Tuesday is my last day in here, and I still haven't had a resettlement thing, still haven't sat down with anyone, like someone from the jail and my probation officer, going, "Right, you need to do this, you need to do that, or find this, do that." You don't get anything. All I'm going to get is woken up Wednesday morning, taken to the gate, and then, "See you later." That is all that is going to happen. (Prisoner)

It was evident that many prisoners had had some, albeit sporadic, involvement with services within the prison but that very few considered this to have been organised, managed and coherent. Prisoners would recall having been visited by an agency, some would provide sketchy details of help they had received with a specific issue, and others of having been let

down when somebody else failed to respond. What emerged powerfully was a sense of apathy about resettlement services that at times stemmed from the prisoner's own lapsed engagement, the underwhelming experience of accessing services, and indeed of the pessimism of staff;

I got told ~~from~~ an officer, if you do less than three months, you won't get any help. They won't even look at the paperwork because they haven't got time to do it, if you do less than three months, there is no point in helping you. (Prisoner)

It was clear that very few prisoners considered resettlement to be a constituent element of their sentence, nor was it something that was routinely managed or reviewed with practitioners. There was frustration that they were not made more aware of what services were ~~available~~accessible and whilst towards the end of the research period directories of services were being made available and each wing was installing information desks many prisoners felt they would still struggle to know what was ~~available~~offered to them and who would provide the services. Others voiced concerns about the timing of being offered support with a recognition that 'they leave it until the last minute' (Prisoner). In turn, this prioritising of those close to release undermined the need to undertake longer-term support;

If it's left to the last minute, the last few days what good can you achieve, you've been here 5 or 6 months and done nothing and now you've got to get your head right, get yourself sorted and some lads don't even know where they'll be sleeping when they're gone. (Prisoner)

For those who had tried to and who did access support - including many of our tracker cohort - their insights offered further explanation for the general sense of apathy towards services. Ross and Richards (2003) have argued for the need to better understand the dehumanising practices of the criminal justice system in shaping individuals lived experience and defining of their sense of self. Men in our sample derided a set of processes that they felt 'treated everybody exactly the same [without recognising] everybody is being released into different circumstances' (Prisoner) and others considered engagements with practitioners to be more akin to 'a box ticking exercise that didn't ask about any personal questions' (Prisoner). It led some men to question how dynamic and tailored to individual needs the services could be. The routine and consistent engagement with an individual with the scope to link in with other forms of help was considered to be the most desirable way to enhance engagement;

Listen, listen to people instead of just brushing them off. It's all about listening and resolving issues. If you can't resolve the issues people are going to get tense, get angry and pissed off... A bit more interaction... That's all people need in here is assurance. I know they're not here to mother us because we're in jail. At the same time have a bit more about you, listen to people a bit more. (Prisoner)

The ambition of the TTG model was to develop a seamless continuity of support within the prison and then into the community and despite the overwhelmingly negative assessments of the men in our sample we did observe that prisoners were passed on to responsible officers in the community and staff working within prison were able to access services outside the jail to help some prisoners. However, whilst some praised the supervision they received these were very much a minority. The prisoners we engaged reported an absence of sentence plans, of feeling isolated, and - for those in the tracker cohort who had been released from the case study prison - of there being no continuity between services. When revisiting for a third time those who had been released 7 of the 18 had been recalled for breaching their licence, 2 had died (due to a drug overdose and taking their own life on release) whilst the remaining number were residing in the community. Their assessment of the support they had received was once again negative - as captured below – and highlights the scale of the challenges for practitioners in delivering TTG services;

Resettlement in the community is about finding you somewhere to stay. Hopefully they will get you some interviews for a job, get you back with the job centre, get your appointments sorted so you get paid as soon as possible to stop you grafting. Helping you, that's resettlement. All I got was a piece of paper where you've got to sign, you get released at the gate and then "see you later". (Prisoner)

Not one person has contacted me on the outside since I've been out, from any of the forces [events for veterans], from any of those things that I filled in [requesting support on release]. Not one of them have been to see me or contacted me since I've been on the outside. (Prisoner)

Families

Whilst not a new phenomenon for those involved in the delivery of rehabilitation services, the Criminal Justice Joint Inspection's (2014: 15) reiteration of the 'central role of positive family relationships in the rehabilitation processes' has refocused policy initiatives in this area. However, the families of those serving prison sentences we engaged did not feel as though they had been stimulated to play a role in this process or that their views, feelings or knowledge of the person were important. The majority of family members claimed that they had received very little or no contact regarding their loved ones and they were not aware of release dates or the details of the release plan. None of the families interviewed could name a person responsible for their family members release and resettlement. This induced feelings of worry, anger, stress, upset and confusion;

Even though they are adults to you, they are still your children and you still like to know what's happening to them. They're your children until you die, at the end of the day. I think they should be more informative to parents. (Prisoner's Relative)

The parents and partners of inmates reported being reliant upon their loved ones to report back on what resettlement activities they were engaged in. This made them worried regarding the accuracy and clarity of the information being provided as they were fearful of how successfully their family member could process information living within such stressful conditions and, on occasion, about how honest they might be. A powerful feature through the interviews was the eagerness of family members to explore the role they could proactively play in the resettlement processes. Whilst the majority were looking forward to their relative's release, others were not and described a real conflict between 'care' (Prisoner's Relative) and 'responsibility' (Prisoner's Partner) and of the scope to work with practitioners to help mediate their role;

You feel so guilty because you've said he can't come back here but I struggle to cope. (Prisoner's Relative)

I think he thinks I am soft. So I think he'll think, "well, if I say to my mum, well I've got nowhere to live" but what can you do? You can't see them on the street. I think the prison service will just say, "he's got somewhere to live; that's it". (Prisoner's Relative)

The family members we engaged provided vivid detail of how emotionally challenging they had found trying to understand the role they could play in supporting their relative. These tensions were characteristic of wider bodies of research evidence that emphasise the challenge for support networks in trying to reconcile an empathy with the position of their loved one, of wrestling with the frustration and, at times, shame they experienced in navigating the role they felt they should perform (see for example Codd, 2008 and Jardine, 2018). There was deep concern about the environment and climate of the prison and the impact it had had on their loved ones, and - like the prisoners - they did not fully understand the impact of post-sentence licence conditions and without tighter management were anxious about future breaches threatening life beyond the prison gates. They understood that they had a key role to play in the re-integration of their family members as they very often provided accommodation, money and emotional support. However, they often described mixed emotions regarding the assumptions and pressures that were placed on them and their role - and they did not feel the prison had engaged them to gauge whether they would be able to or want to offer support.

For someone that does want to start afresh, it's hard for them, I think. I mean, I know they've done wrong and they're in there for what they've done, but when they come out, they've served their time. Give them a chance. Not every one of them is bad. (Prisoner's Relative)

The reflections of family members on the experience of TTG provision were routinely characterised by the sense of being removed from the process and being unclear about how their relative's resettlement journey was being managed. The Farmer Review published in August 2017 stated clearly that families and friends were the 'the golden thread' to help reduce reoffending. Our sample of family members seemed keen to engage with efforts to work with their relatives but felt they needed the help of practitioners and peer mentors who had successfully desisted from crime to help co-produce resettlement plans.

Discussion

In this section we turn our attention to a number of key themes that emerged from our research. Our consideration of these themes, however, is not only motivated by their prevalence within our findings, but because they also represent important lessons for the impending process of re-alignment and retendering of probation services. Many of these themes relate to the organisational and systemic challenges faced by all three of our sample groups, but others belie a deeper malaise and cultural change that not only altered the working practices within the prison but also fundamentally changed relationships as different groups attempted to make sense of new working practices.

Structural Flaws

There was evident frustration at what the vast majority of professional participants considered to be the hasty and ill-advised rolling out of TR reform within the prison. A clear sense emerged throughout the 18-months of research, that for all their endeavours, partner efforts in enacting TTG change were always playing catch-up; that structural reform had never been able to be implemented as intended and allowed to bed in. There was an obvious lack of clarity around who led on implementing organisational reform. Where there might have been purposeful leadership to drive through change there was a malaise, as senior managers in the prison, probation services and CRC (the third sector partner inside the prison and other elements of the CRC in the community) looked to (re)position themselves in an evolving arrangement of professional relationships. The challenging conditions of the prison clearly played a role in not providing the time and space for managers to meet, prioritise and plan the coherent (re)design of resettlement services. But this tier of senior managers themselves felt that the struggle to assemble tight leadership mechanisms to oversee change - due in large part to them coming to terms with the nuances of shifted responsibilities built into TR - compromised the impetus for rolling out change. There was no blueprint or evidence-base to bolster practice development and too often they were having to work reactively in a

pragmatic fashion to align to the model. The playing out of these tensions were even more obstinate amongst frontline resettlement practitioners.

Organisational change is unsettling and can prompt in individuals related feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, as well as optimism and stimulation. Burke et al.'s (2017) research into the evolution of occupational cultures in probation following the introduction of TR identified how readily different groups formed, how some sought to embrace change whilst others felt much less certain. Here, we observed how incremental implementation of new operational working under TR was perceived as threatening by some working within the prison adding, as they did, to a deeper scepticism about the marketisation of rehabilitation services. The professional credibility of the service provision they were part of was seen to be challenged by extending responsibility for rehabilitation to other partners and this presented a threat to their personal certainty they found unsettling.

I'm not sure prisoners see the integrity of the agencies that contribute to TR as well. I think they're just seen as, "Oh, they're just paid to come in and this is what they do"...I believe in it [resettlement], I'm very passionate about helping prisoners, but I'm cynical about the reasons for it. (Prison Service Staff)

Third sector staff, undertaking new roles as resettlement service partners, had to enter into this climate and this added to the already considerable practice challenges they faced in supporting prisoners on their re-integration into the community. They had to work to establish their credibility within the prison and to toil to create mechanism to improve communication, information sharing, and, initially, securing access to the men on the wings. Staff did leave and reported being overwhelmed and frustrated in trying to establish systems to support their efforts to work with prisoners. The time and energy spent trying to overcome logistical challenges compromised the capacity of partners to collaborate and engage in innovative and reflective working practices.

Annison et al.'s (2015) work discusses how criminal justice partners through negotiating collective objectives in delivering integrated offender management services create a shared 'brand' of professional identity. Some staff within our study were starting to see subtle shifts in how they felt the prison could renew its efforts to rehabilitate and work towards longer-term goals with prisoners. The impetus to consider change in light of a critical Inspectorate of Prison inspection and, separately, strong prison officer engagement with a 'key worker' scheme being rolled out in the prison were taken as signs of positive progress;

There's more awareness of Reducing Reoffending, residential staff have far more awareness of their ability to impact positively and how their reaction can impact negatively. We're not just the fluffy stuff, the 'nice to do' stuff. Really, this is important. We're involved in violence reduction. We're involved in reducing reoffending rates. (Prison Service Staff)

The renewal of clear structures and processes to support prisoners from their initial assessment, through their sentence and into the community are essential to efforts to provide partners with a much clearer sense of their (and others') roles. A clearer definition of roles and responsibilities would reduce the potential for communication breakdowns and would help navigate the ignorance of partner's contribution to the delivery of services that to date has proved so damaging in the case study prison. It may also lead to a shared organisational culture of rehabilitative working.

States of Denial

Any such shared culture requires both trust and buy-in from all organisations and professionals operating at all tiers of the working structure. One of the stark contrasts evident within our interviews, however, was a disjuncture between senior managers and those involved in service delivery. At times, it appeared that these two groups were experiencing alternative versions of the same reality, as this extract from one of the researcher's fieldwork diaries exemplifies;

I spoke to one of the prison senior managers about our first report. They said there was nothing that was a surprise and that they [the prison and the CRC] had already taken steps to address the key issues raised. As an example, they referred to the new pre-release programme and how this was providing a clear blueprint for delivering meaningful resettlement work. I asked if there were any teething problems but was assured that it was working well. I found this confounding. I was with the CRC team [who deliver this programme] last week, all of whom expressed frustration and dismay at how this programme was running in practice. I was to observe the programme that day yet of the 15 prisoners due to participate, none attended (October 13, 2016).

This example illustrates a trend amongst senior managers to present their work as both positive and progressive yet for those on the ground to express conflicting views. This disjuncture was evident throughout both the interview and observational data we collated. It is perhaps tempting to understand this as an individual exercise (by senior managers) in either genuine ignorance or self-deception, enacted as a means to justify their position or the efficacy of their endeavours. Yet by drawing on Cohen's (2001) concept of 'interpretative denial' we may read further into this subjective construction of the truth. Here we see senior managers retain a positive outward facing persona when all around is so turbulent with such glossy accounts of truth serving as a veneer for the wider problematic realities of the status quo. Cohen (2001: 10) urges a further excavation of these *positive illusions*, recognising that 'Denial is thus not a personal matter, but is built into the ideological façade of the state'.

Given the wider context of organisational and procedural change experienced by senior managers, however, we contend that these positive illusions be understood as being built

into the ideological façade of *privatisation*. There appeared to be two key motivations for such behaviour. Firstly, to ‘evidence’ that one was delivering on your obligations (demonstrated mostly by those employed within the public sector). These positive illusions saw managers emphasising the inroads they had made, demonstrating a willingness to co-work with partners within the new TTG structures and ultimately delivering on their responsibilities. Secondly, to promote the ‘excellent’ work being undertaken (predominantly by those employed by the CRC). These positive illusions saw managers making headline announcements in meetings (and indeed in the case of the CRC via social media) to bring attention to the innovative resettlement work that they were championing.

When one broke through the veneer of these illusions, however, a beleaguered sense of resentment was visible amongst those who actually delivered these resettlement services. This group consistently alluded to these processes being established and promoted by senior managers yet achieving very little due to the systematic and strategic flaws highlighted above. The potential motivations behind these illusions were numerous; the opaqueness of contracts; the need to be seen to be doing something; the need to showcase the work being undertaken. Yet these illusions ultimately served to heighten tensions and demoralise those delivering services on the ground. Such a process highlights the need to replace the need for denial with an encouragement towards openness, honesty and integrity if future joint working practises are to be fully realised on both a public/private and manager/practitioner level.

Need to engage in a more holistic understanding of resettlement

One of the core ambitions of the wider TR reform programme was the hope that the creation of a market place of offender rehabilitation services would drive innovation and generate new ways to engage and support offenders away from criminality. There was, in particular, a stated ambition for the devolving of probation services to stimulate the increased involvement of private and third sector organisations within the frontline delivery of services. Whilst there is now a more plural community of service providers working to support offenders within prison and in communities, the extent to which service provision has been discernibly advanced is debatable. A series of reviews published into the impact of the TR reform programme conducted by the Justice Select Committee, the Inspectorate of Prisons and Clinks all identified that the lower than expected number of service users moving into CRCs meant funding was not as high as was planned for and the complexity of procurement processes and bedding in restructured working practices was hampering innovation. Voluntary and charitable sector partners were particularly affected by the more challenging than expected conditions that set in after the TR reforms were launched.

Within the case of the delivery of TTG services in prison we have seen here how the logistical and cultural challenges of adapting to a landscape being shaped by TR reform has hampered

the opportunity to properly negotiate the meaning of resettlement, and to then consider the adequacy of working models to meaningfully deliver support to prisoners. The third sector partner here, an established organisation with a track record of supporting marginalised communities particularly in the field of resettlement, are a prime example of the type of agency the TR agenda professed to want to (further) mobilise in the sector. However, as our research has shown, within the context of the prison they have found operating within the climate challenging and their staff report finding it difficult to influence change and make innovation happen. As an organisation working within a larger umbrella company providing probation services in a number of areas they have been successful in developing new working practices but in our case study area have found it more challenging;

We're a proud organisation with a strong history and we shouldn't hide as part of a CRC, our brand is a strong one and there's a lot we can bring here to make systems work better and provide better help, these are groups of people we have always worked with and we understand them as well as anyone. (CRC Practitioner)

Research evidence highlights the capacity of voluntary sector staff to have 'agentic effects and build positive relationships' (Tomczak, 2017: 166) and clearly, in the minds of third-sector partner practitioners especially, the organisations can offer new skills to the sector. However, structures developed since the TR reforms are not facilitating the critically reflective practices that allow partners to explore the scope to renew strategies for engaging prisoners. As the research has shown this can be extended to include the failures to engage with the views of prisoners and their families where amongst both these groups there exist well-rehearsed and well-informed ideas about how a more holistic definition of resettlement can be garnered. The interview data from all groups indicate that many are unsure of how leadership of resettlement work is delineated between prison staff, third sector partner staff, and the wider CRC to which they belong and the consequent malaise individuals report leads them to believe that not enough proactive work is taking place to develop more robust responses to prisoner needs.

The challenge for voluntary sector organisations - like the third sector partner here - when entering into (sub)contractual arrangements with criminal justice partners is the extent to which they can retain their organisational and operational independence. With the incentivisation mechanisms built into TR and the partnering with multi-national organisations there is a heightened threat that altruistic intentions can be replaced as organisations become 'colonized by an economic discourse of risk where measures of reconviction and value for money come to direct operations' (Mythen et al., 2012: 376). Likewise, the clear emphasis on 'offender management' and the exercise of collective power and control has the potency to compromise the status and place of third sector organisations as they could be seen to be consumed within an extended carceral network (see Tomczak, 2017). Our research in one case study prison suggests that future reforms need to consider how accommodating the

structures and conditions for administering offender management services are to fostering innovative practices that draw on the insights and expertise of the (extended realm of) practitioners, services users and their families.

Conclusion

The *Strengthening probation, building confidence* consultation (Ministry of Justice, 2018b) would appear to recognise the current under-performance of TTG provision nationally. However, the problems with the arrangements are mainly attributed to the funding pressures faced by the CRC providers and the response is a further cash-injection (£22million per annum) to enable providers to deliver an enhanced level of support from custody into the community. The findings from our case study would suggest that this is insufficient to address the systemic and long-standing problems we encountered. As we have discussed elsewhere (Taylor et al., 2017) the efficacy of mandating an extra 40-50,000 people into statutory post-sentence supervision on the promise that their resettlement needs will be met without providing either the resources or the organizational means to achieve this has not only placed extra pressure on an already overwrought system but was only ever likely to enhance feelings of resentment and disconnection among those delivering services and those requiring them.

Russell Webster (2018) has recently highlighted the injustice of the current arrangements in that released prisoners have little to gain from their involvement in post-sentence supervision as they rarely receive any proper support but they have everything to lose if they fail to comply as their non-compliance could result in recall to prison. Addressing this anomaly would undoubtedly be a positive start but the approach taken in the consultation merely represents another missed opportunity to reconceptualise and narrate a shared and operationally robust understanding of resettlement and suggests that new thinking is required if we are to tackle the 'institutional inertia' (BBC, 2018) that has gripped the prison service in England and Wales. Ultimately, future reforms also need to help generate a clearer shared rehabilitative working ethos where anxieties around the motivations and operational agendas of partners is more aligned (and respected).

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ⁱ The third sector partner are a charitable organisation who specialise in providing resettlement support. In the case study area they had a history of working within the prison to assist prisoners with their accommodation needs.

ⁱⁱ These individuals were firstly interviewed as they entered the final 12-week period of their sentence and then re-interviewed in the week (where possible, if not then within two-weeks) prior to release. A final interview was conducted post release in the community (or the prison if that individual had been recalled due to infringing their licence conditions) within their 12-month supervision period and not within one-month of release.

ⁱⁱⁱ To limit selection bias, the process of choosing individuals from these lists was pre-determined. Only those who were serving sentences of under 12-months who did not have Multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) were included. Tracker cases were identified and approached in order of their appearance on the automated list at the time of the fieldwork i.e. the person who had most recently entered the 12-week period prior to release and was therefore furthest from release was approached first, then the next most recent following on in chronological order. This method resulted in the shortest sentence of any of our tracker cohort being 5-months. The focus group participants were selected using the inverse approach whereby those closest to their release date were approached first, then the next closest etc. This method ensured that all ranges of sentence length were represented, from a matter of weeks up to 12-months. It is worth noting that whilst a small number declined the opportunity to participate in a focus group, all those approached for the tracker cohort (after being handed an information sheet and given a minimum of 24-hours to consider taking part) agreed to participate.

^{iv} [The Urgent Notification process involves the Chief Inspector of Prisons directly alerting the Secretary of State when there is an urgent and significant concern about the performance of a prison. The Secretary of State will then publish a response and plan of action within 28 days. There will then be a longer-term plan for sustained improvement.](#)