

Re-Integration

Life after prison

An evaluation
study of the
You're Equal Project

Jonathan Culleton and Fergus Hogan



Centre for Social and Family Research
Waterford Institute of Technology




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The Centre for Social and Family Research was established at Waterford Institute of Technology in 2003. It brings together the teaching and research strengths of members of staff from Applied Social Studies and Law. It is a practice-minded research centre, committed to the pursuit of social care and social justice, which seeks to develop collaborative research projects within the South-East region, as well as at national and international levels.



Executive Summary



Executive Summary

This research was commissioned by You're Equal Ltd., a partnership organisation of community and voluntary groups, local development organisations and statutory agencies. It is funded in the main by the European Social Fund through the EQUAL Programme. All of these groups are working together with the shared objective of removing barriers to employment for ex-prisoners and stimulating and supporting labour market activity.

The objective of this research project was to evaluate the work of the You're Equal Project, while working with prisoners, pre- and post-release, in helping them in their efforts to seek and secure employment. Rather than simply measuring the success of this project based on the number of participants who successfully secured employment, this study seeks to explore the deeper issues associated with prisoners and ex-prisoners' efforts to become employable. This issue of participants' employability will be considered in relation to the barriers and supports that affect ex-prisoners' ability to engage in work on their release.

The aims of the research were to evaluate:

- the macro elements involved in creating and sustaining the multiagency and multidisciplinary collaboration central to the You're Equal Project;
- the micro elements involved in the mentoring work.

Research process

This research has provided a forum for prisoners and ex-prisoners to tell their stories of involvement with the You're Equal Project. International research highlights the enormous challenge faced by ex-prisoners in joining the labour market. Hagell *et al* (1995) agree with most penologists in stating that 'release from prison is likely to be a traumatic event, particularly if the sentence was long, and it will also be a time of dramatic change – living circumstances on the outside may have changed, family structures may have changed, prisoners themselves may have undergone a range of different experiences that may affect them and their relationships with others'.

Without sufficient support upon release, the cycle of release and re-arrest can become increasingly difficult to break. Thus, the You're Equal Project has identified the need to bridge the gap between pre- and post-release services in order to provide an element of throughcare to ex-prisoners. Over the first 18 months of this project (June 2006 – December 2007), the mentors have worked with a total of 98 participants¹ in equal numbers at both Cork and Castlereagh Prisons.

¹ Given there were 98 participants in this project, all of the real numbers referenced can also be read as percentages. For example, '44 of the 98 participants were under 24 years of age' is so close to 45% as not to make a difference.

You're Equal participant profile

Since June 2006, the mentoring aspect of the You're Equal Project has worked with a total of 98 participants, 90 of whom were randomly selected for participation in the project in equal numbers at Cork and Castlerea Prisons, while the other 8 were more recent self-referrals to the project. A review of the case files of these participants highlights some interesting figures at the time of sentencing (*see Chapter 5 for full profile details of participants*):

Sentence profiles of participants	
Of the 45 Castlerea participants:	Of the 45 Cork participants:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21 were serving sentences of 12 months or less • 22 were serving sentences of 5 years or less • 2 were serving sentences of 5 years or more 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24 were serving sentences of 12 months or less • 20 were serving sentences of 5 years or less • 1 was serving a sentence of 5 years or more

Offences committed in Castlerea were mainly for assault and arson (generally while under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol); 3 men were committed for breach of barring orders or protection orders; 5 men had road traffic offences (ranging from no insurance to car theft); 3 men had public order offences; and 2 had manslaughter charges. While offences committed in Cork ranged from possession of drugs (for sale or supply) to burglary and robbery (including shoplifting), there were also sentences for road traffic offences, public order offences and assaults causing harm. Many of the prisoners had multiple charges.

Overall, the sample of participants worked with at Castlerea and Cork Prisons included:

- **Age profile:** 44 of the participants were younger than 24 years of age, while a total of 76 participants were younger than 34.
- **County of origin:** 91 of the participants were Irish by origin.
- **Relationship status:** 77 of the participants were single, while 14 were either married, separated or divorced.
- **Employment status:** Only 25 of the participants were full-time employed at the time of entry to prison, while 66 were unemployed.
- **Addiction status:** 52 of the participants admitted current drug and/or alcohol issues, while a further 31 admitted former drug and/or alcohol issues.
- **Accommodation issues:** 61 of the participants had recognised accommodation issues at the time of their release from prison; only 31 were going home on release.
- **Education attainment and levels of literacy:** 34 of the participants said they left school before the age of 14. While 72 of the participants said literacy was not an issue, 26 stated that they had literacy difficulties.
- **Disabilities:** Of the 98 participants, 6 had mental health issues, 1 had a physical disability and 5 had an intellectual disability.
- **Care responsibilities:** 63 participants stated that they had no children or they chose not to answer the question. 81 participants said that they had no care responsibilities, 5 said care responsibilities were present and 11 stated that care responsibilities were present and unresolved.
- **Ethnicity:** Of the 98 participants, 15 said they were members of the Traveller Community and 4 presented as 'other'.

Methods

This research evaluation required methodologies that could generate extensive qualitative data about the experiences of currently incarcerated and former prisoners in relation to their direct experience of the You're Equal Project. The study is primarily based on the analysis of 44 in-depth and semi-structured interviews, consisting of:

- 16 participants – 7 prisoners (3 in Cork Prison and 4 in Castlerea Prison) and 9 ex-prisoners (6 in Cork Prison and 3 in Castlerea Prison);
- 22 key stakeholders (professionals from within the prisons and service providers working outside the prisons);
- 5 mentors;
- Project Coordinator.

We strategically interviewed participants who were just beginning to engage with the project and others who were being supported by the mentors to live in the community, attend counselling or addiction services, secure accommodation and hold down paid employment.

In order to complement the qualitative interviews with the 16 participants, we adopted a case study approach, whereby 22 key stakeholders were interviewed directly, consisting of professionals from within Cork and Castlerea Prisons and service providers from community/voluntary groups, local development agencies and relevant statutory bodies working outside the prisons. We also interviewed the Project Coordinator and the 5 mentors.

Some of the key findings in this study are based on our experience of spending time with each of the mentors as they went about their daily work with the participants and network of support services, together with our experience of the process of interviewing prisoners and ex-prisoners. In addition to these interviews, documentary research and quantitative analysis were utilised to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the project: case notes, records and files were reviewed in consultation with the mentors, as well as minutes of meetings from the earliest planning stages to date.

Multiagency collaboration and networks of support

The You're Equal Project is a significant attempt by a partnership of service providers to meet the needs of prisoners on their release from prison. A small group of key people and agencies were responsible for driving the attempt to fill the gap identified in the provision of services to prisoners on their release through the You're Equal Funding Proposal. The establishment of the You're Equal Project was not, however, without its difficulties from the start. The key dynamic at the inception of the project was the challenge of two different institutional cultures (prison-based statutory services, on the one hand, and community-based services, on the other) coming together on the issue of re-integration – as one worker in the Linkage Programme at Castlerea Prison commented, *'two different traditions, different ideologies and different rationales, creating an interesting dynamic'*.

The progressive energy and momentum created through the You're Equal Project was recognised throughout. A key finding in this report is how positively the vast majority of service providers spoke about the new approach, whereby many traditional service providers have become more prisoner-centred. Key to the success of the project has been the structure of multiagency support that is central to the project. However, in addition to these formal support structures, the collaborative work of being prisoner-centred has had an exponential developmental effect within the two prisons involved.

Working together in this newly structured multiagency collaboration has generated a number of key outputs, including:

- the mentoring aspect of the You're Equal Project;
- 2 FETAC Level 5 accredited modules, developed by members of Cork Local Area Network, with assistance from NEVA;
- EXPAC were contracted by the You're Equal Project to develop an awareness-raising DVD;
- the self-employment training programme, developed by Castlerea Local Area Network and piloted in Castlerea Prison (ended August 2008).

Mentoring success

A major aspect of the You're Equal Project has been the employment, training and work of the mentors. An initial phase of the mentoring in-prison pre-release work includes the mentor helping the participant to reflect on his or her previous patterns of behaviour. The in-prison mentoring process then works to support the participant in focusing on how he might move to *'actually doing something different when he is released that will in fact break his previous cycle and pattern of behaviour'* (Jerry, mentor, Castlerea).


A key aspect of the mentoring work we observed as part of this evaluation project was how the mentors worked with the participants to assist them in negotiating their way back into the world outside of prison. Many of the men had been in prison so long that the world outside had changed, their previous family life had changed – on release they were simply lost. Within a rapidly changing Irish society, the challenges of re-entering society for ex-prisoners are more complex than ever before; one man, for example, who left prison during the time of this evaluation had never handled euros.

By forming a mentoring relationship with the prisoner while still incarcerated, and continuing that relationship both in the short and longer term post-release, the You're Equal Project is attempting to provide something unique – supporting the ex-prisoner through the difficult post-release transitions. Mentoring is a fine art in balancing engagement techniques: participants are invited and challenged to reflect critically on both their personal responsibilities and patterns of behaviour, as well as to become open enough to plan and ask for the supports they will need once released. The mentoring relationship contains the possibility of both helping participants work on themselves (or to help refer them to other service providers who can better assist in such work) and also helping them to organise structural issues, such as housing, welfare payments, health supports and job opportunities.

The mentoring aspect of the You're Equal Project is in itself relatively newly established and in a real way only in process for 18 months. Thus, any medium to long-term measure of its impact or success is limited. However, as this study shows, we are confident, having spoken in detail with the participants and service providers, that there are already very clear measures of success. Bill, for example, was among the first participants to engage with the You're Equal Project. His story was not unusual among the men we met: alcohol, and his addiction to it, was the cause of his troubles. Prior to leaving prison, the case conference planning meeting, involving the Probation Officer and mentor, had focused on Bill's need to begin addiction counselling. On release from prison, with the direct assistance of his mentor, Bill was helped to secure supported accommodation for the first 11 months. Recently, he had moved to semi-independent accommodation, which was a step he was nervous about but proud of. He had also secured a part-time job and had stayed sober. He was adamant that the success of the past year of his life was due to the support he had received, and was still receiving, from his mentor.

Key recommendations

- The You're Equal Project is underpinned by a philosophy of partnership. It has generated new means of multiagency collaboration, both within and outside prisons, focused on the needs of prisoners and ex-prisoners. This should be considered a core principle, which should continue to be supported.
- The You're Equal Project would not sustain itself or support the work of the mentors without the support of the Management and Mainstreaming Committees, together with the Local Area Networks, at both Cork and Castlerea Prisons, where the Programme Coordinator is the central liaison person. This collaborative and boundary-spanning management system should continue to be supported.
- The You're Equal Project has made considerable strides to include service users (prisoners and ex-prisoners) at all levels of the project. However, their involvement has, to date, had limited success. It is recommended that efforts should continue to be supported to expand the number of prisoners and ex-prisoners at all levels of decision-making committees.
- The greatest success to date of the You're Equal Project has come in terms of the role played by the peer mentors. Building on their positive contribution, new peer mentors may now be encouraged among participants and supported to become active members at various committee and sub-committee levels.
- The You're Equal mentors could not sustain themselves in this most challenging work without the ongoing peer support, supervision and training provided to them. This should continue and we recommend, on the basis of the model of work described in Chapters 6 and 7, that the mentors engage in further training. Ideal training for mentors includes the Mentor Training Programme, provided by the Omega Foundation, and the course on Motivational Interviewing (*see Appendix for details*). In addition to these, we would recommend further in-depth training in Redeployment Counselling and the Information Providers Programme, as well as some shorter, more solution-focused courses such as advocacy training, immigrant rights and entitlements, and conflict management and resolution. Also highly recommended for mentors are the two FETAC modules drawn up by the You're Equal Project, namely 'Understanding Imprisonment' and 'Restorative Justice'.
- The boundary-spanning role of the mentors and the Project Coordinator, bridging the in-prison and out-of-prison networks of support, has been recognised by all as a key success factor in the You're Equal Project. This role should be protected into the future, where mentors should continue to be employed 'outside of the prison service' in order to protect their perceived 'independence'.
- The You're Equal Project has included peer mentors. This report shows that all of the participants who worked with peer mentors recognised the positive way in which they brought their own life experiences to the mentoring relationship. Similarly, those participants who worked with non-peer mentors also recognised the skills and qualities that these mentors possessed. On the basis of this initial short-term study, it is recommended that ex-prisoners be considered as possible mentors in the future and, like every other candidate, they should be interviewed on the basis of their overall skills and competencies for the job.
- The You're Equal Project has been piloted in two regions and prisons – Cork (urban) and Castlerea (rural) – thus allowing for a comparative analysis of the service needs in these settings. We recommend that account be taken of the additional demands, and costs, of time and travel that are clearly associated with providing this service in a rural setting. The challenges of long-distance commuting, poor public transport and distance from other support services have



a direct impact on the caseloads and expenses involved for the mentors working in the countryside. We recommend that the rural aspect of this service continues to receive adequate support and funding.

- The caseloads of the You're Equal mentors have evolved over the time of this project. Careful consideration must be given to what constitutes a 'reasonable' caseload. Obviously, demands on the mentors' time are greatest at the time of prisoners' release; however, other crises (such as addiction relapse, housing or relationship difficulties) cannot easily be predicted by the mentors as they try to manage their caseload. It seems to us that the allocation of 15 participants at a time offers some balance and, on the basis of this preliminary study, we recommend that the appropriate caseload for each full-time mentor be kept in the region of this figure (*see also Chapter 5*).
- We recommend that further research be carried out to expand on these preliminary findings. Such a study should follow up with some of the participants after a longer period post-release to explore the longer term benefits derived from the You're Equal Project.



Introduction



1. Introduction

This research was commissioned by the You're Equal Development Partnership in order to evaluate the You're Equal Project. The study was carried out by the Centre for Social and Family Research, Waterford Institute of Technology. The You're Equal Development Partnership includes community and voluntary groups, local development organisations and statutory agencies, funded in the main by the European Social Fund through the EQUAL Programme. The Invitation to Tender document noted that:

You're Equal will operate a project aimed at removing barriers to employment, and stimulating and supporting labour market activity, for ex-prisoners. This will commence in March 2006 and terminate in December 2007.

The overall aim of the project, as stated in the You're Equal Development Partnership Agreement, was:

The maximisation of employment opportunities for prisoners and ex-prisoners through the development and mainstreaming of integrated appropriate training, mentoring and guidance services, and associated research and dissemination to influence the employment sector and inform policy within the prison sector.

This research report offers an evaluation of the You're Equal Project, where the central aim has been to assess its effectiveness in terms of outcomes over the duration of the project and to develop evidence-based recommendations for future policy and programme provision. In doing so, it is hoped to make a specific and positive impact on policy and practice in regard to the employment-related experiences of ex-prisoners.

Background to prison research in Ireland

Currently, within Ireland there is a renewed political movement towards increased prison placements, with relatively few research-informed critiques of, and critical comment on, aspects of the prison system in Ireland (McCullagh, 1996; O'Mahony, 1998 and 2002; Seymour, 2004). Despite Ireland's international status as a 'relatively' low-crime jurisdiction, press coverage and general public concern surrounding crime and criminal justice in recent years has seen policy-makers respond by attempting to be seen as 'tough on crime' through increasing prison places and upping sentence durations wherever viable (Kilcommins *et al*, 2004a).

Considering Ireland's recent expansion of building prisons, the Irish Penal Reform Trust believes that 'the Irish prison system is expensive, inhumane, inefficient and puts behind bars many people who should remedy their offences in other ways' (Seymour, 2004). McCullagh (1996) highlights 'the lack of published research material on all aspects of the Irish criminal justice system ... and the inadequate character of many of the official statistics on crime and especially on the courts and on the prisons'. Those statistics that are available would appear to show a criminal justice system that punishes a 'typical criminal' above another (e.g. white-collar crime).

The profile of the Irish prison population highlights the picture of a 'typical criminal' within an Irish prison population that rose from 1,215 in 1980 to 3,600 in 2003, but has seen a continued decrease since – to 3,199 in 2004 and 3,151 in 2005. The fact that Irish prisons are filled with young men from marginalised backgrounds is, however, incontestable (MacGreil, 1999; O'Mahony, 1998). Kimmel (2004) has called this increase in incarceration figures the 'masculinisation' of responses by the justice system in Ireland. Kersten (1993) suggests that such punishable behaviour is in part a response to a 'crisis of masculinity', which is closely related to high levels of unemployment among young men in disadvantaged areas.

Reviewing the statistics of the Irish prison population, McCullagh (2002) summarises:

The majority of prisoners were from lower working-class backgrounds. When they were classified according to their 'best ever job', 94% were either unskilled or semi-skilled manual workers. 88% of them had been unemployed prior to their committal to prison and 44% had never worked or else never had a job that lasted more than six months. Equally, for many there is little evidence of a work culture in their background. Only 39% grew up in homes where the father had a history of continuous employment and 32% came from homes with no working parent. Educational disadvantage is indicated by the number (50%) who left school before the legal minimum age of 15 and 80% had left school before they were 16. One-third had never been beyond primary school level and more than a quarter had literacy problems.

Challenges of re-integrating ex-prisoners into society

Rising incarceration rates do not simply mean that more people are being locked up. The trend also means that a growing number of ex-prisoners are being released into their community (Kurbin and Stewart, 2006). Within a rapidly changing Irish society, the challenges of re-entering society for ex-prisoners are more complex than ever before. Issues faced by ex-prisoners are in effect systemically interrelated – fitting back into a family or neighbourhood, finding accommodation, receiving treatment or benefits, complying with terms of supervision.

A primary challenge to successful re-integration is the challenge of securing employment, as Mauer (2005) notes:

Once a prison term is completed, the transition back to the community is almost always laden with difficulty. What in many cases is a situation of limited connection with the world of work becomes even more problematic with the stigma of imprisonment attached to former offenders. And particularly in an economy increasingly diverging into a high skill/high technology sector and a broad low skill service economy, few offenders have promising prospects for advancing out of the bottom rungs of the job ladder.

Thus, the process of leaving prison and returning successfully to society should be at the forefront of domestic public policy. However, the challenge faced by ex-prisoners in securing jobs has received some recent attention. The National Economic and Social Forum recommended that legislative changes be made to allow for the criminal records of adults² to be expunged after a period of time (NESF, 2002). It suggested:

In relation to employment, Ireland is the only country in the EU that does not allow for some form of rehabilitation, whereby mainly short-term prison sentences are considered spent after a period of time ... Many of those the team consulted mentioned this is a substantial barrier to gaining employment on release, especially in periods of high unemployment.

Research highlights the enormous challenge faced by ex-prisoners in joining the labour market. Brendan Butler, Director of Social Policy in the Irish Business Employers' Confederation, recognises that a significant number of employers in the Republic of Ireland would not employ ex-offenders and that employers routinely ask job applicants to declare any criminal records (Butler, 1999).

A 2004 report, commissioned by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, reviewed the Employment Equality Act, 1998.³ The authors (Kilcommins *et al*, 2004b) examined the proposed inclusion of four additional grounds of employment

2 Some attempts at reform have been made in respect of persons under the age of 18. Section 258 of the Children Act 2001 provides that where such a person is found guilty of an offence (and it is an offence not required to be tried before the Central Criminal Court) and a period of 3 years has elapsed since the finding of guilt (and the person has not been dealt with for any other offence in the 3-year period), he or she shall be treated for all purposes in law as a person who has not committed an offence. Kilcommins *et al* (2004b) have submitted a detailed consideration of this topic to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

3 The Employment Equality Act, 1998 currently prohibits discrimination in relation to employment on 9 grounds, namely: gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller Community. The Equal Status Act, 2000 prohibits discrimination on the same 9 grounds in the non-workplace area and thus complements the 1998 Act.

discrimination: socio-economic status (including social origin), trade union membership, political opinion and (significantly in relation to this study) criminal conviction/ex-prisoner/ex-offender. The report recommended that:

By introducing expungement laws for certain classes of offences and offenders, it should be possible to break the cycle of exclusion experienced by many offenders, thereby enhancing integration and resettlement. Such re-integrative initiatives should also contribute to public safety by breaking the continuum of exclusion and further crime. In many instances, and having regard to the need to strike a proper balance between risk-aversion and risk-taking, the adverse and unfair consequences of a criminal record outweigh the public's right to know. Enabling such records to be concealed will better ensure that a proper priority is resolved between the public's right to safety and the offender's ability to re-enter mainstream society.

The aim of the present research project is to evaluate the work of the You're Equal Project in working with such prisoners, pre- and post-release from prison, in helping them in their efforts to seek and secure employment. Rather than simply measuring the success of this project based on the number of participants who successfully secured employment, this study seeks to explore the deeper issues associated with prisoners and ex-prisoners' efforts to become employable. This issue of participants' employability will be considered in relation to the barriers and supports that affect ex-prisoners' ability to engage in work on their release.

Aims of the research

As outlined in the original research proposal, the aim of this research project was to evaluate the You're Equal Project in terms of overall impact and effectiveness. Within the context of the terms of reference, this project specifically aims to:


- provide a detailed description of the operation of the project in order to identify a benchmark from which the effectiveness of the programme can be assessed according to identified key goals and objectives;
- assess the impact of the project at the individual case level in terms of the extent to which identified need is met through delivery of and participation with services;
- assess the extent to which the project's objectives have been achieved, both at the organisational and programme level;
- identify the policy context within which the project operates;
- identify the views and experiences of all key stakeholders and assess the degree of participation and partnership among relevant agencies;
- assess the benefits of the programme in relation to overall outcomes;
- construct a policy and practice framework that deals with proposals for improved services for ex-prisoners and identifies best practice in the provision of such services;
- assess the extent to which the target group of prisoners and ex-prisoners were involved at all levels and stages of the project.

Methodology

The research questions and aims of this study (*see above*) required methodologies that could generate extensive qualitative data about the experiences of currently incarcerated and former prisoners in relation to their direct experience of the You're Equal Project. Furthermore, detailed qualitative data was gathered from the case records and files of the mentors and is presented in this report.

At the level of the individual

In seeking to research and evaluate both the experiences and outcomes, pre- and post-release, of the participants involved, and in agreement with the requirements of the commissioning agents, we considered it necessary to gather detailed first-person



narratives of the participants' experiences of their involvement in the project. Thus, 16 participants were purposively selected from both in-prison and out-of-prison settings in Cork and Castlerea. These participants were selected from each of the three groups of intake in order to give the study a view of the development of the project and the work of the mentors over a one-year period.

At the level of the organisation

In seeking to research and evaluate the experience of the organisation, service providers and members of the You're Equal Development Partnership relating to existing service provision, both pre- and post-release, we interviewed all 5 mentors (including one volunteer mentor) and the Project Coordinator. We also interviewed 22 key stakeholders, consisting of professionals working within Cork and Castlerea Prisons and service providers drawn from the Local Area Networks working in the community, in order to explore both aspects of pre- and post-release work with participants (*see Table 4*). We have been careful to include the perspectives of service users, prisoners and ex-prisoners, who have been part of the planning and organising committees of this project. Again, we carried out semi-structured interviews with each of these interviewees and, with their consent, recorded the interview, transcribing it for later analysis. The names of all the prisoners and ex-prisoners have been changed in order to protect their anonymity.

At the level of the programme

In seeking to examine current policy regarding employing ex-prisoners and outlining the impacts and lessons of the You're Equal Project for developing future programmes and service provision, we carried out a review of the literature (*see Chapter 2*). In addition, we attended Management and Mainstreaming Committee meetings in Portlaoise, as well as Local Area Network meetings in Cork and Castlerea where we also held focus groups with the key stakeholders (prison professionals and service providers). In some instances, we followed up these focus group meetings with telephone interviews with a number of the service providers to clarify points or seek further detail. We also welcomed and received some written submissions from service providers who had attended the focus groups.

While the organisation and management of the You're Equal Project encompasses quite a significant system of partners from widespread geographical and institutional backgrounds, we are confident that this evaluation report successfully represents the views and opinions of the various interest groups involved. In agreement with the stipulations of the tender document, we have attempted to use research methodologies, and the presentation of the report itself, in a way that the target group and the stakeholders will find useable and accessible. The findings are presented according to key themes to emerge from the interviews, with illustrative quotes from the service providers and, importantly, the participants themselves (the prisoners and ex-prisoners). (These quotes have received minimal editing in order to retain the flavour of the spoken word.)

Structure of report

This report is divided into 10 chapters, as follows:

- *Chapter 1* provides an introduction to the research subject.
- *Chapter 2* is a review of the literature to provide a contextual overview for the project.
- *Chapter 3* details the research methods employed, giving the rationale and approach adopted in this evaluation.

The findings from the study are provided in Chapters 4-9:

- *Chapter 4* brings together the perspectives of the key stakeholders (prison professionals and service providers) in both Cork and Castlerea as they reviewed the project from their perspectives, with a discussion on the process involved in the creation of a partnership approach through the development of the project.
- *Chapter 5* offers a quantitative overview of the participants' profiles in the You're Equal mentoring project, together with an evaluation of the work involved for the mentors.
- *Chapter 6* explores in detail what the mentors themselves had to say about the model and process of mentoring, as developed by the You're Equal Project, in Cork and Castlerea.
- *Chapter 7* examines what the prisoners themselves had to say about the early phases of the project and pre-release aspects of the mentoring process.
- *Chapter 8* is focused on what the ex-prisoners had to say about the ongoing and out-of-prison supports they received through the mentors and the project.
- *Chapter 9* presents the case study of one of the You're Equal participants ('Michael') in some detail and draws together some of the key themes in this review, with an example of the dynamics of mentoring.

Chapter 10 concludes the study, with a summary of key findings and recommendations of this research evaluation.

The *Appendix* gives details of the training undertaken by the mentors in the You're Equal Project.



**Literature
Review**



2. Literature Review

*'No one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails.
A nation should be judged not by how it treats its highest citizens,
but its lowest ones.'*

Nelson Mandela

Numerous authors have noted the shifts in punishment that have occurred in the Western world in the last 200 years or so. Foucault, in particular, has been instrumental in highlighting the movement from punishment as a physical public spectacle to the withdrawal of 'liberty' as the punishment of choice. The 'function' of the prison in a given society has therefore altered accordingly, from essentially a 'holding' facility used prior to punishment to actually constituting the punishment itself. Clearly, therefore, a nation's prison system is a cultural product, shaped by the prevailing social, political and moral values and attitudes (O'Mahony, 1998). Indeed, this 'cultural product' has been viewed by many commentators as a vital measure of the culture in question, as Winston Churchill's oft-quoted words illustrate: 'The mood and temper of the public in regard to the treatment of crime and criminals is one of the most unfailing tests of the civilisation of any country.'

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that criticisms of, and defence of, prisons in a given society offer a barometer for the ideological debates prevalent in that society. Indeed, as McMahon (1992) says, 'Since the inception of imprisonment as a major form of punishment about two hundred years ago, criticism of it has been endemic to its history.' For O'Mahony (2002), 'Imprisonment is now the ultimate form of punishment, the punishment of last resort ... All of the alternative non-custodial sanctions available for less serious crime, such as probation, community service and fines, depend on the availability of imprisonment as a kind of enforcer.'

As will be highlighted below, recent years have seen a return to strident demands for a return to more brutal methods and to a reliance on pure deterrence, fear and harsh punishment (O'Mahony, 1998). This phenomenon has been noted by Garland (2002), in particular in the UK and USA. O'Mahony and McCullagh, among others, have noted broadly similar trends in the Irish context. The profile of the prisoner in Ireland also mirrors that which is typical in the Western world, in that offenders tend to be young, urban, undereducated males from the lower socio-economic classes and the so-called underclass. A final similarity is noted in that, as in many other countries, a large number of prisoners are dependent on alcohol or opiate drugs, and many have psychiatric problems and disturbed family backgrounds.

This literature review, cognisant of all these concerns, will examine briefly the key historical context for this research project, before illustrating some more recent background information. Finally, this review will examine backgrounds to the methodologies used in the You're Equal Project, with particular reference to mentoring and mentoring processes.

Historical context: Prisons in Ireland

As noted above, the early part of the 19th century saw a change in the nature of imprisonment and punishment. Prison came to be seen as a way society could exact retribution for the crime committed; prior to that, prison was simply a place to confine criminals pending sentence and deportation (Aylward, 2002). As the concept of prison changed, the requirement for prisons to be larger and better suited to longer sentences became clear. Hence, the origins of the modern Irish prison system are to be found in the establishment of Mountjoy Prison in 1850 – it should be noted that the Irish Prison Service is actually one of the oldest public institutions in the country (Aylward, 2002). Particularly in the 20th century, Ireland, like many Western societies, has ‘abandoned corporal and capital punishment, and has placed imprisonment at the centre of the system of criminal sanctioning’ (O’Mahony, 2002).

For much of Ireland’s history since independence, both crime and imprisonment have had little impact on society and public opinion more generally. Crime rates, particularly in the first five decades of the State’s existence (1922 – c. 1970), were extremely low by any international comparison (Kilcommins *et al*, 2004a). Indeed, according to Aylward (2002), ‘during the period 1928 to 1956, the [Irish] Prison Service severely contracted in size as the general prisoner population decreased ... by 1956 the only prisons in use were Mountjoy, St. Patrick’s, Portlaoise and Limerick’. According to the analysis by O’Mahony (2002), in those three decades Ireland had virtually the lowest crime levels in the developed world: even in 1961, the daily average number of prisoners in the country, including unconvicted remand prisoners, was only 447.

Among the Council of Europe countries, Ireland had the most rapid growth in its prison population in the 17-year period to 1987 (Tournier and Barre, 1990). This is compounded in the Irish context by the fact that there is a strong orientation towards custody among Irish judges and imprisonment has been the dominant sanction in Ireland. For Riordan (2002), punishment in the Irish context is essentially a subjection of the criminal’s will, rather than an infliction of pain or a deprivation of some good. Punishment is also seen as ‘a restoration of an order of fairness’. This had led to Ireland instituting a ‘Criminal Justice Complex’ (Garland, 2002), which operates in a manner similar to that in the UK in particular; it also shares with the British system the outcome that ‘custody is the most expensive disposal and, once the prisoner is released, is no more successful at preventing future crimes than other (non-custodial) disposals’ (Home Office, UK, 1998).

In summary, according to O’Mahony (2002), in the contemporary era, imprisonment is aimed, to varying degrees in different cases, at ‘retribution (i.e. rebalancing the benefits of the offence by the application of a disbenefit); the reform and rehabilitation of the offender; a publicly visible form of punishment; the deterrence both of the punished and the public at large; the exclusion of offenders from open society; direct prevention of crime by incapacitation of the offender for the period of imprisonment; and the expression of community values and social disapproval’.

Immediate context for this study

The ‘Celtic Tiger’ period has coincided with a rise in crime and incarceration rates in Irish society. In the period 1987 – 2000, Irish prisons saw a 51% increase in the number of prisoners, with almost all of the expansion coming since 1996 and an enormous increase (658%) since 1961 (O’Mahony, 2002). The Irish Prison Service Annual Report 2005 notes overall committal figures of 10,658 for 2005, which is virtually the same as the previous year, 2004 (IPS, 2005). By contrast, the number of sentenced committals showed a marked increase on previous years, standing at 5,088 persons for the year 2005.

As the Irish Prison Service attempts to cope with these increases in incarcerations, the actual number of places tends to be exceeded on a regular basis in many Irish prisons. Castlerea Prison, for example, is a committal prison for male offenders aged 17 and over; it consists of two distinct areas (the 'Block' and the 'Grove') and has a capacity of 201 prisoners. In 2005, the average daily prison population in Castlerea was 210 (IPS, 2005). Cork Prison, a closed medium-security prison for males aged 17 and over, has a capacity of 268. In contrast to many of the State's prisons, Cork – on average, over a year – was not overpopulated and had an average daily population of 257 in 2005 (IPS, 2005). (This is not to suggest that Cork is *never* overcrowded.)

Social and economic background

It would appear valid at this point to briefly examine the prison population in contemporary Ireland. Penology has been an area long neglected by Irish academia, hence there is a limited amount of research available upon which to draw conclusions concerning the Irish prison population. McCullagh (2002) has highlighted this dearth of research, although his own review of the relevant literature suggests that the majority of prisoners in the Irish context are from a lower working-class background. This finding is further underlined by the fact that, in Mountjoy Prison, for example, 94% were either unskilled or semi-skilled manual workers, and 80% had left school before the age of 16. Hannon (2000), in a study of the health of Irish prisoners, found that 31% of her sample had either none at all or primary level education only, 53% had some secondary schooling and only 16% had completed secondary school. As suggested above, therefore, those who get sent to prison in Ireland are primarily young males with significant histories of early school-leaving, of unemployment that is intergenerational in nature and of serious drug problems (McCullagh, 2002).

According to the Irish Prison Service Annual Report 2005, the age profile in Irish prisons continues to be constituted primarily of young men: those between 21 and 40 years of age accounted for 67% of all committals in 2005 (IPS, 2005). The most important fact about the profile of the typical prisoner is that it is unambiguously one of relatively severe personal and social disadvantage (O'Mahony, 2002). O'Mahony (2002) and O'Donnell and O'Sullivan (2003) have noted that Irish prison populations are overwhelmingly those who, by accident of birth, come from communities that suffer from chronic unemployment, low income, poor nutrition, deficient education, bad housing and a whole series of related personal problems, such as family breakdown, alcoholism and drug addiction.

By way of international comparison, particularly inter-European, the rapid increase in Ireland's rates of incarceration can be considered quite high; indeed, in the 1990s the rate of increase was one of the highest of any country in the EU (O'Mahony, 2002). As noted earlier, however, the statistics in Ireland's case begin from very low base figures and, by international standards, Ireland remains a relatively low-crime country. Finally, while we imprison higher proportions of our population than most other European countries, Ireland tends to keep them in prison for shorter periods of time. The British Think Tank 'Reform' has characterised Ireland as a low-crime country with a high rate of imprisonment (see www.reform.co.uk). The *European Sourcebook of Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics* supports this argument, suggesting that in terms of Europe's 'stock' of prison population, Ireland is below European averages, while its 'flow' of prison population is quite high by the same measures (Ministry of Justice, The Netherlands, 2006). In 2003, for example, only 5 EU countries had a higher flow into prison than Ireland (of the 25 countries with data available).

Rehabilitation and punishment

During the 1960s, much of the Western world began to establish rehabilitation as the central rationale of prison systems. The increasing influence of the social sciences, in particular, had developed a concept of society as a 'construct' which could therefore be remade, or reshaped, to suit a particular philosophical or policy objective. Suitable conditioning, therefore, could also be applied to prisoners, according to this same logic, rehabilitating them and making them capable of leading a non-deviant life within society. Many commentators, Garland (2002) perhaps being the most prominent, have detected a clear shift in attitudes to prisoners and rehabilitation in the recent past. Riordan (2002) has noted that 'there now seems to be widespread agreement that rehabilitation is not the same as punishment. While it may be possible to offer prisoners opportunities of rehabilitation while they are being punished, it is clear that society sees some point in punishment other than the purpose of rehabilitation' (O'Mahony, 2002). In particular, a new public concern about crime and criminals can be seen to be reflected in crime and incarceration policy, and has become a 'real force in the debate about criminal justice in the modern era' (Aylward, 2002).

Garland (2002), based primarily on a review of the evidence from the UK and USA, argues that the most important elements of this transformation include the decline of the rehabilitative ideal; the re-emergence of punitive sanctions as expressive justice; changes in the emotional tone of crime policy; the return of 'the victim'; concern that the public be protected; a new populism and the politicisation of crime; the reinvention of the prison; a transformation of criminological thought; an expanded infrastructure of crime prevention and community safety; a commercialisation of crime control; new management styles and working practices; and, finally, a perpetual sense of crisis.

Some of this phenomenon is also present in the Irish context. O'Donnell and O'Sullivan (2003), for example, say that the prison has consolidated its position at the hub of the criminal justice system. Interestingly, the same authors are of the view that the rehabilitative ideal has no history of decline in the Irish context since it had never held sway to the same extent as elsewhere. Any analysis of the literature on the expansion of punitive intervention suggests the politicisation of the crime issue since the mid-1990s. These developments were fuelled by extensive media coverage of high-profile crime cases and the ensuing moral panic (Seymour, 2004). Further, the prosperous economic conditions arising from the era of the 'Celtic Tiger' enabled a prison expansionist policy to become a reality (Kilcommins *et al*, 2004a).

It should be noted here that despite the increases recorded in crime in Ireland in the last 20 years, comparatively speaking it is still a 'low-crime country' (McCullagh, 2002). Perhaps most significant is the fact that there is no clear relationship between the level of crime and the level of imprisonment (O'Mahony, 1993). As McCullagh (2002) states, 'they have not moved together in a statistically significant fashion'. The fact that imprisonments are growing at a rate not consistent with lesser increases in overall crime figures suggests, at the very least, that public concerns with crime, and policy responses to these concerns (including increasing incarcerations), are rather at odds with the reality of Irish crime rates, in the broader context. In fact, according to Stern (1998), in most Western European countries 'Government policy aims to keep the numbers going into prison as low as is acceptable to the public and to the judges'.

Mentoring

'Those having torches will pass them on to others.'

Plato, *The Republic*

The original mentor appears in *The Odyssey* as an old and trusted advisor of Odysseus who is appointed to look after the estate and Odysseus's son, Telemakhos. Within the context of the story, Mentor is a classic transitional figure, helping the youth achieve his manhood and confirm his adulthood in an adult world. Mentoring is clearly an age-old strategy for facilitating an individual's growth and learning, one perhaps best defined as a developmental relationship. A mentor's primary function is to be a transitional figure in a person's development. For Clutterbuck (2001), mentoring is one of the most complex and developmentally important relationships a man can have in early adulthood. According to Daloz (1999), 'Mentoring is a slippery concept. Most people think of a mentor as a person, usually older and more experienced, who is able and willing to help a protégé get where he or she wants to go.' Mentoring certainly involves a commitment to building a partnership and reducing power imbalances.

Mentoring manifests as a rather nebulous concept as noted and therefore quite difficult to define. Most definitions of mentoring agree that it involves 'teaching, advising and sponsoring protégés ... although a person can be mentored by several people simultaneously, the relationship is best conceptualised as a dyad' (Clutterbuck, 2001). However, in spite of the variety of definitions of mentoring (and the variety of names given to it, from 'coaching' or 'counselling' to 'sponsorship'), all the experts and communicators appear to agree that modern mentoring has its origins in the concept of *apprenticeship* and hence follows a certain structural pattern. Clutterbuck (2001) defines it persuasively as 'a protected relationship in which learning and experimentation can occur, potential skills can be developed, and in which results can be measured in terms of competencies gained rather than curricular territory covered'. Mentoring can be further defined within the developmental mentoring context as an attempt 'to help and support people to manage their own learning in order to maximise their potential, develop their skills, improve their performance and become the person they want to be' (Morselli *et al*, 2006).

In terms of the process involved, based on the above understanding of the concept, mentors can help individuals reach significant decisions about complex issues. They help clarify the mentee's perspective, while bringing an additional view to bear on the issues. Mentors are not there to solve problems *per se*, but rather to illuminate the issues and help plan ways through them. For Burt (1998), the core skill of a mentor can be described as 'having sufficient sensitivity to the mentee's needs to respond with the appropriate behaviours'.

To be effective, the mentoring role, therefore, adds value and moral content to the relationship and hence is 'a disciplined process, although it has few rules' (Clutterbuck, 2001). The necessary flexibility within the mentoring relationship also brings with it considerable responsibility on the mentor's part; in particular, mentoring must necessarily involve caution and a balancing between exerting a positive influence and overextending the relationship into dependence in various forms (Morselli *et al*, 2006). As Travis *et al* (2001) warn, 'enabling ideas to root in the minds of learners is an act of care and is not without risk. There is a potential danger within such a relationship, where some of the hopes and expectations of mentees clash with the realities of the instrumental and political motivations of some of their mentors, and inevitably, therefore, the nature of the surrounding society or occupational setting'.

Peer mentoring

In recent years, mentoring has also spread beyond the world of careers and work to embrace a wide spectrum of community needs – from schoolchildren and university students, to ex-prisoners and young offenders, teenage mothers, head teachers and the

unemployed. Indeed, peer mentoring has become a common device, used in business and education particularly, to develop the skills of younger members of organisations. Much of the research focusing on conventional occupations concludes that mentored individuals are more successful in their careers than those who are not mentored (Clutterbuck, 2001). The process of peer mentoring can therefore be explained as the input of a more experienced person, who serves as a role model, teacher, sponsor, and one who encourages, counsels and befriends a less skilled person for the purpose of promoting the latter's professional and/or personal development. Mentoring functions are carried out then within the context of an ongoing supportive relationship between the mentor and the mentee (Travis *et al*, 2001).

The mentor should therefore aid the mentee in helping them to become what it is they aspire to be, and to realise their full potential, while also taking an interest in their ongoing welfare. Effective peer mentoring should also help the mentee to face up to and resolve difficult situations in their lives and challenge them to take new directions at appropriate junctures. Finally, particularly in the case of mentoring ex-prisoners, the mentor must attempt to promote change in the mentee, helping that person towards a new vision of what is possible. Furthermore, highlighting the importance of such mentoring, the National Economic and Social Forum has recommended that ex-prisoners themselves, who have been through the prison system and are familiar with all the pitfalls, have a valuable role to play in helping others to re-integrate on release (NESF, 2002). Travis *et al* (2001) note the impact that 'successful ex-offenders' can have as role models and mentors for newly released prisoners. In particular, they note the credibility that such ex-prisoners can obtain from current and newly released prisoners: 'It takes one who has the eye, who can see the perpetrator and the behaviour', according to one successful mentee interviewed for that research. Furthermore, the authors say, 'It is important to recognise that people do excellent work when they get themselves together and help people who are still caught up in that system'.

Mentoring prisoners and ex-prisoners: International contexts

Prisoner re-entry poses considerable challenges for the Irish Prison Service and for policy-makers. As noted, many prisoners have difficulties after their release – reconnecting with families, affordable and available housing, and liveable wage jobs, not to mention re-entering peer groups that may have encouraged offending behaviours in the first place. According to Travis *et al* (2001), most prisoners fail to successfully transition to community life; in particular, the challenge of changing habits learnt on the streets and reinforced in the institution looms large. Indeed, according to the research by Travis *et al* (2001), some two-thirds of prisoners are re-arrested in the USA within three years of release. Ireland's recidivism figures are certainly lower – at 27.4% for one year, 39.2% after 2 years, 45.19% after 3 years and 49.2% after 4 years – although high enough to further highlight the intransigence of the recidivism issue (IPS, 2005). Burt (1998) has noted the fact that some social and occupational networks actively restrict access, forcing 'outsiders' to use 'borrowed social capital'. In such settings, outsiders have a greater chance for success if they have a sponsor who gives them access to his or her network (Burt, 1998). The reality is that in most Western societies, ex-prisoners are thus restricted and socially excluded, based on the nature of their life histories. Having been incarcerated devalues an actor's social identity (Goffman, 1963) and ex-prisoners therefore are often disqualified from full social acceptance. Having a mentor to access social capital on the ex-prisoner's behalf reduces the impact of such stigma and circumvents at least some of the barriers faced by this particular socially excluded group.

The following discussion is an attempt to place the Irish You're Equal Project within the immediate context of other international projects that share some similarities with the concepts utilised by You're Equal. It is clearly not an exhaustive list of all projects

that have attempted to re-integrate ex-prisoners, nor is it an analysis of these projects; rather, it is an attempt to give a brief overview of models of supporting ex-prisoners through mentoring (see 'Useful websites' for more details on these projects).


Ready 4 Work, USA

Several projects in the Western world in recent years have attempted to respond to what Cullen (2002) terms the 'legacy of the "nothing works" challenge to the practice of rehabilitation', where 'developing theories of effective intervention seemed ill advised if there was, in essence, no "treatment effect" to be explained'. For example, the Ready 4 Work Programme is an American project run by a US national 'not for profit' organisation called Public/Private Ventures. The programme began in 2003 and is funded by a number of agencies, both private and public, as the name suggests. It is co-funded by the US Departments of Labor and of Justice, as well as two private foundations, the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Ford Foundation. Public/Private Ventures administers the project on a day-to-day basis, with various organisations occupying seats on a 'management committee'. These seats are filled by representatives of the business sector, the criminal justice system and faith- and community-based social service providers, as well as the funders, all of whom collaborate to operate a structure that appears to resemble the partnership model – at least to an extent – in its consensus-building and cooperative philosophy.

However, the major differences between the Ready 4 Work Programme and the You're Equal Project also appear to lie within these philosophical underpinnings. Ready 4 Work is a faith-based initiative and is therefore motivated to 'improve the lives of former prisoners' through mentoring with trained volunteers from 'faith- and community-based backgrounds', offering 'spiritual' guidance, as well as more profane daily assistance in accessing social institutions, etc. The potential importance of such a service is highlighted by the fact that, according to recent research in the USA (Maruna and Immerigeon, 2004), parole officers there have an average caseload of 1-69 parolees and are able to make about 1.6 face-to-face contacts with each other per month. The mentors in this case are trained to help returnees change mindsets, deal with workplace challenges and build social relationships. The Ready 4 Work Programme has thus far 'served' 2,500 adult ex-prisoners, as well as 300 juveniles. The programme is spread over 11 different sites around the USA, all in urban centres with large prison populations. All participants in the programme are volunteers and must have been convicted of non-violent, non-sexual crimes only in order to qualify for participation. The programme focuses on three core elements of training: job training and placement, mentoring and case management. Clearly, several elements in the Ready 4 Work Programme offer similarities to You're Equal Project, particularly in the focus on attempts to connect with inmates while still in prison. Finally, in its own review document of March 2007 (entitled *Preview*), Public/Private Ventures suggests that, after just under three years, it is too early to tell if the system is working. This may be significant for the You're Equal Project, which has in effect been running for less than half that period.

Chance Project, Czech Republic

The Chance Project has been running in the Czech Republic since 2005, within the framework of You're Equal funding. This project describes itself as a 'comprehensive motivational and educational programme', which to date has processed 40 clients (4 of whom were female). Interestingly, the Chance Project involves a number of different agencies, including the Czech Prison Service, the Regional Education Centre, the Probation Service and the Czech Salvation Army, all of whom cooperate in order to run various aspects of the Chance Project. Without doubt, this management structure bears a striking similarity to the management structures of the US Ready 4 Work Programme and the Irish You're Equal Project, based in Castlerea and Cork. While the partnership-style organisation of the You're Equal Project does appear to be a development unique among this type of mentoring and ex-prisoner support project, it cannot be considered



as entirely without precedent. As discussed later in this report, the partnership model appears to be a positive new departure, offering a considered pre-existing structure and philosophy for the project, something which had to be generated from elsewhere in these other cases. In the case of the Chance Project, all mentors are trained volunteers and, again in a manner similar to the You're Equal Project, work with clients begins prior to release and continues indefinitely post-release.

StAMP Mentoring Programme, Australia

The StAMP Mentoring Programme, run by the Community Restorative Centre (CRC) of New South Wales, Australia, has been in existence since August 2004. Reflecting an emerging pattern, this programme also comprises a range of local community organisations and Government agencies, as well as the funder of the scheme, the New South Wales Attorney General's Office, all of whom work collaboratively 'to develop a coordinated approach to supporting people who have been in prison'. As the programme has developed, further linkages have been deemed appropriate as clients' needs became apparent. Hence, in 2005 the StAMP Programme formed an association with the New South Wales Aboriginal Advisory Committee, having found that a number of their clients originated in that ethnic group. Finally, as with the Ready 4 Work Programme and the Chance Project, all the mentors in the StAMP Programme are trained volunteers and are drawn from the general New South Wales population, with no more than two clients working with a particular mentor at a time.

SOVA Project, UK

The SOVA Project in the United Kingdom was created to help 'strengthen communities, and reduce crime' and offers a final interesting example of mentoring in this context (SOVA stands for 'supporting others through volunteer actions'). With a slightly different structure and considerably larger than any of the projects mentioned above, SOVA is a national body, in operation for 30 years, dedicated to voluntary service with prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families. SOVA is primarily funded by the Prince's Trust and is a registered charity under UK regulations. The project comprises some 60 different schemes dotted throughout the UK, which fulfil a variety of functions – from supports, such as mentoring and 'befriending', to education and training, representation, mediation and resettlement support. Several of these 60 schemes have in recent years begun offering a mentoring service to clients, with a particular focus on young offenders and those serving probation orders. Clients are referred to the various SOVA projects in their area by the Prison or Probation services; they are then assessed by a SOVA project worker and assigned a suitable mentor. From that point, the relationship is intended to work in a manner similar to those discussed above, with the major difference being the fact that in SOVA's case mentors are trained and fully professionalised, hence offering a service somewhat similar to the You're Equal Project in terms of the mentor-to-client group dynamic.

Comparisons with You're Equal Project, Ireland

A number of central themes emerge from any such review of mentoring prisoners and ex-prisoners in the international context. Firstly, it is clear that the concept of offering mentoring relationships to prisoners and ex-prisoners is a relatively new one. With the exception of the SOVA Project, the You're Equal Project and the others discussed above have all begun in the last three to four years. Even in the case of SOVA, the mentoring aspect of its work is relatively new. This newness means that no longer term research is available thus far in order to evaluate the effectiveness of such schemes. However, the fact that they all began in a short period of time, in a variety of different locations around the world, suggests that a 'gap' had been perceived in Western attempts to rehabilitate and re-integrate prisoners, and that a broadly similar solution was arrived at, independently, in several locations. All of the projects cited above have copious

'anecdotal' evidence of the success of the mentoring concept; however, as in the case of the You're Equal Project itself, only longer term research will categorically prove their success or failure.

A clear difference between these projects is the issue of the status of the mentors themselves. In some cases, the projects involve volunteer mentors, typically drawn from the local community; in others, the mentors are fully professionalised. Interestingly, in either case, the description of the role and duties of the mentor in their relationship with the client is very similar, suggesting that mentoring does have a set of core attributes, regardless of the professional status of the mentor in question.

Finally, the structure of the projects themselves warrants a brief mention. As highlighted above, there is a great deal of similarity in how these projects have been constructed. With the exception of SOVA (which has been established for a much longer period and has developed structures over its 30 years of existence), all the projects are operated by a collective of different interest groups – from prison and probation authorities to local and community groups, charities and religious organisations. A common feature appears to be a 'management' or 'steering' committee-type structure, which is composed of a number of relevant agencies and groups.

You're Equal Model: Mentoring prisoners

'Most prisoners get out with just a bag over their shoulders ... the hardest part is when you get out the gate. If you don't have somewhere to go and if you don't have money, you're gonna have to rob.'

Michael O'Riordan, Workers Resource Cooperative, 2006

The 1994 report by Ireland's Department of Justice, entitled *The Management of Offenders: A 5-Year Plan*, recognised the fact that 'one of the greatest difficulties facing offenders ... is that of coping in the community when released from custody'. The report also noted that very often offenders have no option but to return to the social scene that contributed to their wrongdoing in the first place, with very little prospect of gaining employment. These employment difficulties, in particular, prove to be an intransigent long-term problem for former prisoners. They tend to possess low levels of workplace skills and education, as noted earlier, and the addition of a custodial term to an ex-offender's personal history further reduces their employability.

It would be forgivable to assume that release from prison would bring great emotional relief to a prisoner, that the regaining of liberty would be a wholly positive experience. However; the reality of this can be a very traumatic experience (NESF, 2002). The international literature on the subject also appears to be broadly consensual on the difficulty of release for prisoners, particularly the initial few days. Hagell *et al* (1995) appear to agree with most penologists in stating that 'release from prison is likely to be a traumatic event, particularly if the sentence was long, and it will also be a time of dramatic change – leaving the prison environment, living circumstances on the outside may have changed, family structures may have changed, prisoners themselves may have undergone a range of different experiences that may affect them and their relationships with others'.

According to Collyer and Lenton (2006), 'to feel a sense of belonging, people need to feel safe, valued and a part of the community'. As we have seen, this is difficult for ex-prisoners in particular. The first few days post-release can be absolutely crucial in terms of the ex-prisoner's sense of self-worth and belonging in the community, as noted in the NESF's report (2002):

It is unrealistic to expect that people will leave prison and start to lead a socially included, crime-free existence without any supports being put in place for them before they complete their sentence ... many people leave prison and they are returning to nothing.

When this is the case, they have nothing to lose by re-offending and prison becomes a way of life. For this pattern to change, interventions need to take place throughout the period of imprisonment and through the release from prison into the wider community.

As the above commentators (and the vast majority of the relevant literature) suggest, without sufficient material and social support upon release, the cycle of release and re-arrest can become increasingly difficult to break. Despite the large number of services that provide support for prisoners and former prisoners in both Cork and Castlerea, the You're Equal Project identified the need to bridge the gap between pre- and post-release initiatives. It proposed to undertake to bridge that gap, by providing a 'throughcare' service to ex-prisoners, particularly in the context of the first crucial few days, the likelihood of re-offending and the difficulties faced by ex-prisoners more generally. By forming a mentoring relationship with the prisoner while still incarcerated, and continuing that relationship both in the short and longer term post-release, You're Equal is attempting to provide something unique, which supports the ex-prisoner through the initial difficult post-release phase and afterwards into employability. Through the innovative utilisation of several mentoring methodologies (*see Chapters 3 and 4*), the You're Equal Project is attempting to provide a support that has not been present before and, based on an examination of the relevant literature, appears necessary.


Summary

*'A lot of people have gone further than they thought they could
because someone else thought they could.'*

Anonymous

This chapter has attempted to provide a brief overview of some of the central contexts for the You're Equal Project. First, it outlined some of the historical context for any attempts to work with prisoners in Ireland, noting that prisons and prison administration are some of Ireland's oldest surviving public institutions. Due to low crime rates for the majority of the State's existence since 1922, crime and punishment were not issues that exercised the Irish public particularly, until the beginnings of the 'Celtic Tiger' era in the early 1990s. As noted by O'Donnell and O'Sullivan (2003), since then, consistent with many Western jurisdictions, Ireland has experienced a return to more punitive requirements among the general public towards criminality and punishment.

Next, the profile of the 'typical' Irish prisoner is described – as a young male, generally one who has been socially and educationally disadvantaged, and often with addiction issues, particularly with narcotics. Turning the discussion to a description of mentoring and peer mentoring specifically, it was found to be a concept that is highly individualised, unique to each person. While certain commonalities emerge, such as the 'teaching, advising and sponsoring' nature of mentoring, mentoring is without doubt specific to, and differently formulated within the context of, each mentoring relationship. Finally, the You're Equal Project was found to be consistent in its aims with the content of the international literature on the various topics above. The project is intended to operate as a 'bridging' mechanism between various services, both pre- and post-release, while also mentoring and challenging the prisoners and ex-prisoners within this process.



**Research
Methodology**



3. Research Methodology

This chapter offers an overview of the methods used in this study to address the key research question of evaluating the You're Equal Project. Methodological and ethical considerations are discussed and an overview of the sample is provided. The process, challenges and limitations involved in researching prisoners and ex-prisoners are also examined.

Aims of the research

As outlined in the original research proposal, the aim of this research project was to evaluate the You're Equal Project in terms of overall impact and effectiveness.

Within the context of the terms of reference, the specific aims were to:

- provide a detailed description of the operation of the project in order to identify a benchmark from which the effectiveness of the programme can be assessed according to identified key goals and objectives;
- assess the impact of the project at the individual case level in terms of the extent to which identified need is met through delivery of and participation with services;
- assess the extent to which the project's objectives have been achieved, both at the organisational and programme level;
- identify the policy context within which the project operates;
- identify the views and experiences of all key stakeholders and assess the degree of participation and partnership among relevant agencies;
- assess the benefits of the programme in relation to overall outcomes;
- construct a policy and practice framework that deals with proposals for improved services for ex-prisoners and identifies best practice in the provision of such services;
- assess the extent to which the target group of prisoners and ex-prisoners were involved at all levels and stages of the project.

Evaluation research is concerned with the evaluation of organisational programmes or interventions. The essential question that is typically asked by evaluation research is (Byrman, 2004) – Has the intervention achieved its anticipated goals? This study therefore intended to provide an evaluation of the project with the central aim of assessing its effectiveness in terms of outcomes over the duration of the project and developing evidence-based recommendations for future policy.

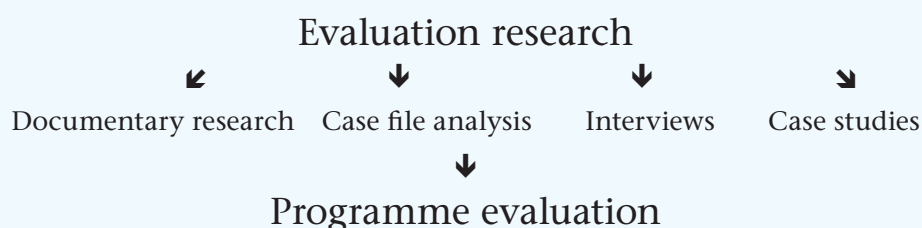
Research design

Given the nature and aims of this study, the research required methodologies that could generate extensive data about the experiences of currently incarcerated and former prisoners in relation to their direct experience of the You're Equal Project. Traditionally, evaluation research relies on experimental quantitative research designs; however, approaches to evaluation based on qualitative research are gaining currency. Such an approach emphasises the importance of an in-depth understanding of the context in which an intervention occurs and the diverse viewpoints of the stakeholders. It was decided, therefore, to adopt a qualitative methodology, which drew on the experiences of a strategically designed sample, using in-depth interviews with the prisoners, ex-prisoners, mentors and key stakeholders, together with a number of focus groups with Local Area Networks, Management and Mainstreaming Committees.

In seeking to evaluate the You're Equal Project, it was agreed with the research sub-committee when the research contract was awarded that this study would evaluate both the micro elements involved in the mentoring work itself and also the macro elements involved in creating and sustaining the multiagency and multidisciplinary collaboration central to the You're Equal Project.

The evaluation research was primarily qualitative in nature. However, in addition to the qualitative research methods, documentary research and quantitative analysis were also utilised to provide a comprehensive evaluation. A literature review was conducted to establish the policy context of the You're Equal Project. Case notes, records and files were reviewed in consultation with the mentors and minutes of meetings from the earliest planning stages to date were also reviewed.

As outlined in the initial research proposal, this evaluation research was conducted over four phases, as follows:



Sampling strategy

In total, this evaluation report is primarily based on the analysis of 44 in-depth and semi-structured interviews, carried out with 16 participants (prisoners and ex-prisoners), 5 mentors and 1 Project Coordinator, and 22 key stakeholders (*see below*).

In order to document the operation of the project and assess its effectiveness, it was necessary to have detailed first-person narratives of participants (prisoners and ex-prisoners) and their mentors, with the express intention of revealing the dynamics of the mentoring process as developed by the You're Equal Project. Thus, the initial evaluation research proposal sought to interview 16 participants of the project, accessed through the mentors at Cork and Castlereagh Prisons.

Mentors

The Project Coordinator and all the mentors involved in this project were interviewed. The mentors facilitated and organised access to participants and key stakeholders. Furthermore, as researchers, we spent some time in the company of each of the mentors, observing first-hand how they went about their work. In evaluating the work of the mentors, we were keen to develop our understanding of the model of mentoring that the You're Equal Project is developing. Specifically, we were concerned to explore such sensitive issues as:

- peer mentoring (where some of the mentors had previously been in prison themselves);
- gender issues of mentoring;
- urban/rural challenges and/or differences in the demands on mentoring.

Participants (prisoners and ex-prisoners)

All participants sampled in this evaluation research project were accessed through the mentors working in the You're Equal Project. Random sampling methods as applicable to quantitative research were not employed given the qualitative nature of this evaluation. The sampling framework utilised purposive sampling, which is designed to enhance understanding of selected individuals or groups' experiences. Researchers seek to accomplish this goal by selecting information-rich cases, i.e. individuals or behaviours that provide the greatest insight in attempting to answer the research

question (Devers and Frankel, 2000). Thus, our recruitment strategy was to purposively sample participants to include a range of criteria including a mix of participants who were being mentored by each of the mentors in both the urban and rural settings of Cork and Castlerea Prisons, respectively.

Specifically, from the initial stages in this evaluation, it has been the intention to interview participants who are at various stages of engagement in the project, i.e. some participants from each of the three groups to date, at both prisons. It was hoped that this strategy would give a profile of how the project and mentors were actually working to engage with and follow through on the support and mentoring of the participants as they left prison.

It must be noted that, at the time of these evaluation interviews, the mentoring aspect of the project had only been running since June 2006 and was therefore relatively new. However, we are satisfied that we have been able to meet and interview a good sample of participants at various stages of engagement and involvement in the work. We have interviewed 16 participants, from Cork and Castlerea, some of whom are currently in prison and some of whom have been released (*see Table 1*). We have interviewed participants who have worked with each of the mentors, in both urban and rural settings. We met some participants who were just beginning to engage with the project and others who were being supported by the mentors to live in the community, attend counselling or addiction services, secure accommodation and hold down paid employment (*see Table 2*). Thus, we are confident that, even with the relative newness of this project, we have been able to meet and interview a good range of participants.

Table 1: Sample of participants interviewed

Cork		Castlerea	
In prison	Out of prison	In prison	Out of prison
3	6	4	3

Table 2: Phases of engagement

In prison		Out of prison	
First/early contact	In-prison relationship-building	Early stages of release	Re-integration and maintaining success
4	3	2	7

The intention of interviewing participants across the phases of engagement was to explore how they are engaged with initially, worked with in prison, on early release and through to maintained success (*see Table 3*). We also interviewed the Project Coordinator and all 5 mentors, including the volunteer mentor.

Table 3: Participants interviewed

Phase of engagement in mentoring project	Prison	Mentor	Issues for participant
Initial referral meeting			
John	Castlerea	Siobhan	Unknown as yet
Laurence	Castlerea	Siobhan	Unknown as yet
Michael	Castlerea	Jerry	Unknown as yet
Working with participants in prison: Pre-release mentoring			
Michael	Cork	Pat	Mental health, learning difficulties, alcohol addiction
Dave	Cork	Pat	Alcohol addiction, car crimes
Mark	Cork	Larry	Career criminal, car crimes
Michael	Castlerea	Jerry	Learning difficulties
Early release mentoring supports			
Regina	Cork	Larry	Housing, parenting
John	Cork	Pat	Gambling addiction
Kieran	Cork	Larry	Drug and alcohol addictions
Sustaining supports via the mentoring relationship			
Garry	Cork	Larry	Alcohol counselling, job and accommodation
Anthony	Cork	Larry	Addictions
Ian	Cork	Larry	Job with car
Martin	Castlerea	Siobhan	AA and back to education
Philip	Castlerea	Siobhan	AA and contact with children
Bill	Castlerea	Jerry	Alcohol counselling, supported accommodation

Networks of support and key stakeholders

In order to complement the qualitative interviews with the 16 participants, we adopted a case study approach whereby we interviewed a number of key stakeholders in the You're Equal Project with the intention of identifying the totality of experiences in relation to overall effectiveness of the mentoring work.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with key professionals where the aim was to identify and explore their perceptions and experiences of the effectiveness of (a) the mentoring work itself and (b) the You're Equal Programme as a whole.

The sample of key stakeholders interviewed directly included professionals from within the prisons at Cork and Castlerea, and also service providers from community/voluntary groups, local development agencies and relevant statutory bodies working outside the prisons (see Table 4). In total, 22 key stakeholders were interviewed, with each interview lasting 1-2 hours and focused on the professional's assessment and experiences of the project, highlighting linkages between the relevant agencies, reviewing the learning opportunities over the period of the project and questioning the possibilities of add-on value or risk of duplication associated with the project.

Furthermore, since this research seeks to evaluate the project and document the process of development, operation and recruitment, and to assess overall impacts and outputs, the researchers attended Local Area Network meetings at both Cork and Castlerea, together with Management and Mainstreaming Committee meetings in Portlaoise. All of these occasions formed part of the analysis of the evaluation in this research project.

Table 4: Key stakeholders interviewed

Key stakeholders	Cork	Castlerea
Deputy Director, Irish Prison Service	Seamus	Seamus
Roscommon Partnership		Linda
Prison Governor		Dan
Chief Officer	John	
Industrial Manager		Willie
VEC	Colm	Riona (by telephone and focus group)
Linkage Programme	Maira	Barry
Pre-release Worker	Francis	
Probation Officer	Tim/Dermot	Kieran
Bridge Recovery Group	Noel/Sharon	
Mother	Mother	Mother
Kazelain Supported Hostel		Sligo
Pace Employment and Accommodation Supports		Dublin
Prisoner participant in the organising committees		Albert
Department of Social and Family Affairs		Eamonn (by telephone and focus group)
FÁS		Bernie (by telephone and focus group)

The interviews with the 22 key stakeholders followed a semi-structured interview schedule and addressed the following main areas:

- overview of the You're Equal Project;
- nature and scope of the service providers' role and investment in the project;
- informed opinion of the outcomes (both soft and hard) from the project;
- professional assessment of the impact of mentoring on the lives and (criminal) careers of the participants;
- reality of add-on value and further possibilities for multiagency and multidisciplinary work – both within and outside the prison;
- risks posed by possibility of duplication of services;
- limitations to services;
- recommendations for future development (or not) of project.

Ethical issues

The research project was administered according to the procedures for Ethics Committee approval set down by Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT). Given the study's population of prisoners and ex-prisoners, the ethical considerations were of paramount importance. As with all research conducted within WIT's Centre for Social and Family Research, the ethical guidelines for research as set down by the Irish Sociological Association (of which both researchers are members) were rigidly adhered to.

We were extremely careful to practise process consent, whereby participants, when first approached with an invitation to give an interview, are reminded of their choice to withdraw from the interview at any stage. Interviewees were reminded as the interview progressed of their choices around what they were comfortable discussing. As outlined by Morrow and Richards (1996), ethical issues were considered at all stages of the research. As Hill (2005) states, ethical issues 'are not simply a preliminary stage or hurdle to be got out of the way at the beginning'. The interviewees were informed that they could terminate the interview at any stage, should only talk about issues they felt comfortable with and should ask the researcher to 'move on' if any particular questions were uncomfortable.

In recognition of the vulnerability of the participants, interviews with those men who had already been released from prison were conducted at a venue of their choice, including coffee shops, hotel lounges and public parks. The reason for the interviews (as a central part of the evaluation research project of You're Equal) was fully explained and all interviews were taped with the interviewees' consent.

Process and challenges of interviewing prisoners

While we were careful to practise process consent throughout all interviews, no participant met with refused to give an interview. From our previous research with marginalised or vulnerable populations, we have found that very few people actually do withhold consent or take charge of their *choice* not to participate in the research (Ferguson and Hogan, 2007 and 2004; Hogan and O'Reilly, 2007). However, in this project, we felt the participants we did meet with were happy to give an interview on the basis that we were introduced to them via the mentors, with whom they had obviously built up a significant level of trust, rapport and respect.

A number of ex-prisoners whom we had hoped to interview did not turn up for interviews as arranged; in some such instances, the mentor involved explained their own experience of the man being somewhat 'unreliable' or their mentoring relationship as being 'less secure' than others. Two men explained that they could not attend the arranged interview because one had been called for a job interview at the same time, while the second had recently secured some short-term work.

A further group we did not interview were any of the prisoners or ex-prisoners who had not engaged in the project. While there is obviously something important to be learned from the narratives of these men, about what the project meant or did not mean to them, we felt that to attempt to gain access to them for such interviews would be time-consuming and most likely fruitless. Ethically, we were also concerned that we might be perceived as disrespecting their initial decision not to become involved in the project. Thus, we focused on seeking access to and interviewing men who had some involvement in the project as prisoners and/or ex-prisoners.

Notwithstanding these ethical considerations, the numbers of those potential participants who declined to engage in the project or with the mentors are interesting:

- In Cork, a total of 9 potential participants declined over three groups (15 offers each time).
- In Castlerea, a total of 7 potential participants declined over the three groups: 3 declined from the 1st group, 3 from the 2nd group and 1 from the 3rd group.

In Castlerea, the mentors Siobhan and Jerry met the participants together to consider a best-fit between the mentor and participant, swapping participants between them to ensure that the randomly selected participants did not decline the offer of a place on the project. These figures do not necessarily compare 'like with like'. However, they do, on the limited statistics thus far available, seem to indicate that 3 out of 15 potential participants declined the offer to engage with a mentor in the You're Equal Project.

The different approaches between Cork and Castlerea (where, in Castlerea, Siobhan and Jerry initially met all participants and then divided the caseload) does not at this early stage seem more or less successful than the Cork model, where the 15 randomly selected participants were simply divided between the mentors. However, the disparity between the figures for declines in the Cork project is noticeable and requires further analysis. Larry works part time as a mentor in Cork and therefore takes on a smaller caseload than Pat, the only full-time mentor employed in Cork; thus, Larry would be expected to have fewer numbers of potential participants declining. Pat's numbers of refusals are still, noticeably, much higher; since he works full time, he may well be recording the more complete records of average refusals in the Cork project. Further research and analysis is required in this instance to make greater sense and learn from those potential participants who declined to engage in the project.

In this study, we accessed participants for interviews via the mentors after we had reviewed case notes and lists of names. We got to meet with most of the men we asked to meet. Those we did not meet with may also provide evidence of both (a) how unreliable and difficult it is to engage with some men and (b) for some men the mentoring aspect of the You're Equal Project had worked, in that it helped them get called for job interviews. Thus, we feel confident that the 16 participants interviewed offer a fair reflection of the work being done through the mentors in both Cork and Castlerea Prisons.

We also feel confident that the process and challenges we faced in gaining access to and interviewing the participants have taught us some important lessons about what is involved for the mentors in their work with the men. Three particular experiences have informed our analysis and evaluation of the mentoring project: researching in prison, connecting with ex-prisoners and the urban/rural divide.

Researching in prison

As researchers, we received clearance to enter the prisons early on in the evaluation process. Notwithstanding this, however, we soon realised that prisons run to a very strict and tight timeline, where the times available to meet with prisoners are curtailed by the daily routines and demands of running such a large 'total' institution. While we were welcomed into both prisons by the Governors and facilitated at all times by the

prison officers themselves, we also experienced the reality of waiting at locked gates, either to get into or out of the prison. Delays also occurred when prison officers had to escort us about the prison or when the prison officers went to find prisoners for us to meet. When we did meet with the in-prison participants, the interviews themselves lasted on average 40 minutes, given the demands placed on the prisoner's time (e.g. meal times, shower times and lock up).

While we are satisfied that these 40-minute interviews with the in-prison participants were adequate to do justice to our interview schedule, we also clearly experienced the challenges for mentors in connecting with and engaging in the mentoring relationship with the prisoners.

Connecting with ex-prisoners

Other challenges were faced in meeting with ex-prisoners. Again, our meetings with ex-prisoners were organised through the mentors; we would simply give them notice of when we would arrive and base ourselves in Cork or Castlerea for a number of days in order to carry out the interviews. Thus, as researchers, we were not widely available to the interviewees; rather, they had to fit into our schedule (although we did visit Cork and Castlerea on a number of occasions) and we are most grateful to the mentors for how they facilitated us in this work.

As mentioned above, some men did not show up for interviews as arranged, possibly showing their unreliability, but also at times evidencing that they had secured some employment or job interviews. The challenges of meeting ex-prisoners were also exacerbated by the urban/rural divide.

Urban/rural divide


There are some important distinctions in relation to the work that is being carried out in Cork and Castlerea, which are explored in detail later in this report. However, our experience of being based in Cork for interviews with participants and key stakeholders was that the urban context allowed for a far more centralised coordination of communication. We could walk or take public transport between the various agencies involved in the project. We could also base ourselves in a hotel lobby and wait for the interviewees to turn up at the allocated time. There was a level of ease that seemed to be created simply by the physicality and closeness of a city-based service. However, it should be remembered that the Cork-based mentors travel long distances to work with and support ex-prisoners leaving prison, and they return to places as far away as Waterford and Kerry.

In Castlerea, on the other hand, we experienced first-hand the challenges involved in running such a project in a rural location. Services are not centralised in any way and service providers go to great lengths to accommodate and support the You're Equal Project. Mentors, too, travel great distances to connect with and support ex-prisoners who are released from prison and then return home to places like Sligo, Cavan or Longford. The lack of regular public transport in the region makes everything more difficult, not just for researchers and mentors but also for prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families trying to visit.

Each of these experiences of actually *doing* the research will be reflected upon in more detail in our analysis and findings (see *Chapters 4-9*).

Limitations of the sample


The interviews for this evaluation research project were carried out over a 6-month period, between February 2007 and July 2007. In total, 44 in-depth and semi-structured interviews were carried out in Cork and Castlerea with 16 participants (7 prisoners and 9



ex-prisoners), the Project Coordinator and 5 mentors, and 22 key stakeholders, together with focus groups with Local Area Networks (Cork and Castlerea) and Mainstreaming and Management groups (Portlaoise).

However, there are obviously a number of significant limitations to this study. Specifically, the mentoring aspect of the project was *only running* for 12 months at the time of the interviews. Thus, it was not possible to evaluate longer term outcomes of measurable success for the project by, for example, following up with the initial participants in a longitudinal manner for up to 2, 3 or 4 years. We did, of course, strategically target some of the men who were involved in the early phases of the project and who were longest out of prison. We are satisfied that the sample of men we did interview and report on gives clear evidence of the work being done by the mentors with the participants in both Cork and Castlerea.

Another limitation of the study is that certain key outcomes (i.e. the development of 2 academic FETAC Level 5 accredited modules, the awareness-raising DVD and the self-employment programme piloted in Castlerea) have just recently finished. An evaluation has yet to be done on each and therefore their longer term impact has yet to be assessed. Suffice it to say, however, that these three tangible 'products' were achieved as part of the You're Equal Project and the process of multiagency and multidisciplinary collaboration generated through them was noteworthy (*see Chapter 4*).



Findings:
Multiagency collaboration
and networks of support
for the You're Equal Project



4. Findings: Multiagency collaboration and networks of support for the You're Equal Project

This research evaluation project seeks to map the current service provision to prisoners on their release from prison and the gaps that exist in relevant services. The You're Equal Project itself is a significant attempt by a partnership of service providers to meet the needs of prisoners on their release. This chapter, the first of the 'Findings' chapters (*see also Chapters 5-9*), offers an overview of the development of the You're Equal Project and the development of the multiagency collaboration and networks of support, both within and outside the prisons of Cork and Castlereagh.

A small group of key people and agencies were responsible for driving the attempt to fill the gap identified in the provision of services to prisoners on their release from prison through the You're Equal Partnership European Funding Proposal. Funding was secured and drawn down under the employability pillar of the EQUAL Programme, with the focus of the project recognising the need to focus on *employability* (as opposed to employment) of ex-prisoners as they attempted to re-integrate into society after their release.

Key drivers and initial stakeholders in the development, management and mainstreaming of this project have been the Roscommon Partnership Company, Galway City Partnership, Cork City Partnership, Cork City Vocational Education Committee in Cork Prison, and the Irish Prison Service Regimes Directorate. Other development partners have come on board from the very early stages of this project, including FÁS, ADM/Pobal, the Probation Service, NEVA, Roscommon Vocational Education Committee, Bridge Recovery Group and the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

You're Equal aims and objectives

The You're Equal Development Partnership Agreement for the project outlines the overall aim of the project as being:

The maximisation of employment opportunities for prisoners and ex-prisoners through the development and mainstreaming of integrated appropriate training, mentoring and guidance services, and associated research and dissemination to influence the employment sector and inform policy within the prison sector.

The proposal for You're Equal funding argued strongly that research and experience have shown that prisoners and ex-prisoners face multiple disadvantage in terms of health (including mental health), education, housing, drug/substance abuse, and economic background. As such, there was a need for multidisciplinary integrated approaches to the needs of ex-prisoners with a view to facilitating their re-integration into society in general (e.g. welfare, housing, health and addictions) and employment in particular (e.g. education, training, qualifications, work experience, employer awareness and advocacy).

In setting out to achieve the overall aim of the project (*see above*), the You're Equal Development Partnership Agreement reads:

We the 16 partners of the You're Equal Project will, with the support of the EQUAL Programme, agree to establish, develop and maintain a strong and effective partnership over the next three years in order to identify and pilot innovative approaches that will address the needs of ex-prisoners as detailed in the attached aims and objectives.

From its inception, the You're Equal Project was focused on a number of distinct innovations, with specific aims and objectives. These are listed in the You're Equal WRC Mapping Document, compiled by the Workers Resource Cooperative (WRC) Social and Economic Consultants.

Specific aims included:

- To increase the employability of prisoners and ex-prisoners.
- To support the positive resettlement of ex-prisoners in the community.
- To empower all partners to actively engage with the project to include the involvement of prisoners and ex-prisoners in the management, implementation and review of the project.
- To be effective in the coordination of services to prisoners and ex-prisoners.
- To use the project as a model for change in the delivery of employability services and supports to prisoners and ex-prisoners.
- To use the transnational dimension of the project to assist in the development of models of best practice and the methods of mainstreaming such practices.
- The aim and objectives are predicated on the development and adoption of a person-centred approach, underpinned by an empowering ethic relating to both the recipients of the service but also to the capacity of the service providers to respond individually and collectively in a flexible, collaborative and integrated manner to the identified needs of the client group.

Specific objectives included:

- The development of an integrated approach to service provision.
- The inclusion of members of the target group at the various levels.
- The enhancement of existing links between employers and prisoners/ ex-prisoners.
- The inclusion of self-employment-based training.

In attempting to address the core question of this research evaluation – whether the You're Equal Project achieved any of its initial targets – we interviewed 22 key stakeholders from the Cork and Castlerea projects (professionals and service providers working both within and outside the prisons, *see Table 4*). We also attended Management and Mainstreaming Committee meetings held in Portlaoise, as well as attending Local Area Network (LAN) meetings in both Cork and Castlerea where we also held focus groups with LAN members to include their input in the evaluation. Furthermore, we took written submissions from anyone who wished to provide additional reflections after the focus groups and we followed up with some of these with more in-depth telephone interviews.

You're Equal Project management

The You're Equal Development Partnership developed as the associated partners recognised the need to support and enhance multiagency and multidisciplinary collaboration in supporting ex-prisoners once they had left prison and tried to re-integrate into society. The project is organised, structured and supported through a fully consultative, participative management structure within the following framework (*see Figure 1*):

Organisational structure:

- Management Committee
- Castlerea Local Area Network
- Cork Local Area Network
- Mainstreaming and Policy Group
- Practicalities sub-committee
- Finance sub-committee
- Research sub-committee
- Self-employment sub-committee

- Case Management Group, Castlerea Prison
- In-prison Equal Group, Cork Prison

The day-to-day running of the project is organised by the small team at You're Equal Ltd., staffed by the Project Coordinator, an Administrator, 5 mentors (one a volunteer), a Self-employment Development Worker and 2 Community Employment (CE) workers.

The Project Coordinator is responsible for the daily management and running of the You're Equal Project. This is done under the direction of the Management Committee and in line with the EQUAL Programme procedures, and the appropriate procedures for relevant subsidiary programmes. The role requires the Project Coordinator to fulfill a number of functions, including:

- managing all staff working for the You're Equal Project;
- overseeing all administrative and financial functions, including any and all reporting required from the project by the Management Committee;
- liaison with the Managing Authority of the EQUAL Programme (Department of Enterprise and Employment) or its agents (Workers Resource Cooperative/WRC) on all aspects of the EQUAL Programme;
- ensuring that the overall philosophy of the You're Equal Project is consistent with a partnership approach, hence liaising with all partners and other local projects;
- facilitating a meaningful partnership approach in implementing the project, promoting consensual decision-making, broad consultation and mainstreaming of successful methodologies and outcomes.


Through the process of interviewing key individuals within the Local Area Networks, the central nature of the role of Project Coordinator became clear to the authors. Every individual we spoke with in each LAN provided positive feedback about their interaction with the Project Coordinator. While the role does not involve direct contact with the current and former prisoners themselves, during our interviews with them the mentors all clearly articulated their feeling of being fully supported by the Project Coordinator in their attempts to fulfil their mentoring role.

The Management Committee is made up of representatives from the Irish Prison Service (the Governors of both Cork and Castlerea Prisons), 3 Partnership companies, Citizen Information Centres (CIC), community and voluntary sectors, and Vocational Education Committees (VECs). The Management Committee was established to direct the overall operational management of the You're Equal Project.

The Mainstreaming and Policy Group has representatives from the Irish Prison Service (Regimes Directorate and Prison Governors), Partnership companies, the Probation Service, Linkage Programme, Department of Social and Family Affairs, FÁS, NEVA, the community and voluntary sectors, ex-prisoner representatives, Citizens Information Board, Department of Education and Science, and Pobal. The function of the Mainstreaming and Policy Group is to identify best practice and lessons within the project and to support the integration of these into local, regional and national employability and equality practices and policies.

The Castlerea Local Area Network has members from the Roscommon Partnership, the Irish Prison Service (the Prison Governor and the Industry and Training Manager), Department of Social and Family Affairs, Linkage Programme, the Probation Service, VEC, FÁS, HSE, Western Drugs Task Force, CIC and an ex-prisoner representative.

The Cork Local Area Network is made up of representatives from the Cork Partnership, LES, Department of Social and Family Affairs, the Probation Service, VEC, the Irish Prison Service (Chief Officer of Cork Prison), Prison Psychology, community and voluntary sectors, Linkage Programme and an ex-prisoner representative.



Representation on both the Cork and Castlerea Local Area Networks builds on current structures and has expanded based on the geographical coverage of the two prisons. The partnership principle has been implemented through agencies working together, sharing perspectives and collaborating across a number of different actions and projects. Maximum involvement has been promoted through planned actions, enhanced communications and joint reviews of best practice within the remit of the project plan. It is at this level that the various needs of the participants are accommodated by the input of the different agencies.

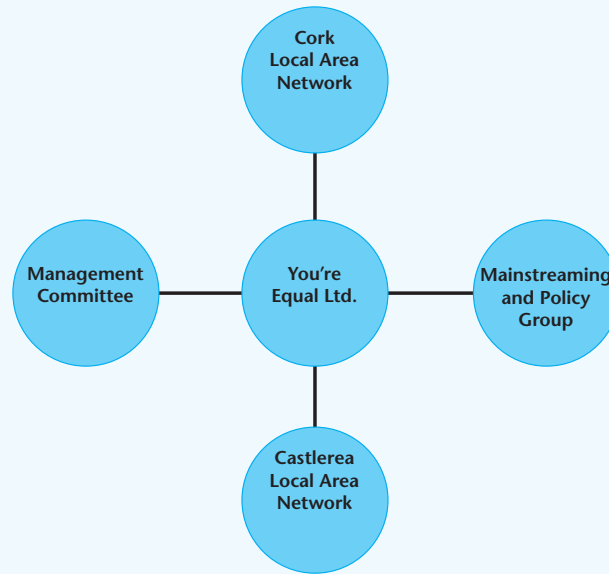
Each of the partners involved in You're Equal Ltd. makes significant contributions in terms of time, finance and match funding, goodwill and other areas, as appropriate, over the lifetime of the project in order to ensure its goals and aims, as laid out in the plan, are met. The spirit of the You're Equal Development Partnership Agreement is that each partner will contribute as appropriate to its means.

This multiagency and multidisciplinary collaborative management system has been based on key principles of community development, as well as the pillars of the EU EQUAL Community Initiative. This collaborative and boundary-spanning initiative was at first a challenge for those leading the You're Equal Project; however, over a relatively short space of time, a number of core outputs have been achieved, which would not have existed prior to, or without, the You're Equal Development Partnership. Specifically, the You're Equal Project has generated and supported new structures for multiagency collaboration with respect to issues involved in the resettlement and employability of ex-prisoners at all levels – from local level (at Cork and Castlerea Prisons) up to national level.

This multiagency collaboration has led to:

- the development of strong networks, at local and national level, focused on addressing the needs of prisoners and ex-prisoners;
- production of an awareness-raising DVD and associated written material to be used as a training device for service providers, employers and organisations within the community and voluntary sectors;
- the inclusion of prisoner issues and matters pertaining to their families on the Citizens Information Board website (*see* www.citizensinformation.ie);
- specifically designing and piloting a self-employment training programme at Castlerea Prison, with the aim of mainstreaming it into all such institutions across the country;
- the creation and accreditation of 2 FETAC Level 5 modules – one on the prison experience and the other on restorative justice;
- the project supports and structures the work of the mentors in Cork and Castlerea Prisons, both pre- and post-release.

Figure 1: You're Equal Development Partnership structure



<p>Management Committee Irish Prison Service, Roscommon Partnership, Cork Partnership, Galway Partnership, VEC, CIC</p>	<p>Castlereagh Local Area Network Department of Social and Family Affairs, FÁS, Roscommon Partnership, Linkage Programme, Prison Governor, VEC, Drugs Task Force, Probation Service, HSE, ex-prisoner representative</p>
<p>Mainstreaming and Policy Committee Roscommon Partnership, Cork Partnership, Galway Partnership, Pobal, Linkage Programme, Irish Prison Service, Department of Social and Family Affairs, FÁS, NEVA, Probation Service, VEC, Citizens Information Board, ex-prisoner representative</p>	<p>Cork Local Area Network Cork Partnership, Probation Service, Chief Officer, Prison Psychology, Drugs Task Force, Bridge Recovery Group, Linkage Programme, Department of Social and Family Affairs, VEC, ex-prisoner representative</p>

Evaluating the You're Equal Project

In seeking to evaluate the project from the perspective of members of the You're Equal Development Partnership, we strategically focused on interviewing key stakeholders in both Cork and Castlereagh, including services providers within and outside the prisons. While this evaluation relates to the project as a whole, this chapter also makes reference to some of the key distinctions that have emerged in the two pilot sites. Thus, this chapter seeks to review how the development partners felt they managed to achieve their stated aim of 'strong and effective partnership' in achieving the overall aims of the You're Equal Project. Specifically, this chapter seeks to present the partners' perspectives on the following 5 key questions:

- How the You're Equal Project has developed over its lifetime?
- How the mentoring project has worked to achieve its stated aims in supporting the re-integration of ex-prisoners?
- How the You're Equal Project fits into (or duplicates) existing services within and outside the prison system?
- What are the measurable signs of success in the project?
- What has been the key learning aspect of the project?

Development of the You're Equal Project

Seamus Sisk, Deputy Director of the Regimes Directorate in the Irish Prison Service, was involved from the early stages of the You're Equal Project in helping to negotiate its progress, seeing it as a pilot project that could inform the further development of 'Positive Sentence Management' or 'Integrated Sentence Management' within the Irish Prison Service. Such a project was an ideal strategic fit with the work of the Regimes Directorate, as stated in the You're Equal Provisional Gap Analysis:

The Regimes Directorate is the key institutional driver in meeting the [Irish Prison] Service's commitment to re-balancing its custodial and care/re-integration functions. The Directorate, which is multidisciplinary, seeks to support and facilitate all staff and services in helping prisoners develop their sense of responsibility and cultivate attitudes and skills which offer them the best chance of leading law-abiding and self-supporting lives after release.

The establishment of the You're Equal Project was not, however, without its difficulties from the start. The first person we interviewed for this evaluation project noted: 'It had been a difficult labour and the new project needed a lot of care and attention to ensure it had a safe and supportive environment within which to grow and become established.'

By their very nature, competitive funding proposals (in particular, those that hope to be successful in European tenders) must establish themselves as proposing something unique that seeks to fill the gap in previous service provision identified in the proposal itself. Creative initiatives, in part driven by imposed deadlines and submission guidelines, that propose the development of multiagency and interdisciplinary collaboration may be construed as accusations of previous failures on the part of service providers, who have seen themselves as working hard to support the service users. A number of people we interviewed remembered feeling at the beginning that this You're Equal proposal was somewhat dismissive and summary in how it suggested a gap in services and its proposed remedy. However, on reflection, the vast majority of partners accepted that these were initial challenges that were overcome as the project developed.

For example, Kieran, the only Probation Officer in Castlerea Prison, was sceptical at first, but since the Irish Prison Service and the Governor of Castlerea had 'bought into' working in partnership with the pilot project, it was incumbent on him to work with the project. Later, however, throughout his interview, his support of the process, and the overall outcome of the project, showed how he had experienced the value of the multiagency partnership approach for prisoners:

In the early stages, the project was very fragile, but it held itself together. The initial handling of the project was done very badly, with poor communication. There were real problems and in the beginning I was definitely on the outside, giving out at all the stuff that was going on. I thought they were all over the place with their partnership approach. But since I saw what they are doing now, I'd say it is just brilliant really.

(Kieran, Probation Officer, Castlerea)

Many of those interviewed for this evaluation (including people involved in writing the initial proposal) accepted that there had been 'communication' mistakes and oversights at the beginning between agencies within and outside the prisons, where the partnership-style of working, when unfamiliar, could be seen as being 'all over the place' and appeared to clash with the hierarchically structured and time-managed approach of the prison system.

A senior training and employment officer in the Linkage Programme at Castlerea had already been working in a boundary-spanning capacity both inside and outside the prison. As such, he seemed able to offer a reflective analysis of the challenging dynamics at the beginning of the project:

One of the things that interested me at the start of the programme was when the Partnership drew down the money as a re-employment initiative and then came into the prison and said we have this money and this is what we want to do. As an outside agency coming in to the prison initially, that led to a new political situation. The question being, why was the Partnership suddenly interested in offenders? Well, it's a worthy interest for the Partnership to be interested in since they represent the community element and that's been missing. The idea that the criminal justice system on its own could ever re-integrate ex-prisoners without the community's involvement simply doesn't work. But now, you had two different institutions coming together on this issue of re-integration – two different traditions, different ideologies and different rationales, creating an interesting dynamic.

(Barry, Linkage Programme, Castlereah)

A guiding principle from the outset of the You're Equal Project was active involvement of the service users at all levels of the process and management of the project. One of the Castlereah prisoners who was initially very much involved commented:

Initially my name was put forward by a member of the teaching staff and OK'ed by prison management. My vision of the project was that it would fill a void within the prison system where the prisoners were left to their own devices. Assistance was selective prior to You're Equal coming on board. There has always been a chasm between pre- and post-release in the prison; a prisoner basically left the prison with a travel voucher and his belongings in a plastic bag, not knowing sometimes where to go or whom to turn to for help. You're Equal appeared to me in the beginning to be offering to bridge that gap between pre- and post-release ... I was involved in the beginning – attending meetings and speaking with prisoners, teachers and the staff from the Roscommon Partnership. It was reassuring to see Partnership management like Linda Sice being so positive about the project and to feel that our input [prisoners and ex-prisoners] here was of value.

(Albert, prisoner, Castlereah)

Thus, while the proposed You're Equal Project was successful in drawing down European funds, it did have a turbulent start, with some of the service providers interviewed remembering how the project had struggled to establish multiagency collaboration. Other service providers, however, praised the courage and foresight of the initial project, its key staff and their commitment to bringing together different models of working. From the start, the You're Equal Project strove to include service users, prisoners and ex-prisoners, and over time the project began to win the trust and support of those involved. In particular, the establishment of the *mentoring aspect* of the project seemed to be the key factor in creating the opportunity for all involved to recognise that their initial struggles had been about coming together in a new way to meet the needs of prisoners as they left prison. As the You're Equal Provisional Gap Analysis stated:

Each partner is committed to the integrated and effective coordination of services for the target group and undertakes to deal with all elements of the work of the Development Partnership in an open, constructive and proactive manner.

Multiagency collaboration and the risk of service duplication

In seeking to evaluate this project from the perspective of the various stakeholders and networks of service providers, we were careful to explore with them their perception or experience of any overlap or duplication of service provision. This was hinted at in the underlying struggles to establish the initial collaborations for the You're Equal Project. While it was always important that You're Equal did not simply duplicate existing services or encroach on space that was already occupied by other service providers, one member of the Linkage Programme at Castlereah was sure that the holistic 'welfare' approach adopted by the mentors was something new and unique:

The funding can't duplicate anything [i.e. an existing project with funding] and while the initial funding was drawn down from an employability stand, they came up with the idea of mentors under this employability focus. But the project had to get broader than that and rightly so, I think. I had taken a much more welfare focus because that was where the gap was ... it can be very confusing for people who are released from prison, so the mentors are flexible so they can respond and connect ex-offenders with outside agencies

and supports. The whole emphasis is on post-release support ... flexibility of the mentors is necessary. The problem with the system [as it is] is that so often it is seen as somebody else's responsibility – welfare, health boards, linkage, probation – but a lot of those agencies work 9-5, so it's so easy for the guys to fall through the gaps.

(Barry, Linkage Programme, Castlereia)

A number of service providers working as post-release workers in both Cork and Castlereia Prisons were clearly supportive of the opportunity to have the mentors as additional supports in the underresourced area of post-release support. At the time of interview, Francis had been working for 7 years as a Post-release Coordinator in a pilot project, funded through the Drugs Task Force and attached to Cork Prison. Having been involved in the initial planning of the You're Equal Project, Francis remained happy that the project, while changing and developing, had remained true to its initial ideas:

From Day One, I was pushing for peer mentors here [Cork Prison]. I knew they were going to add value to what I was doing and what Cork Alliance was doing too. The work that I should have been doing as a post-release coordinator, the gap was still there – there needed to be two or three of us here doing that work. Then we'd be all right. So even if an extra two or three mentors came from the project to give their support to the lads [prisoners] that was always going to be a help as I saw it ... and even though they are not peer mentors, what they are doing now is brilliant and it was badly needed.

(Francis, Post-release Coordinator, Cork)

The other significant possibility of an encroaching duplication of services was raised in Castlereia Prison by the Head Teacher, Riona Finn, in regard to the establishment of the self-employment programme and training course that has been run by You're Equal in the prison. However, all other members of the You're Equal Castlereia Network were clear that there was a significant gap in the service provision and needs of the prisoners themselves for self-employment training. At the time of writing this report, the first cohort of 14 prisoners had just successfully completed their participation in the pilot self-employment programme, which ended in August 2008.

Measuring the success of the You're Equal Project

An obvious reason to engage social science researchers to evaluate this project is to consider the measurable signs of its success (or otherwise) in achieving its initial objectives. Throughout this evaluation process and in presenting this report, we have strategically focused on giving space to the voices of those most closely involved – the mentors, participants and networks of service providers. Some interviewees have clearly told us that they believe the project 'has not been going long enough to see the real outcomes' (Barry, Linkage Programme, Castlereia) and in terms of long-term *hard outcomes* of the project, this is correct. The project simply has not been running long enough to be able to point to facts and figures, such as how many participants have remained out of prison for a number of years after their engagement with the mentors, or how many have remained in gainful employment, or remained free of drugs or alcohol. Yet, as shown in the following 'Findings' chapters, many of the men interviewed clearly acknowledged the supportive role they felt the mentors played in their being able to manage the initial few months after release from prison.

There are, however, a range of *soft outcomes* and more immediate signs of success that the service providers interviewed have offered as their evidence of the success of the You're Equal Project. These include:

- a number of actual products and measurable outputs (*see below*);
- the add-on value of multiagency collaboration and the understanding generated throughout the system, both inside and outside prison, through the process of doing and being You're Equal together.

Tangible outputs of the You're Equal Project

During the course of the You're Equal Project, three distinct 'products' were developed. They are evidence of the breadth and depth of the multiagency collaboration that has been developed and enhanced through the process of being involved in the project. These tangible outputs are:

- 2 FETAC Level 5 accredited modules, developed by members of Cork Local Area Network, in association with NEVA;
- EXPAC were contracted to develop an awareness-raising DVD;
- the self-employment training programme, developed by Castlerea Local Area Network and piloted in Castlerea Prison.

While each of these products in itself is too new to measure in terms of its impact, all of the service providers interviewed had been involved in some way with the creation of at least one of the products. All commented positively on how strategically creative and engaging they were as a shared project, bringing the various multiagency, interdisciplinary and geographically diverse service providers together, thus, again, leading to enhanced multiagency collaboration.

Add-on benefits of multiagency collaboration

A key finding in this report is how positively the vast majority of service providers spoke about multiagency collaboration and communication. Remembering how challenging the early stages in the development of the You're Equal Project were in terms of generating new communication systems between agencies, the key seemed to be how, through partnership, so many of the service providers had become task-focused, rather than role-focused, as they become more prisoner-centred:

The conflict [at the start of the project] used to be about whose role had been moved in on. But if you're precious about 'empires', the guys who lose out are prisoners themselves. The fracture lines were about roles and managing empires. I prefer people to be work on a task and be prisoner-focused, and the mentors are helping the lads re-adapt and get back into living. And the group [multidisciplinary/interagency] is sitting down around the table in here and that's a real start.

(Tim, Probation Officer, Cork)

While all of the service providers within the prison knew how hard each other worked, they also agreed that the You're Equal Project had created the focus and framework for supporting multiagency collaboration:


I'm 29 years in the Prison Service. I've worked in lots of prisons and this to me is a very, very positive plan or step in relation to dealing with prisoners because you have always had the different agencies in the prison trying to work with the lads to get them this or that or whatever, but I think when you have a group function focusing on a person, it's all the better and you now have that in Cork prison ... Multiagency and multidisciplinary work is happening inside the prison now. You see, before You're Equal we did not have a structure on the multidisciplinary work before. We now have a multidisciplinary team in the prison working together to understand the lads' needs and problems.

(John Connelly, Chief Officer, Cork Prison)

Similarly, in Castlerea the in-prison multiagency collaboration has been strengthened through the You're Equal Project:

Our Governor is very open to the partnership approach. The mentors ring us and we ring them and we organise things together. We are all pretty busy here, but you have a much more stable and consistent approach to people when you build in this interagency work. The real value of it all comes together at the case conference reviews, where the mentors present the person-centred plans that they have developed with the participants. There may be holes in it [the system] and when you sit down as a group with all the services, you see the little chinks come to light and they can be addressed at that stage.

(Willie Conlon, Industrial Manager, Castlerea Prison)



According to one of the key architects of the initial You're Equal proposal, whether or not the project is funded into the future, it has already achieved systemic change from which there will be 'no going back' on the positive growth in collaboration that it has brought about:

I happen to think it's an ideal project. I think it has the potential to roll out across the country as a model of best practice into what people here are now calling a partnership arrangement. In fairness, I think we are all working well together and the Chief here chairs case conferences and, regardless of what happens with You're Equal, that multidisciplinary case conferencing and new way of working will continue.

(Colm, Head Teacher, Cork Prison)

Those service providers we interviewed who travelled into the prison or came together for the Local Area Network meetings were pleased with how the process of coming together to share perspectives on their work had made a very positive difference to the way they went about their work in, for example, the local FÁS office or in the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

Summary

This chapter has given an overview of the system of multiagency collaboration and networks of support that have been the framework for the development of the You're Equal Project, both inside and outside the prisons. Many of the stakeholders, service users and providers interviewed for this evaluation spoke of the mentoring aspect of the project as being the most significant contribution of the project to date.



Findings:
Profile of participants
in the You're Equal
mentoring project



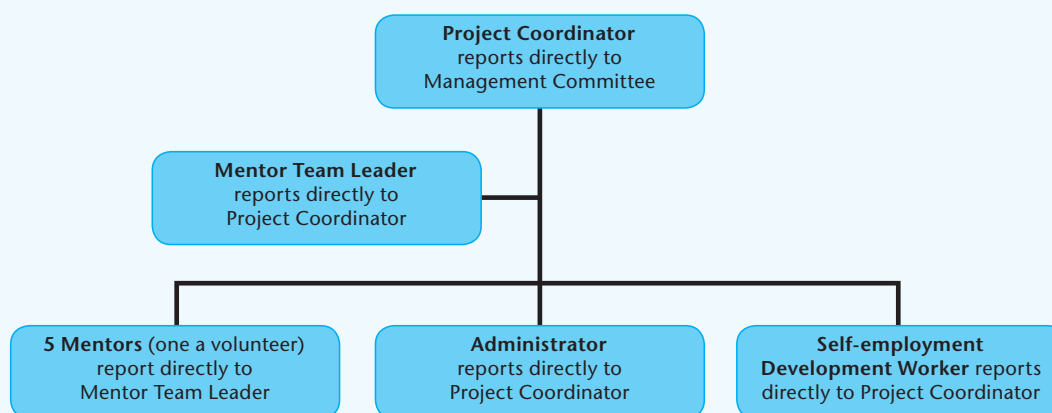
5. Findings: Profile of participants in the You're Equal mentoring project

This chapter provides a brief overview of the reporting structure for the mentors employed in the You're Equal mentoring project, followed by a quantitative overview and profile of the 98 participants who engaged in the mentoring project at Cork and Castlerea Prisons and on their release. An evaluation is also given of the mentors' workloads in terms of time and resources required in such a mentoring project.

Mentoring project reporting structure

The You're Equal Project is coordinated through the Project Coordinator who, in turn, reports to the project's Management Committee. Four mentors are employed by the project (1 full-time and 1 part-time based in Cork, and 2 full-time in Castlerea), while a fifth person acts as a volunteer peer mentor, based in Cork. Since June 2006, the mentors have delivered a variety of mentoring-related services to 98 prisoners. This service has developed a new model of working with ex-prisoners and is flexible in its approach, including work being done out of normal working hours (between 8am and 10pm) and over weekends. Thus, the You're Equal Project and the mentors within it fill an immense gap, not filled by any other service or agency in either of the catchment areas. All of this work is carried out and supported within the coordination and management structure outlined in Chapter 4. The reporting structure for the mentors is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Reporting structure for You're Equal mentors



Statistical overview of You're Equal participants

Since the mentoring aspect of the You're Equal Project began in June 2006, the project has worked with a total of 98 participants⁴, 90 of whom came from inside the official referral process and were randomly selected in equal numbers at Cork and Castlerea Prisons. At both sites, however, over time and as the project and mentors became known and trusted, a growing number of prisoners voluntarily joined the project and, to date, the total number of these 'self-referrals' is 8.

A review of the case files of these 98 participants highlights some interesting facts in relation to their addresses, age profile, country of origin, relationship status, employment status, addiction status, accommodation issues and levels of educational attainment and literacy (see Tables 5-11).

4 The figure of 98 participants is so close to 100 as to invalidate the use of percentages. Each real figure in Tables 5-12 below can therefore be read as a percentage.

Address profile

A significant point in Table 5 is how many of the participants in the Castlerea project came from counties outside of and quite some distance from Co. Roscommon. This point has significant implications in regard to the challenge of multiagency collaboration and mentoring in rural locations.

Table 5: Address profile of You're Equal participants

Of the 45 Castlerea participants	Of the 45 Cork participants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 from Co. Sligo • 4 from Co. Longford • 15 from Galway (city and county) • 3 from Co. Donegal • 2 from Co. Cork • 1 from Co. Tipperary • 2 from Co. Monaghan • 2 from Co. Cavan • 2 from Co. Roscommon • 4 from Co. Mayo • 1 from Co. Derry • 1 from Co. Leitrim • 1 from Co. Westmeath • 2 foreign nationals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 from Co. Waterford • 2 from Co. Kerry • 38 from Co. Cork • 2 foreign nationals

Offence profile

The profile of offences at each of the prisons was somewhat different for the participants (see Table 6). At Castlerea, most offences committed were for assault and arson (generally while under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol); 3 men were committed for breach of barring orders or protection orders; 5 men had road traffic offences (ranging from no insurance to car theft); 3 had public order offences; and 2 had manslaughter charges. At Cork, the offences committed ranged from possession of drugs (for sale or supply) to burglary and robbery (including shoplifting); there were also sentences for road traffic offences, public order offences and assaults causing harm. Many of the prisoners had multiple charges.

Table 6: Sentence profiles of You're Equal participants

Of the 45 Castlerea participants:	Of the 45 Cork participants:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21 were serving sentences of 12 months or less • 22 were serving sentences of 5 years or less • 2 were serving sentences of 5 years or more 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24 were serving sentences of 12 months or less • 20 were serving sentences of 5 years or less • 1 was serving a sentence of 5 years or more

Age profile

Of the 98 participants, 44 were younger than 24 years of age, while a total of 76 were younger than 34 (see Table 7).

Table 7: Age profile of You're Equal participants

18-24 years	44
25-34 years	32
35-44 years	18
45-54 years	3
55-64 years	1
Total	98

Country of origin profile

Of the 98 participants, 91 were Irish by origin (*see Table 8*).

Table 8: County of origin of You're Equal participants

Ireland	91
UK	5
EU	2
Total	98

Relationship status profile

Of the 98 participants, 77 were single, while 14 were either married, separated or divorced (*see Table 9*).

Table 9: Relationship status of You're Equal participants

Single	77
Married	7
Separated	5
Divorced	2
Other	7
Total	98

Employment status profile

Of the 98 participants, only 25 were full-time employed at the time of entry to prison, while 66 were unemployed (*see Table 10*).

Table 10: Employment status of You're Equal participants at time of entry to prison

Employment status on entry to prison	Total	Cork	Castlerea
Unemployed	66	34	32
Employed (full time)	25	13	12
Self-employed	3	2	1
Other	4	2	2
Total	98	51	47

Addiction status profile

Of the 98 participants, 52 admitted current drug and/or alcohol issues, while a further 31 admitted former drug and/or alcohol issues (*see Table 11*).

Table 11: Addiction status of You're Equal participants

Admitting current drug and/or alcohol issues	52
Admitted former drug and/or alcohol issues	31
No reference to drug and/or alcohol issues	15

Accommodation issues profile

Of the 98 participants, 61 had recognised accommodation issues at the time of their release from prison; only 31 were going home on release.

Educational attainment and levels of literacy profile

Early school-leaving was a very considerable factor in many of the participants' lives. Of the 98 participants, 34 had left school at or under the age of 14 (2 at age 11; 6 at age 12; 7 at age 13; and 19 at age 14). A further 28 had left school at age 16; 9 at age 17; 1 at age 23; and 11 did not know. While 72 of the participants said literacy was not an issue, 26 stated that they had literacy difficulties.

Disabilities profile

Of the 98 participants, 6 had mental health issues, 1 had a physical disability and 5 had an intellectual disability.

Care responsibilities profile

Of the 98 participants, 63 participants stated they had no children or they chose not to answer the question. 81 participants said they had no care responsibilities, while 5 said care responsibilities were present and 11 stated that care responsibilities were present and unresolved.

Ethnicity profile

Of the 98 participants, 15 said they were members of the Traveller Community and 4 presented as 'other'.

Measuring the mentoring caseload

Another aspect of this study sought to measure and evaluate the work and caseload involved in the mentoring. As shown above, given that the selection of participants has largely been random to date⁵, there was no way of predicting in advance the various needs that the participants would have; a large proportion of them are struggling with addictions and poor mental health, as well as accommodation issues. Thus, the work of the mentors is ongoing in many cases.

Caseloads in the You're Equal mentoring work are cumulative. The mentors are each still working to support 9 of the participants from the 1st group and 13 from the 2nd group, while they are also engaging with 10 new participants from the 3rd group. In addition, they are responding at both prisons to a growing number of referrals from other professionals and agencies, as well as from prisoners themselves (self-referrals) (see Table 12).

In quantifying the work involved in mentoring, three measures were employed:

- an evaluation of the hours given to mentoring in any one week;
- a measure of the numbers of active participants being mentored on a given day;
- a summary reflection on the work, time, resources and other inputs involved in a sample of cases.

An evaluation of the weekly hours given to mentoring

The team of mentors meets each month to offer peer support, share work experience and review the development of the project. At one such meeting (25-27 September 2007), the team reflected together on the overall number of hours worked per week as mentors across the You're Equal Project at the Cork and Castlerea sites.

The mentors consider that there is a continuum of supports that various service users can need. This ranges from high maintenance cases to lower maintenance cases and dormant cases. In terms of time, this continuum can be classified as follows:

⁵ It should be noted, however, that the random sample did seem to produce a fair reflection of 'typical' Irish prisoners (IPS, 2005).

High maintenance support:

- over 10 hours contact a week
- between 3 and 10 hours contact a week

Lower maintenance support:

- up to 3 hours contact per week
- under 1 hour contact per week

Dormant cases

Given this typology, the mentors approximated that, collectively, on the previous week's work, they had given 204 hours' contact – the equivalent of 6 full-time posts (at 35 hours per week). The You're Equal mentoring team consists of 3 full-time and 1 part-time post, and one volunteer mentor. The mentors are also available by phone outside of normal working hours and at weekends.

Note: This level of work by so few mentors may not be sustainable after the pilot phase of the You're Equal Project. While these figures are based on a self-analysis of their work by the team of mentors, we have no reason to doubt their validity, having spent periods of time with all of the mentors in both Cork and Castlerea. As researchers, we have experienced first-hand the time inputs, crises and demands that each of the mentors respond to as an everyday aspect of their work.

A measure of the numbers of active participants being mentored on a given day

On Tuesday, 4 December 2007, a snapshot survey was taken of live cases being worked on by each of the mentors. The intention was to measure how many service users were being mentored on that day and where had they come from (i.e. from 1st, 2nd or 3rd groups, or from the growing number of referrals to the project). Table 12 gives a summary of the 50 active cases being worked on on 4 December 2007.

Table 12: Mentors' daily caseload (snapshot)

Mentor	1st Group	2nd Group	3rd Group	Referrals	Total no. of cases
Larry	1	1	1	3	6
Pat	4	4	3	0	11
Marina	<i>n/a</i>	1	1	4	6
Jerry	2	5	2	6	15
Siobhan	2	2	3	5	12
Total	9	13	10	18	50

All of the mentors reported that on any given day they are involved to various degrees with service users who are high, medium or low maintenance (*see above*).

The Cork project has three mentors – Larry, Pat and Marina. Pat works full time, while Larry works a half-time post and Marina is a volunteer mentor. Initially, Marina did not have access to the prisons, so she does not have any referrals in the 1st group (*n/a* in Table 12); she does, however, co-work two service users with the other Cork mentors (these two service users have been counted once in the figures in Table 12 and are not shown in Marina's statistics). Collectively, therefore, the Cork mentors were working with 23 service users on Tuesday, 4 December 2007 (the day of the snapshot survey).

The Castlerea project has two full-time mentors – Siobhan and Jerry. Together, they were working with 27 service users on Tuesday, 4 December 2007. However, like all the mentors, they reported having various levels of contact with service users on that day. Jerry, for example, reported having 'working contact' with 7 of his 15 service users.

A summary analysis of the figures in Table 12 indicates that a significant number of the initial participants from each of the first two intake groups at Cork and Castlereagh are still engaged with the mentors. The figures also show a development in the mentors taking on 'referrals' other than through the initial random selection process.

In Cork, the primary reason for the taking on of 'referrals' has been the In-Prison Group practice of only working with the randomly selected 15 participants. This left spare workload capacity with the mentors, which was taken up by outside referrals. These referrals came from a variety of sources, but in the main from agencies that were either part of the Local Network or from agencies working with the project on behalf of other participants. In contrast, in Castlereagh Prison the Local Network and Case Management Group were open to referrals from all internal prison agencies on top of the 15 selected participants if there was spare mentor capacity to take them on. Spare capacity in the mentors' workload is dependent on the needs of the participants with whom they are working.

The mentors reported that, with the development of the You're Equal Project, word of the mentoring process had spread and a range of agencies and individuals were now referring service users to the project (see Table 13).

Table 13: Agencies and individuals who referred service users to the You're Equal mentoring project

Arbour House, Cork	Edel House, Cork
Strengthening Families Programme, Cork	Probation Service, Athlone
LES, Galway	Irish Prison Service
Acorn Project, Longford	VEC Prison Education Units
Probation Service, Castlereagh	HSE Drugs Worker
Probation Service, Loughan House	Linkage Programme
Margaret Connoughton, Chaplin, Castlereagh	HSE Addiction Counsellor, Castlereagh
Justice Patrick Clyne	District Court Judge

Furthermore (though not shown in Tables 12 and 13), the mentors also reported working with 13 men in prison on Tuesday, 4 December 2007 (Larry, 1; Marina, 2; Pat, 2; Siobhan, 3; and Jerry, 5).

A summary of the inputs involved in a sample of cases

The third measure used to quantify the work involved in mentoring was a summary reflection on the work, time, resources and other inputs involved in a sample of cases. Four case studies were chosen at random and anonymised for the protection of the service user. They are included here in some detail in order to highlight the type of work (in terms of time, travel and networking) that the mentors do on a daily basis.

John's Case Study

John is a 26-year-old male from Mayo. He is considered to be a recidivist offender, whose offences are mostly alcohol-related. By 2006, he had been in and out of prison 18 times. His last sentence was served for breaching a barring order against his parents. He is currently banned from driving as result of driving while under the influence of drink. He has two children under the age of 5, but is not in a relationship with their mother. He has been through Harristown House twice [a Probation-run addiction centre] and relapsed on release twice. He has worked as a plasterer. He claims to be a good mechanic. Kazelain Supported Hostel was recommended as ideal for him.

Between 30 November 2006 and 9 May 2007, John was released from prison and then arrested again numerous times for the same, if not similar charges, all alcohol-related, the first being shortly after his release. He had gone to weekly AA meetings, was said to have had good intentions, but his father described him as 'slipping and sliding on

and off the drink'. John had great difficulty remaining sober. He continuously switched back and forth from 'wanting help and being open to suggestion' to 'denial and certain that he can stop himself from drinking'. His parents have both expressed fear of him and for him. He was repeatedly 'in and out of the house, drunk, sober, violent, etc'.

Throughout this period, the mentor stayed in touch with John through phone calls and letters. He also visited John on numerous occasions, both in prison and at his parents' home. In addition, the mentor travelled to and from many different parts of the country on a regular basis in an attempt to assist John. The mentor was instrumental in facilitating access to the treatment centre for John. He had a very real fear that John would either kill himself through his chaotic and reckless alcohol and drug use, or else find himself facing a serious assault charge. The mentor was delighted when John agreed to try and get admitted into Cuan Mhuire and the mentor offered to drive him there. The mentor went to collect John, but he had left the house, had been drinking and could not be contacted. The mentor eventually found him, but realised that he was not quite ready to be admitted and left the door open to trying again. The mentor arranged another assessment in Cuan Mhuire for John.

The mentor and John kept in touch in the days awaiting his assessment, with the mentor offering continuous support and encouragement throughout. The mentor collected John from his home in Crossmolina and brought him to Bruree for his assessment, during which the mentor was allowed to sit in. The mentor gave his name as an accredited visitor. After John was admitted to Cuan Mhuire, the mentor wrote a letter to John's solicitor, confirming that he was in residential treatment.

The mentor's case notes record that 'by 3rd May 2007, he [John] seemed relaxed and looked physically healthy. He said he was committed to staying the full 12 weeks. The staff at Cuan Mhuire were [said] to be very pleased with him so far and he seemed to be properly committed, engaging in groups, etc'. By 23rd May 2007, John was still in treatment and thinking about his future after his term (in Cuan Mhuire) was served. Since that time, the mentor has visited John and kept in touch through phone calls, texts, visits and meetings. The mentor is currently working towards setting up supports for John for when he leaves Cuan Mhuire.

Without the mentor's involvement, John most likely would not have been able to arrange an assessment by Cuan Mhuire or to get or afford the transport to the residential treatment facility. It is also likely that he would not have attempted to obtain approval by the Court to pursue treatment. Without the mentor's professional approach to John's case and his consistency in the support and encouragement he offered John, it is likely that John would not have been motivated to persist with his road to recovery.

In providing support for John's parents, the mentor maintained ongoing contact with them both before and after John's admission to Cuan Mhuire. The mentor wrote letters, made phone calls and visited John's parents in their home. He also organised a support worker to work with the parents and help them through certain issues regarding John, particularly about the fact that they are scared of him.

Summary of mentoring service: The support service provision by the mentor in this case over the period 2 June 2006 to 9 May 2007 included 11 meetings, 45 phone calls, 8 letters and 1 e-mail. The mentor also made 10 case-related journeys, totalling about 2,120 kilometres.

Stan's Case Study

Stan is a 23-year-old Czech national. He is single and has no children. His English is understandable and he also speaks Russian and Polish, as well as his native Czech. Stan was in the Republic of Ireland 3½ weeks before his arrest for a 'tie up' robbery (credit card theft), but claimed it was his first offence. He had been in touch with his family over the phone, but had no visit. He claimed they were supportive. He had concerns

about accommodation and money after his release, as well as having an ‘ex-prisoner stigma’. He was sentenced for 9 years, with the remaining 2 suspended; it was reduced to 4 years on appeal and he had served 3 at the time of his release.

The mentor’s case notes highlight that, initially, the mentor had an issue with Stan’s ‘lack of truthfulness’. He had a Czech driving licence and wanted to get an Irish one when he was released. His ambitions for one year on were ‘to have a home, a job and a girlfriend’.

The mentor worked hard to help Stan, with the hope that he would not re-offend. He stayed in constant correspondence with Stan, speaking with him nearly every day. The negative response the mentor received from Government professionals (such as the Gardaí and the Community Welfare Officer) suggests that if Stan were to try to access these services alone, considering the language barrier and his ‘foreign national ex-prisoner’ status, it is less likely that he would have been taken seriously.

Summary of mentoring service: The mentoring support service provision in this case over the period 2 June 2006 to 28 May 2007 included 12 meetings, 35 phone calls, 5 letters and 1 e-mail. The mentor also made 9 case-related journeys, totalling about 2,896 kilometres.

Bill’s Case Study

Bill is a 43-year-old male from Co. Longford and an admitted alcoholic. He was released from prison in November 2006. He has a recidivist profile, where offences are all alcohol-related. He has experienced much emotional trauma: he disclosed childhood sexual abuse by a relative who is also a priest; he lost his father in January 2006; he has made several suicide bids in the past; his baby daughter died at 4½ weeks old and he feels responsible and guilty for her death; he has two ex-wives, numerous brothers and sisters, all alienated; when released from prison, he sleeps rough. He is on medication, mostly sleeping tablets and pain-killers. He has worked in the prison’s kitchen and in the past has worked as a baker, painter and decorator. He liked all of these jobs. He has concerns about accommodation on release and wants to do voluntary work or work with HIV/AIDS sufferers. Members of the *You’re Equal* team were the first visitors Bill had had in his 3 months in prison.

The mentor identified the supports Bill needed and addressed them accordingly. Supports were put in place in terms of accommodation, benefits, family supports (working towards mending bridges with his ex-wife and children), keeping AA contacts and organising community/voluntary work for him. Helping Bill in his recovery was a long delicate process, which took great commitment, empathy and sensitivity on the part of the mentor. Because of this mentoring relationship and the supports, both practical and emotional, that the mentor offered, Bill has excelled and is now confident and determined, with a sense of self-worth and a desire to progress in life. Bill had many obstacles to overcome during his time of recovery (he got beaten up through no fault of his own, was rejected by his ex-wife and was continuously tempted by alcohol), yet he progressed regardless, with the mentor offering him support and encouragement throughout.

Bill was interviewed in *The Irish Times* (28 November 2007), where his story was highlighted as an example of the potential success of the You’re Equal Project and of people’s abilities, at times with the correct supports, to turn their lives around and start anew.

Summary of mentoring service: The support service provision by the mentor in this case over the period 2 June 2006 to 9 May 2007 included 9 meetings, 19 phone calls, 3 letters and a number of e-mails and text messages. The mentor also made 8 case-related journeys, totalling about 429 kilometres.

Paul's Case Study

Paul is a 21-year-old male, originally from Belfast but living in Cork for the previous 4 years. He has served three sentences for drunk and disorderly offences. His last sentence was served in Loughan House for a period of just one month. By his own admission, he has an alcohol problem and lacks confidence. He claimed he would spend €250 per week on alcohol if the funds were available. He is currently in a relationship and has a baby due in April. He has no contact with family and has no money. He has some experience of plastering, painting and decorating, and as a kitchen porter. In conversation with his mentor, he claimed he 'would like to address his alcohol problem and needs help doing so'.

Paul approached the mentor in Loughan House, initially to enquire about accommodation. On talking with him, the mentor realised Paul's primary issue was a serious alcohol problem. The mentor discussed the issue with Paul, helping him to realise that his wants and needs for accommodation, work and family would not be sustainable without first addressing his alcohol problem. Once Paul realised that he needed help, the mentor set about organising the appropriate supports for him by contacting various people who work within the area of alcohol and drugs-related problems to get their professional advice and recommendations. Unfortunately, Paul was refused admission into the treatment facility suggested as most suitable for his needs. The mentor then tried to organise other places for him. With such little time and so few prospects, Paul appeared to lose motivation and decided he would no longer avail of supports from the You're Equal Project.

Summary of mentoring service: The support service provision by the mentor in this case over the period 14 November to 27 November 2006 included 2 meetings, 22 phone calls, 3 letters and 4 e-mails. The mentor also made 2 case-related journeys, totalling about 993 kilometres.

Summary

This chapter presented a quantitative overview and profile of the 98 participants who engaged with the You're Equal mentors in Cork and Castlerea Prisons. Examining the mentoring aspect of the project, three 'snapshot' measures were included to assess mentors' workloads and the inputs required in their case work. These were an overall measure of time given by the mentors in a given week; an analysis of their caseload on a given day; and a breakdown of the time and inputs given in a sample of their cases. To illustrate the latter measure, the four case studies cited show that, in addition to the face-to-face meetings with the service users, the work of the mentors also includes much travel and communications in terms of networking supports and appropriate service contacts on behalf of the service users.

Key variables (such as the way some service users require more supports than others) mean that, on any given day or over any given week, the workload of the mentors varies. However, it is seen that a full-time mentor, on average, manages to respond to somewhere between 11 and 15 service users each week, some of whom are in prison and others in the community as ex-prisoners.

As a post-release project, the You're Equal Project has, from its inception, been focused on ensuring the availability and flexibility of the mentors in responding to the needs and crises of participants after their release from prison (*see also Chapters 7-9*). Chapter 6 offers an overview of the mentoring process from the mentors' point of view.



Findings:

**What the mentors and
service providers had to say
about the You're Equal
mentoring model**



6. Findings: What the mentors and service providers had to say about the You're Equal mentoring model

This chapter focuses specifically on mapping the You're Equal mentoring model. An overview of the model is described and outlined by the mentors themselves and by service providers from the two Local Area Networks at Cork and Castlerea Prisons. Throughout the evaluation period, we had close contact with each of the mentors, who facilitated us greatly. They gave freely of their time, organised our research visits and arranged meetings with participants and professional service providers. They also provided us with open access to their case notes and records as source material for this evaluation.

This chapter is based primarily on our interviews with each of the mentors, as well as the Project Coordinator. In addition, the views of other service providers are included since they offered reflections on the mentoring process.

Mentoring: Initial training, supports and supervision

A key resource made available through the EQUAL funding for this project are the mentors, who work directly with prisoners while they are in prison and ex-prisoners on their release. All the mentors received initial and ongoing training, which covered such core issues as an overview of the You're Equal Project and its partners, an overview of the prisons involved and the agencies within and outside the prisons, together with specific training and guidance on the role of mentors and the interpersonal skills required. Full details of the training received by mentors is given in the Appendix of this report.

Specifically, the initial training session, 'Advice to Beginning Mentors', advocated how the mentors' ongoing support and flexibility in responding to and developing trust with the participants were crucial in helping the participants to help themselves (a feature recognised in the literature, as noted earlier). Key phrases (*see below*) from this early training session reinforce the central disposition of the You're Equal Project towards how mentoring is done successfully:

- 'The ability of the participant to grow is dependent on self-esteem ...'
- 'Your success as a mentor is dependent on the participant's readiness and openness for learning ...'
- 'If you offer advice before the right time, it probably can't be understood or used yet by the participant ...'
- 'Don't create an impression of "pushiness" because that won't be seen as meeting a need in the participant ...'
- 'More often than not, rejection relates to the participant's readiness to learn, not you, and it provides a valuable clue about the participant's development and professional maturity ...'
- 'Remember that the "door to change is LOCKED on the INSIDE". The participant has to choose to take risks with you for the sake of growth ...'
- 'Make a commitment to the participant and the mentoring relationship early on. Then share confidences with the participant to demonstrate your willingness to be vulnerable for the sake of your learning and growth ...'
- 'Plan some social times and allow for the participant's other areas of life. Build in mini-celebrations and invent little rituals to mark milestones in the participant's growth ...'

The mentors also work with agencies responsible for, or that interact with, prisoners while they are still in prison (including the Irish Prison Service, Probation Service, VEC and HSE), as well as with agencies and organisations that interact or provide services to ex-prisoners once they have left prison (including the Department of Social and Family Affairs, FÁS and Area-based Partnerships).

Each of the mentors showed a clear understanding and appreciation of the struggles, both practical and psychological, that prisoners face when they are released from prison. Having been in prison herself for two years, one of the mentors, Siobhan, had a very deep appreciation of the challenges involved for re-integrating:

Getting out of prison is like being kicked out of home. It doesn't matter if you're in prison 6 months or 6 years. The definition of institutionalisation is being in an institution for a long time. But it's not always that way. You can be in an institution and after a couple of weeks, you can be institutionalised. Like, in prison you have to eat on your own in your cell, so you lose all the social niceties. You come out of prison with a smile on your face or a don't-f***-with-me face. You can't survive otherwise. And when you come out, you have to unlearn all that and relearn all the other social skills. Now, put that on top of all the practical stuff that has to be done and people who can't cope with that become very very overburdened and can very very easily give up and go back to saying, "I'll go back to doing what I can do", which is jump over a post office counter, go get pissed, go rob this, go rob that ...

(Siobhan, peer mentor, Castlereah)

Mentoring for Jerry was also about creating the space that allowed people to make their own mistakes:

If you mentor someone inappropriately, you can stop them reaching their rock bottom and stop them learning from that. As a mentor, you need sometimes to let it go wrong for people, but be there to help them pick up the pieces, pick up the consequences. It's all about consistency.

(Jerry, peer mentor, Castlereah)

One mother whose son had ended up spending 8 months in Cork Prison having 'gone mad on drugs and drink' travelled 150 miles to meet with us, to give her thanks to the You're Equal Project and the work of the mentors in helping to turn her son's life around. Her son was now 6 months out of prison, had got himself a job and moved accommodation away from the town and the old gang of friends who were still causing and getting into trouble. The key difference and reason for this mother's thanks was the work of the mentor:

When he [son Garry] was in prison in Cork, Larry [the mentor] was there for him. And when he got out of prison, he got into trouble again and Larry was still there for him. I think that made a huge difference to him – that Larry didn't turn his back on him when he got into trouble again. Larry met up with him again. I think Larry is very good for him, you know; that back-up is there for him the whole time if he does tend to fall back and he can ring Larry and Larry is there all the time for him to talk to and he comes down to meet him. And I've spoken to Larry a few times when he phoned to see how he's doing. That's nice to know, that somebody cares for him, that Larry is still there for him even though he got back into trouble. That meant a lot to him, you know. He's got a job now, moved address and is keeping out of trouble, and I believe it's all down to Larry's support and encouragement. It's [the You're Equal Project] a great thing.

(Garry's mother)

Riona, the Head Teacher at the Education Unit in Castlereah, was clear in her recognition and praised the contribution the project as a whole, and the mentors in particular, had made to the lives of prisoners:

The project filled the void in post-release services. It is beneficial to us as a unit if we can refer a prisoner to the service who will act as a support worker in achieving their plan. The continuous support offered to the prisoner in enabling him to plan for his release is beneficial to all involved in the rehabilitation of prisoners. The 'throughcare' element of this project is undoubtedly the most beneficial element. The efforts made in coordinating the external post-release services in relation to supporting the prisoner are positive. The

improvement of the service provided by external agencies in re-integrating prisoners into the community and in increasing their knowledge and skills when dealing with ex-prisoners is a positive step. The possibility of accessing a support worker who can support the educational plans of a prisoner is a help to all teachers, but in particular to the career guidance teacher. The mentors undoubtedly have worked tirelessly in achieving their aims in often difficult circumstances.

(Riona, Head Teacher, Castlerea)

Kieran, the Probation Officer at Castlerea Prison, openly admitted to being unsure about the sincerity of the You're Equal Project to begin with, given the difficulties of the initial communications. However, he was now adamant that the mentors had made a real and genuine difference to the challenge prisoners face as they are released:

I see mentors as the real support workers. They have been excellent in doing their jobs. The immediacy of the mentors' service to the prisoners on the day of their release is crucial. What we've had here [in Castlerea] is Jerry or Siobhan picking someone up at the gate and taking them somewhere, typically to an AA meeting or to accommodation, and helping them to settle in. That first day is one of the highest risk for prisoners re-offending because their situation is unstable and because they have to celebrate getting out of jail. Given just how big a problem substance abuse is for so many prisoners, the immediacy of service from the is crucial the mentor in helping to break the cycle.

(Kieran, Probation Officer, Castlerea)

Albert, one of the long-term prisoners involved in the establishment of the You're Equal Project, gave his view on how the role of the mentors could usefully develop in the future:

I would like to see the mentoring programme touch base with long-serving prisoners, who may still have 2 or 3 years left to serve. The world has changed greatly since I and other long-term prisoners were committed to prison and these changes can be quite daunting. The school [in the prison] does not facilitate people like 'us'. The Probation Service is stretched and I see the mentors as best placed and committed to offering the guidance and support needed. The fact that the mentors here in Castlerea are peer mentors also makes a great deal of difference and I feel that they are respected by the participants for the empathy they have and show ... If the mentoring programme was installed as a continually evolving and adaptable programme, designed to address prisoner needs and encourage prisoners to help themselves, I believe – as one who has served over 13 years so far – that there will be a notable positive outcome for the prisoners and for society as a whole.

(Albert, prisoner, Castlerea)

Mentoring and the selection of participants

At the beginning of the mentoring project, participants were randomly selected from among those with 6 months left to serve on their sentence. A prospective participant was initially approached by a mentor (or someone in the prison system with a good working relationship with the prisoner) to offer him a place on the You're Equal Project and to discuss the services available through the mentoring relationship. This gives the mentors an opportunity to engage with and develop a trusted working relationship with the participant before he is released. The pre-release work done in prison is crucial to the success of the mentoring engagement, whereby the prisoner buys in (or refuses to participate) and the mentor works with him to develop a personal plan covering the period to release and beyond.

Initially, the decision to randomly select participants was to ensure that there was no 'creaming off' or selection of prisoners who were considered to be easier to work with. However, as the project has progressed, there is some movement towards targeted selection and some self-referrals in both Cork and Castlerea Prisons. This shift in practice has developed out of the learning generated over the first year of the project at both prisons, through the experience of the mentors and also the wider case conferences

held within each prison, which focus on the individual needs of each prisoner and their person-centred plans, both of which have become key aspects of the mentors' work with the participants.

Mentoring and the construction of person-centred plans

Each of the mentors brings a unique set of skills and way of mentoring to their work, which is slightly different in each of the prisons. In Castlerea, the mentors Siobhan and Jerry tend to meet each of the randomly selected participants together on the first occasion in an attempt to see which of the two of them might be best suited to working with that participant over the course of the project. In Cork, the mentors Larry and Pat, working alongside the Probation Officers and some of the teachers, use group work, as well as one-to-one work, as a model of working with the participants within the prison. All these approaches work well for the mentors and participants alike:

Fundamentally, the mentoring process has a post-release objective and, while a lot of mentoring happens in the prison environment, the whole objective is on building a relationship for the post-release work to happen. And that is what I've found – by being able to meet with and work with the client on a one-to-one basis within the prison, sometimes for up to 6 months prior to their release, I can help the participant to make a plan so that we can continue with the mentoring relationship post-release. So, fundamentally, the You're Equal Project is seen as a post-release programme. But there is a lot of work done with the men in the prison environment and that's what makes this particular mentoring programme so successful.

(Larry, mentor, Cork)

The mentors meet regularly (usually weekly) with the participants within the prison with a view to developing and maintaining a relationship that will underpin the construction of a person-centred plan that is 'owned' by the participant. Through these meetings, the mentors develop a picture of the issues facing the individual and can assist him in drawing up a structured holistic plan to address them:

When I start to work with people, I ask them 'If you had a magic wand, what is it you'd like to do?' and the amazing thing is they don't know. So you have to go back and say, 'Here's an A4 pad and what I'd like you to do tonight is to write out a list of what you'd like. And if you can't do that, write out a list of what you wouldn't like, what you don't want'. The negative list is often the easiest one to write out ... Drawing up a pros and cons list – his wishes and hopes and dreams on 4 or 5 pages, where he came from, where he is now and what he'd like to do, with action points – actually gives them time to formulate their thoughts. That's kind of the way I start to work with them. I found that, in prison writing out things often helps.

(Siobhan, peer mentor, Castlerea)

Case conferencing within prison

Case conference meetings are held in both prisons every 3 weeks. At these meetings, the mentors represent the participants, bringing their understanding of the issues to the attention of a multidisciplinary team, consisting of representatives from the prison services, Probation, Linkage Programme, work and training, the VEC and chaplaincy. All work together in considering each participant's needs and progress in the project and in making decisions that are participant-focused on the lead-up to release.

The participant will say whatever issues he has at that particular time and I simply reflect back and try to help him with the issues he is struggling with at that time. There are other services and we [mentors] work very well and very positively with them. That is part of this process and we are seen as a help, coming into the prison to assist people prior to their release.

(Larry, mentor, Cork)

By being participant-focused, these case conferences have been an invaluable opportunity for service providers within the prison to come together and share perspectives on the participants. This not only creates a more holistic perspective on the men themselves, but also creates the add-on benefit of greater understanding and communication between the services within the prison (*see also Chapter 7*).

Network supports outside prison

The mentors act as the link between services inside and outside the prison. Outside the prison, the Local Area Networks (LANs) at Cork and Castlerea have both been established as the framework to support the work of the You're Equal Project. The LANs are made up of service providers from within and outside the prisons. They have been established as formal networks, conducting themselves in a formal manner and following terms of reference to guide their work.

LAN meetings are held every 6 weeks, involving, among others, the Department of Social and Family Affairs, FÁS, Local Partnership company and a representative from the prison. The Project Coordinator attends all LAN meetings, while the mentors are invited to attend certain meetings to represent the interests of the individual prisoners who are due for release or who have been released. The Coordinator advocates issues on behalf of the mentors and the LAN members collectively discuss policy issues.

The add-on value from the process of these LAN meetings has been recognised by the WRC Social and Economic Consultants in their You're Equal Mapping Document, which found:

The members of the Network work together to solve problems, fill gaps or otherwise ensure that barriers are not put in the way of the re-integration of the individuals concerned. This can mean, for example, ensuring effective communication between organisations regarding a given individual (e.g. between the Department of Social and Family Affairs and FÁS); speeding up a process to ensure that a given individual does not have to spend too much time without adequate accommodation or too much time idle; pre-registering of individuals on FÁS courses; effective intra-organisation communication (e.g. Department representative on the network contacting counterpart in Sligo with a view to ensuring effective handling of a returning ex-prisoner).

This evaluation indicates that much of the positive work the LANs are achieving is as a direct result of the newly established relationships and multiagency collaboration that have been generated through the You're Equal Project. Staff within and outside the prisons have commented on how the You're Equal Project has created the opportunity for new ways of working together to better understand the needs of prisoners, both within prison and on their release. A product of the process of this emerging multiagency collaboration has been the creation of a network of supports that come together to organise the running of the You're Equal Project, as well as the case conference meetings that are held to discuss the specific needs of individual participants (*see above*).

Thus, a very significant output from this project has been the new ways in which networks of multiagency collaboration come together, focused on the needs of prisoners and ex-prisoners. The You're Equal Project won European funding by highlighting this shortcoming in joined-up service provision – the gap between in-prison and outside-prison services for prisoners and ex-prisoners – where a crucial part of the needs of prisoners is about supporting them to negotiate the first few days of their release successfully. The mentors, supported through the Local Area Networks, were proposed as the model for bridging this inside-/outside-prison world and helping the participants to re-integrate into civic society after their release.

A very practical and supportive part of the mentoring work is quite simply 'being there' to meet the participants as they are released from prison. All of the evidence from this evaluation, supported by the literature review, indicates that the moment of release is one of the high-risk periods for participants – a time when many ex-

prisoners can go back to their previous pattern of behaviour, the one that has always got them into trouble. By physically meeting the participants at the gates of the prison on their release, the mentors are offering both an emotional support and a strategic intervention at a crucial stage in the mentoring process:

Getting out of prison is a really difficult time for most of the men. He comes out that gate with a plastic bag and a voucher for either a train ticket or a bus ticket. If there is any money in his gratuity account, he has that. If he doesn't, he has nothing and that's it, he is left out that gate ... totally abandoned ... If he has family who have transport, he might have somebody to pick him up. If he doesn't, well that's it ... If it's a Friday when he gets out, as it so often is, then he is without money for the weekend until the dole opens on Monday or the community welfare office opens on the Monday. As for his GP or medical needs, you have to be out of prison to claim a medical card and you need to have a fixed address to claim it. So these are the things you face immediately. Very often, the guys just disappear then. So we meet them at the gate when we know they are being released.

(Siobhan, peer mentor, Castlerea)

The organisations involved in the Local Area Networks at Cork and Castlerea, and the individuals who represent these agencies at the Network, Management And Mainstreaming Committee meetings, are to be commended for the service they give to the ongoing development of the You're Equal Project as a whole. Many such agencies involve themselves in the work of supporting prisoners on their release, even when many of the released prisoners resettle to counties outside of their service providers' catchment areas. For example, the Roscommon Partnership gives significant support and leadership to the project at the Castlerea Prison, yet most of the men released from that prison return to live in counties other than Roscommon. Thus, it should be recognised that the supports given by service providers in Local Area Networks are far from simply 'local' and therefore to be commended.

Learning lessons through mentoring

As a pilot project, the mentors involved have been keen to engage in critical self-reflection in order to learn, develop and grow the mentoring in a productive way. The mentors in each of the prisons work very closely together and offer each other ongoing support. Furthermore, they meet all together once a month to share new ideas and learning from the challenges in their work. We found each of the mentors to be open and reflective practitioners, confident in their own skills yet willing to admit when they wanted, or felt they needed, to develop their practice.

A number of key issues came up as learning moments throughout the first year of the project. The team of mentors, together with the Project Coordinator, responded to these in such a way as to further develop and enhance the mentoring project. The main issues, discussed below, were:

- the challenge of maintaining contact with participants when they were released early or transferred unplanned to another prison;
- the challenges presented to the mentors when working in an urban or rural context;
- observations on the gender of the mentor;
- observations on peer mentoring and volunteer mentoring.

Maintaining contact when participants are transferred or released early

One of the first and most significant learning issues to occur came early on in the mentoring project when many of the initial participants in the You're Equal Project were transferred from Castlerea Prison to Loughan House in Cavan. While partnership agreements with Cork and Castlerea Prisons had been clearly negotiated from the start of the project, similar arrangements had not been established with Loughan House. Although it did not take much time or effort to establish these new connections, the issue could have been foreseen and included in the initial You're Equal Development Partnership Agreement.

In other instances, because Cork and Castlerea are both remand prisons and there is no way of predicting or controlling the numbers of prisoners sent there on any given night, some prisoners are released early to make way for new ones in an attempt to avoid overcrowding. Once again, early experiences of unplanned and early releases were most disruptive to the work of the mentors, where often the mentors turned up to the prison only to find that the participant had already been released, even though they had been working hard on a pre-release plan of action. However, if the mentor has established a relationship with a given prisoner who is subsequently transferred or gets early release, the mentor tries to maintain contact with the participant in question, subject to his agreement.

Recently, the Governor in Castlerea and the Chief Officer in Cork have both directed that the prison files of participants engaged with a mentor on the You're Equal Project should be flagged and when a participant is released or transferred, his mentor should be notified immediately. This is seen as a crucial piece of the jigsaw and a most positive outcome from the case conferencing meetings.

Mentoring across the urban/rural divide

Throughout this evaluation project, we were concerned to explore the context, challenges and possibilities of working in both the urban and rural settings of Cork and Castlerea. Castlerea Prison is located in a rural area, with little post-release infrastructure in place, with the notable exceptions of the Dóchas Centre Galway and the Linkage Programme. Cork Prison, on the other hand, already has some post-release support services in place, such as Cork Alliance Centre, Churchfield Community Trust, the Dillons Cross Project, Linkage Programme and HOPE. The existence of these post-release supports in Cork has led to some, not insurmountable, challenges of overlap and duplication (see Chapter 4, *'Multiagency collaboration and the risk of service duplication'*). However, the complete absence of any such support services in the surrounds of Castlerea Prison raised considerable challenges for the mentors and those involved in the network of support.

With regard to the urban/rural divide, a key finding in the way the mentors and network partners have to work relates simply to the very long distances they need to travel on a daily and weekly basis to meet with and support the participants who have left prison and returned to live as far afield as Cos. Donegal, Longford, Limerick, Galway and Cavan.

Mentoring in rural Ireland means you could be driving around all day. You tend to go to them [participants], rather than expect them to get into the office in Castlerea or Galway.

(Siobhan, peer mentor, Castlerea)

One advantage of travelling these long distances, often giving lifts to and from appointments, is that it gives the mentors an opportunity to be with the participants for longer periods of time in a fairly relaxed atmosphere – and the mentors use this time most productively. However, the distances involved make it impossible to compare the two projects at Cork and Castlerea in terms of the mileage costs or the time taken to meet with the participants involved.

Observations on the gender of mentors

We were interested to explore the issue of gender with the mentors. Three of the five mentors employed on the You're Equal Project are men (Pat, Larry and Jerry), while the other two (Siobhan and Marina) are women. Thus we were able, to some degree, to consider the gender of mentors as a variable worth commenting upon.

The three male mentors really did not have any comment to make on their gender. As men working predominantly with other men, gender did not seem to be an issue (although we often shared conversations about the stark macho nature of the prisons as total institutions where at times there was a sense of toughness throughout, from prison officers at the gates through to the prisoners and ex-prisoners). Similarly, at

first neither of the two female mentors had any comments or observations on what it was like to be a woman working with prisoners and ex-prisoners who were mainly men and within what was certainly perceived as an all-male institution. As Marina, the volunteer peer mentor in Cork, said, 'I don't even notice it, that's being honest. It would not be an issue. I wouldn't even think of it'.

However, on further consideration, both Siobhan and Marina had some interesting observations about gender:

I don't know 'cos I'm a female. Maybe the fellows treat you with a little more respect? I don't know if that's it, but like, never in a month of Sundays would they disrespect me, never. I never have any trouble with the men because i am a woman.

(Marina, volunteer peer mentor, Cork)

Of course, I'd be conscious of what I'd wear and how I dress when I am working with the men. But that's not a big thing at all. What I'm much more aware of is how I feel when I make contact with their wives or partners. I often get a feeling from them, like, who's this other woman phoning me to say she wants to talk about how my husband or boyfriend is getting on. You know, I think that side of the work, working with the men's wives, would be much easier for the male mentors.

(Siobhan, peer mentor, Castlereah)

Observations on peer mentoring

One of the defining characteristics of the work of the You're Equal mentors is how many of them are peer mentors, i.e. having once been prisoners themselves – Siobhan and Jerry in Castlereah, Marina in Cork, and Tommy, the Project Coordinator.

While empowerment and participation are core values and perspectives that were driven in this project by the Roscommon Partnership and the Cork VEC in particular, the You're Equal Project has always strived to include service users (prisoners and ex-prisoners) in all stages of the project. Thus, peer mentoring was a key consideration from the very establishment of the project. Linda (Roscommon Partnership), who was one of the main drivers in the project from the start, felt committed to exploring the value of peer mentoring as a key aspect of the project:

Peer mentoring has so much to bring to this project from a community development perspective. There is nothing like having lived the experience and being able to share that genuine empathy. I suppose that's the position I brought to the table at the start. I suppose, to be honest, I was a bit naïve; a bit shocked too for the concerns, sensibilities and security issues that this brought up for the Prison Service. I came to this project with a real naïvety, but there was willingness and openness within Castlereah [prison] to consider and explore the possibilities of peer mentoring.

(Linda, Roscommon Partnership, Castlereah)

A specific objective of this evaluation project was to consider the implications involved in peer mentoring. However, employing peer mentors and agreeing their clearance to enter some of the prisons was not without concern and risk, most notably for the Irish Prison Service. Jerry, a peer mentor in Castlereah Prison, spoke about knowing first-hand how difficult it is to be honest about one's history of addiction and imprisonment – the very challenge that all of the participants in the You're Equal Project have to face at some stage:

I'm an ex-prisoner myself. In active addiction for 17 years, heroin was my drug of choice and in 1997 I went through a treatment centre ... What if you have turned a corner in your life and you're then looking to make a new start. Do you draw a line underneath the past, veil it and try to hide it and pretend it never happened and kind of reinvent yourself? In which case you're kind of living a lie. Or do you openly and honestly declare your past? In which case you're unlikely to even get the interview, you know, let alone the job.

(Jerry, peer mentor, Castlereah)

All of the mentors felt that the peer mentors' own experience of prison was an invaluable tool in their work with the participants. The peer mentors themselves were adamant that they used their personal experience and narrative of life in prison and their journey of re-integration in a careful and appropriate way to engage, support and challenge the participants in this project:

Well, I'm a volunteer mentor and also what's considered a peer mentor, having spent time in Limerick Prison myself. I'm also a recovering alcoholic, so I bring a lot of my own personal experience to it. But it's very important that you do a lot of work on yourself. I got sober. I worked on myself. I did a lot of personal work. It's important that I'm in a good place myself before I even went to work for You're Equal. If I wasn't well in myself, I wouldn't be able to be of use to the people I'm supposed to be helping. So I bring that dimension to working with the guys.

(Marina, volunteer peer mentor, Cork)

I was in prison for two years and that's one of the reasons I wanted to do this job. 'Cos having been there, I thought I could make a difference to somebody. I think it's easier to relate to someone in front of you if you can say 'Yeah, I know where you're coming from'.

(Siobhan, peer mentor, Castlerea)

Having their own personal stories, the peer mentors claim, assists in establishing their credibility and bona fides with the participants:

Being a peer mentor puts you in a unique position to challenge both the prisoners and the system. Just by being there, you can show that rehabilitation does actually work.

(Jerry, peer mentor, Castlerea)

Others, too, in the planning stage were open to exploring the role and value of peer mentors, although while Barry, of the Linkage Programme in Castlerea Prison, considered peer mentors as important members of the multidisciplinary agency, he was not saying that mentors should be exclusively ex-prisoners themselves:

To have the experience of ex-offenders made good is very useful. At the same time, there is a danger if you use a single lens to view people – ex-offenders are more than just ex-offenders ... I think if you have a sensitivity and I think having people within the system who are peer mentors, they can be very helpful for those with no trust in the rest of us. There is a divide often between prisoners and the professionals who are there meant to be working to support them.

(Barry, Linkage Programme, Castlerea)

Willie Conlon, the Industrial Manager in Castlerea Prison, was sure, having worked in other prisons with many prisoners and service providers, that peer mentors were a key difference that made this project successful:

Peer mentors see through things and break through barriers with the lads [prisoners] very quickly. Where you see that mostly is at the case conference reviews. One of the peer mentors says something about one of the lads and it suddenly makes sense. Nobody pulls the wool over the [peer] mentors' eyes; so the pace of work is so much quicker with them.

(Willie, Industrial Manager, Castlerea)

Volunteer mentoring

Knowing that a number of the international examples of mentoring projects referred to in the literature review (*see Chapter 2*) were based on the central role of volunteer mentors and in light of the current drive towards civic involvement and voluntarism, we were interested to explore this aspect of mentoring in the You're Equal model. However, given that only one of the 5 mentors was a volunteer (Marina), we are unable to extrapolate on the role of volunteer mentors in this project. Marina's volunteerism is commendable and she is clear evidence that such civic-minded people exist in modern Ireland. However, her narrative also shows how her choice to volunteer in this instance is, understandably, also influenced by her desire to construct a practice-based CV for

future paid employment. More than this, however, her narrative is strong evidence of the journey that peer mentors must undertake as they move from service users to successful service providers.

Crucially, Marina's experience and interview as a peer mentor in Cork Prison show how ex-prisoners (who are not allowed re-enter the prison as service providers) are at a significant disadvantage in developing a pre-release relationship with prisoners. In Marina's case, it was much more complex to develop a congruent relationship with the same prisoners on their release. Thus, while we are unable to make any significant comments on the volunteer aspects of mentoring in the You're Equal Project, Marina's act of volunteering has not only assisted a number of prisoners and ex-prisoners, but her contribution has also illuminated a key learning issue – the necessity of building up a pre-release relationship for the post-release service to be successful.

It is important to note that the mentors are not employed by any of the State agencies and they, along with other members of the Local Area Networks, are of the view that their independence is another contributory factor that influences the extent to which they are accepted and trusted by the prisoners and ex-prisoners, many of whom have issues with authority. All of the peer mentors and mentors we interviewed showed clear evidence of how their various life experiences influenced their way of relating and working with prisoners and ex-prisoners in their jobs as mentors.

Mentoring: Process and output

The mentors recognise that part of their work as mentors is practical, helping to organise and guide participants as they leave prison and try to fit back into society. In that sense, the work is task-centred and product-based, e.g. organising accommodation and job interviews, helping to compose and type out a participant's CV, assisting a participant fill out forms for welfare payments and so on. At the same time, and often in doing this task-centred work with the participants, the mentors are also focused on the process of the work, e.g. modelling behaviour that participants may be unfamiliar with, staying committed to them, being consistent, turning up as promised or returning a phone call when arranged:

One aspect of mentoring is a bit like parenting. It's all about consistency. Many of the guys will be coming in from chaotic backgrounds where people gave up on them. You are talking about people (and these are generalisations) with very low self-esteem, very low self-confidence and usually homes of inconsistent care or support. What we offer is consistency.

(Jerry, peer mentor, Castlereagh)

This dual focus on product and process has been an important aspect of the way the mentors work. Doing one without the other would be a wasted exercise, e.g. talking about accommodation without assisting a man to organise himself, or perhaps doing too much for someone without allowing them to travel the journey themselves:

I tend to mentor by looking at the practical stuff first. [Then] I delve into what is the reason behind, for example, the accommodation problem, the alcohol problem ... find out what are the real issues 'cos very often the presenting problems are *not* the real issues. People usually come out with the same four issues – accommodation, alcohol or drugs, family situations and very often illiteracy. When you probe a bit deeper, other stuff comes out, like 'I can't go home 'cos my father said he'd kill me 'cos I'm gay and he can't handle it'. That was one man's story that I was working with, you know, and his thing was to get drunk, get stoned and block the whole thing out.

(Siobhan, peer mentor, Castlereagh)

This balancing act is a key feature in the model of mentoring developed by the You're Equal team of mentors. As stated in the You're Equal Mentoring Overview (January 2007):

Working with participants on various aspects of their behaviour and lifestyle, the participants incorporate new ideas and practices, and apply them, it is hoped, to everyday life and living. They become more aware of the conditions required for change. The mentoring process is developmental because participants who want to remain crime- and drug-free are developing persons and ever changing and evolving ... But as the participant develops, the mentor's style will need to shift if the mentor's assistance is to remain appropriate to the new needs and level of maturity of the participant. Therein lies the mentor's opportunity to greatly facilitate accelerated personal growth, but, the greater the risk of problems if the mentoring relationship is not developing at the same pace.

Styles and frameworks of mentoring

In exploring what the mentors do and how each of them approach their work with participants, we found a clear framework that they all followed. Yet each of the mentors has a unique style that distinguishes them in working to engage, challenge and support the men. These different and complementary styles of mentoring are supported by the mentors themselves in the You're Equal Mentoring Overview (January 2007), where they claim:

Each mentor has a style of mentoring which they have developed. Style is a mix of natural tendencies towards certain approaches to life and of approaches which have been learned and adopted to make mentoring relationships both more productive and more comfortable. Life experiences teach us that we need to strike a balance between being task-oriented and relationship-oriented. Exactly how we have individually settled this issue and struck a balance is our personal mentoring style.

The You're Equal team of mentors have identified four mentoring styles:

- holistic – initial assessment;
- querying – follow-up visits;
- confrontational – challenging behaviours;
- encouraging – progression and reviewing.

We propose in this evaluation report that the mentoring framework can be seen to follow four distinct phases of development:

- two phases in prison – (a) initial engagement and (b) ongoing relationship-building in prison;
and
- two phases outside prison – (c) early release support and (d) ongoing mentoring support and success.

The four mentoring styles form the fundamental elements of the mentoring process and may be seen as aligning with the four stages of the mentoring process (see Table 14). However, all four mentoring styles are needed at some point in that process and the skill of the reflective mentor/practitioner is in using more than one of the styles during any one meeting with a participant.

Table 14: Styles and phases in the mentoring process

Phase in mentoring	Style of mentoring
First contact	Holistic – initial assessment
In-prison relationship-building	Querying – follow-up visits
Early stages of release	Confrontational – challenging behaviours
Re-integration and maintained success	Encouraging – progression and reviewing

Mentoring as a profession

From our experience of being with the mentors and interviewing them, we found them to be most professional in their regard for their work as mentors in the You're Equal Project. Yet, for the main part, they shied away from calling themselves 'professionals'.

All of them viewed it as important that they were not employed by any of the State agencies. This brought an independence to their role when working with the prisoners and ex-prisoners, which they believed was a strong factor in contributing to their not being perceived as the same or aligned with any of the other professional service providers.

Not being perceived as professionals in this sense was for them a contributory factor in the extent to which they are accepted and trusted by prisoners and ex-prisoners, many of whom have issues with authority. Similarly, the mentors worried about the future of the project, when it might become mainstreamed and controlled by such factors as time constraints, increased caseloads and professional boundaries, which the mentors believed would get in the way of doing the actual work of spending time with the participants themselves.

Mentoring as caring

We found appropriate examples where the mentors recognised that, upon occasion, they would strategically adopted a style of mentoring with the participants that was 'being like a mother' or 'being somewhat like an uncle':

You know, sometimes that's what they [participants] need. Sometimes when they ask you a question, there really is only one clear answer and at those times I'm not shy from being 'the mammy' and telling them what I think they should do. Sometimes, you know, that's what I do if I think it's the right thing to do. I think Pat [mentor] in Cork is sometimes like an uncle to some of the lads too, in the same sort of way of being with them.

(Siobhan, peer mentor, Castlereagh)

Spending time with and interviewing Pat, the only full-time mentor employed in Cork, it became clear to us what Siobhan was getting at in her rather fond description of him as 'an uncle'. Pat spent a lot of time getting to know his participants and working hard to link them into a job that he felt would be a suitable match for their ability and interests. A big part of Pat's approach to mentoring was based on developing a sense of internal discipline in the men through work – in work their time would be positively occupied on release, they would earn some money and thus build and develop their self-esteem and confidence. It was, according to the participants we interviewed, an approach that often worked.

None of the participants we interviewed spoke of feeling 'mothered' or 'uncle-ed' in any paternalistic manner, but they did speak openly of the various ways they felt encouraged, supported and helped by their mentors (*see Chapters 7 and 8 for what the participants said*).

Mentoring as sponsorship and therapeutic change

To a large degree, all the mentors positioned themselves more like sponsors or therapeutic change agents in relation to the participants they worked with on the project. Clearly, each of the mentors reiterated that they were not counsellors or therapists (at times they said they would refer the men to such services), but they each embodied a capacity to remain consistently available to the participants whatever they were going through.

All the mentors had a patient understanding and acceptance of how relapse fits into the cycle of change. Jerry, for example, having been through drug addiction and recovery himself, likened his role of mentor to that of a sponsor in the AA model of recovery. His narrative of the work he is involved with, mentoring some of the most addicted participants, showed his very deep and patient understanding of relapse and how setbacks can at times be the very opportunity for an open and honest engagement. He referred to such occasions as the 'bullshit buster':

My desire sometimes would not be for them to avoid prison. Sometimes that's exactly what the guy needs to help stabilise him ... like if you are trying to work with a guy, you can challenge him to a point, but then you have to leave him and trust him. Then he goes out and doesn't do half the stuff he said he was going to do and it all goes belly-up and he

ends up back in jail. Well then, you have a really honest starting place all over again. I call it the 'bullshit buster', like 'We've both witnessed your behaviour on your last release. Now what are we going to talk about?'

(Jerry, peer mentor, Castlereagh)

Each of the mentors spoke about their disposition towards the men and recognised the need to 'work with them from where they were at'. Siobhan summed it up as:

The men make all the changes. They do the work, we just facilitate them. We are there to work with them when they are ready to do the work. And we keep reminding them that we are there for them, but it's up to them, we can't do the work for them, be it addiction counselling, anger management, organising a house or a home. We can help them, advise them, be there as a support or whatever, but it's up to them at the end of the day ... Likewise, it's up to the men themselves if they want to take part in the mentoring project. A number of men that we were working with in the prison dropped contact with us when they moved prison or when they got out. Sometimes we don't know they are getting out, when they are released early due to the overcrowding here in a remand prison.

(Siobhan, peer mentor, Castlereagh)

However, the paradox inherent in Siobhan's narrative (of simply facilitating or bearing witness to men who are already engaged in their own journey of self-development and change) is that it dismisses the important role of 'change agents' that the mentors have in the lives of the men. Taken to its logical conclusion, the narrative could be misinterpreted to be the corollary of the 'nothing works' mindset (Cullen, 2002, *see Chapter 2*), where those who are going to change, change themselves and those who are not simply do not engage to begin with. In an effort to explore this issue, we strategically sat in with some of the mentors in their very early meetings with some new referrals to the project in an attempt to observe the dynamics and challenges of engaging the men in the mentoring work. In Chapter 7, we discuss in more detail how sitting in with the mentors on these first meetings allowed us to experience first-hand the level of skill and ability needed to work as mentors, how respectful the mentors were of the men's choices to engage or not, but also how patient the mentors were in not simply letting the men 'off the hook' and refusing the opportunity being offered to them.

The demands of such mentoring work require great personal ability and skills. Each of the mentors were involved in some form of ongoing training through the You're Equal Project, including motivational interviewing. Much of the work engaged in by the mentors hints at this motivational or 'brief solution' work, in which they work with the men and help them map out what are their dreams and wishes for their future; then begins the more thorough task of outlining what each man needs to actually do to achieve his goals, what past patterns and behaviours (often addictive) he now needs to begin to change and what help and supports he may need to ask for along the way.

In relation to empowering the prisoner, we are talking about positive empowerment where we help the prisoner, where we support the prisoner to be empowered to take part in the programme or make the changes he or she may feel necessary. You have to go back to the idea of who owns the need for change? The client is the person who needs to change and the mentor just supports that change. I think that's very, very important – mentoring is about positive empowerment. If, however, it's the other kind of empowerment, where the mentor would do this or do that for the client, well then that's not a mentor – that's just negative empowerment and it doesn't help anyone.

(Larry, mentor, Cork)

Mentoring: Flexibility and appropriate caseloads

A key feature in the success of the mentoring project as far as all the mentors were concerned was that they are contactable by mobile phone between 8am and 10pm. This, in itself, sets them aside from any other 'professional' service.

We're there as an assistance and a support. I suppose a fundamentally important aspect of mentoring is not only being there in the moment of the meeting, but the client knowing you are there if they need you. So in our system of post-release, we're available on the

phone from 8 o'clock in the morning 'till 10 o'clock at night. I've found that's a very good way to generate enthusiasm in the client to stay in contact with the programme. For example, rather than deny difficulties or deny a relapse, they can pick up the phone maybe and say, well I messed up there, you know, and maybe we could talk about that.

(Larry, mentor, Cork)

The mentors have seen the necessity of having a flexible and responsive approach as a key requirement from the very inception of the mentoring project – 'being available to the participants when they need us':

Very often you have to make yourself available as people's problems don't become obvious between 9 and 5. I often get a phone call at 10 o'clock at night from someone saying, 'I'm doing all right, but I just want you to talk to me for 5 minutes and wait for me while I come around'. Or 'I just need to talk to you for a while'. You know that helps.

(Siobhan, peer mentor, Castlereagh)

According to Jerry, 'in general the men don't take advantage of it in a bad way at all':

If someone rings me when they are drunk, I'd say 'Great, thanks for keeping in touch. There's probably not a lot of good in us meeting today, but hey, do you want to meet for a coffee tomorrow?' Just kind of being consistent, you know, staying positive and putting some of the responsibility back onto them.

(Jerry, peer mentor, Castlereagh)

The mentors' flexibility in responding to and meeting with the participants – both on a planned basis inside and outside prison, but also at times when the men are in crisis and need their mentor – is something the mentors see as 'sacred' in their work. They all warn against the dangers of increasing caseloads and/or office bureaucracy to a point that impinges on that work and their ability to meet men in crisis:

The difference, to be fair to the other service providers, is possibly that we have the time to get to know the guys rather than just to look through their file and judge them by their tattoos ... The time issue is so important and the size of our caseloads ... I think our closest fit is with Probation. You sense that what we are doing is what they would love to be doing if they had the time or the resources. Like, sometimes it is so important that we have, for example, time to spend a day driving a fellow in crisis around Achill.

(Jerry, peer mentor, Castlereagh)

Summary

In trying to evaluate the work of the mentors, we have attempted to capture a picture of how they go about their work and speak of the men. In challenging the mentors to put a measure on their work, Jerry came close to summing up our experience of the mentoring project:

In an economic sense, it costs on average €94,000 to keep a man in prison for a year. We have been able to keep men out of prison for a fraction of that cost – men who had been in and out of prison over and over again before the mentoring project started to work with them. What people need to understand is a system of soft measurements to highlight the men's changes in attitudes, rather than the colder facts and figures of that guy's life. That guy we met this morning, for example. He is only out of prison for 6 months, he's still in a treatment centre and on benefits, he hasn't got his own accommodation or a job yet by a long shot. Those are the facts and figures of his case, but in terms of his actual life story he has made enormous changes, enormous changes.

(Jerry, peer mentor, Castlereagh)



Findings:
What participants
had to say about the
mentoring supports
within prison



7. Findings: What participants had to say about the mentoring supports within prison

This chapter and Chapter 8 offer a specific focus on what the 16 participants themselves – 7 prisoners (all men) and 9 ex-prisoners (8 men and one woman) – had to say about their experiences of the You're Equal Project and specifically their involvement in the mentoring programme, both in prison and outside prison. The 15 men in the project were randomly selected in Cork and Castlerea Prisons to take part in the mentoring programme; the only woman involved had referred herself to the programme on her return to live in Cork after her release from Mountjoy Prison in Dublin.

In seeking to meet with and interview participants in this study, we attempted to interview people from both prisons who had worked with each of the different mentors. Furthermore, we strategically wanted to interview people who were involved at each stage of the mentoring process, i.e. (a) early engagement with the mentors in the prisons; (b) developing the mentoring relationship within prison; (c) support on their release from prison; and (d) ongoing mentoring support and re-integration. We are confident that within this sample we have achieved the range of interviewees sought. We interviewed 7 participants in prison in the first two phases of the mentoring process, and a further 9 participants who had been released from prison and were working with the mentors towards their goals with varying levels of success (*see Tables 1 and 2*).

Interviewing participants: Prisoners and ex-prisoners

All the participants we met with spoke openly about what brought them into prison, the challenges of living in prison, the risks involved in leaving prison and the need for support and guidance to begin the process of re-integration into society outside the prison walls. Many explained clearly how drugs and drink were their 'real problems', how they missed their children and felt they had let their families down. Some men spoke of how addicted they were to cars, crime, gambling, and how they knew they were not yet finished going in and out of prison. Interviewing some of them, we as researchers experienced just how challenging some men are to talk with, let alone engage with or challenge on their behaviours and attitudes to crime. We wondered at times about some of these men's level of learning difficulties and/or mental health. Yet we were satisfied that our research strategy of interviewing participants along the trajectory of involvement in the mentoring project allowed us to explore how the mentoring developed with the men. This development of mentoring work as a relationship is something we will explore in detail in this chapter.

While some men we had arranged to interview did not turn up (some because of jobs or interviews, and others maybe because, as the mentors involved explained 'they were the less reliable ones'), all of the men we interviewed praised and acknowledged the positive role that the mentors had made in their lives, crediting them and the project with making a real difference in keeping them out of trouble and out of prison.

Early engagement with mentors in prisons

As discussed in Chapter 6, the men in both Cork and Castlerea Prisons have until now been selected randomly, based on their upcoming release date, with the intention of allowing the mentors to engage the men and to develop a relationship with them prior to release. Sitting in on the early meetings in Castlerea Prison allowed us to experience just how time-consuming it is to simply get access to the men in prison. The peer

mentors in Castlerea are escorted to and from the prison gates to the school, where new participants are met; the prison officers then look for the required participants and ask them to meet with the mentors. All of this takes quite some time and occasionally the participants were busy or involved in some other activity. However, while each of the mentors mentioned how time-consuming and initially frustrating it seemed to gain access to prisoners within the prison, issues of access and accommodation for the mentors and their meetings with the participants in each prison has greatly improved as the project has developed.

Garry was 19 years of age when we interviewed him, having recently served his first prison sentence of 8 months in Cork Prison:

I was in for a load of different charges – assault and burglary, got 2½ years suspended, mainly due to the drink and drugs, going mad robbing cars. I was drinking from about 12 years up, but drinking heavy from 17 and using drugs. The guards were standing up for me, saying I was easily led. I get on well with all the guards around the town.

(Garry, 19, Cork Prison, drunk and disorderly)

During the interview, Garry described how the engagement process within prison worked and how appreciative he was of the way his mentor, Larry, was there for him when he was inside:

He [Larry] came up to me inside one day and started talking about You're Equal and I said OK and he's [Larry] grand. Like, he said to me, 'You can tell me to f*** off if you want to, but I'll be there for you if you need someone to talk to'. So I said yeah, that's be great. So we made a plan for when I'd get out, what I was going to do, where I was going to stay, would I go home, getting a job and stuff like that. We done all that in prison.

(Garry, 19, Cork Prison, drunk and disorderly)

Interviewer: It sounds simple when you put it like that.

Garry: Ah God, it sounds easy all right. But no, it wasn't easy changing. I suppose that's the hard thing about it – changing.

Interviewer: What were you trying to change? What new things were you trying to put in place?

Garry: F*** it, everything – f*** it, I'd have done anything not to end up back in Cork [prison]. It was enough of a fright. I suppose for some people prison doesn't work. But it gave me a fright.

Observing the initial meetings between mentors and participants in a small number of cases allowed us to experience first-hand how the You're Equal Project was explained to them very clearly: about how they would not get any extra benefits (such as early release) if they participated, but rather the project was about helping them plan for when they got out of prison, to try and help them break the patterns of what had got them into trouble on previous occasions. The men were asked if they wanted the mentors to help them make such a plan, to look at their addictions, their accommodation, their friendships and relationships, plans for jobs and so on. During the initial meetings, we observed how some of the men specifically asked about the possibility of early release if they took part; again the mentors explained that this was not part of this project. Yet some of the men we interviewed soon after they had begun the mentoring project were sure they had heard somewhere (or they had convinced themselves about what they wanted to hear) that they might get early release because of the mentoring project.

They told me to speak with Pat [mentor]. But I wanted to see him myself, so they joined me in the Equal Group. They said if I worked in the group, I had a chance to get out early and get on.

(Michael, 28, Cork Prison, drunk and disorderly)

Michael was 28 years of age at the time of our interview; he had been in and out of prison since the age of 22, when he started getting into trouble with charges for being drunk and disorderly. Having served 9 months on his most recent conviction, he was due for release shortly and was glad to have secured a place in the You're Equal Group.

Throughout the research interview, we wondered about Michael's mental health, when he seemed to go off on distracted tangents when answering questions, talking about voices and people out to get him in the prison and outside. Whether these people were real or imagined, Michael was a most difficult interviewee, yet he was adamant that knowing Pat, the mentor, and being in the You're Equal Group gave him a sense of support and safety, and that together with Pat they were planning where he would live when he was released and where he might get a job in some form of supported environment. He was clear on what Pat and he had talked about when they met initially as part of the mentoring project:

[Pat asked me] ... what kind of work would you do, what you would work at, what is your sentence from when you come into prison? What do you worry about? How many charges have you, what kind of charges have you done? What would you work at? Keeping up your interests, like. Are you safe when you go out? Are you safe when you're in here, like there is no one at you ...

(Michael, 28, Cork Prison, drunk and disorderly)

Our experience of sitting in with the mentors as they met some of the men for the first time, and also of interviewing more of the men soon after they had met with their mentors, helped us to experience how difficult some of the men were to engage with, not just because of the context of the prison itself but also possibly due to their mental health and addictions, as well as their youthful or masculine sense of bravado and protest.

Developing the mentoring relationship within prison

Throughout the evaluation of this project, we found that a large number of the participants struggled with drug and drink addictions (*see Table 11*). Even the relatively young men we met spoke of already spending years and years in prison; as one young man put it, 'All for small things like, 8 months, 12 months, 18 months ... but they all add up, you know.'

Anthony and Dave were 20 and 19 years of age respectively when we interviewed them in Cork Prison. Both had been 'in and out of prison since they were 12 or 13 years of age'. Both had been recent recruits to the mentoring project. Prison for Anthony had saved his life:

My two cousins that I hung around with outside are both dead now from taking drugs. All the lads from my estate are either dead or in here in prison from the drugs.

(Anthony, 20, Cork Prison, car crimes)

Dave, like Anthony, had left school after primary level and had gone on to do his Junior Cert from prison, although he had nothing good to say about prison at all:

Prison don't help no one. How could it help taking someone away from everything? It's not working [prison]. That's why I'm hoping the Equal Group works. It's different like. Instead of just throwing people back out to nothing and, trust me, like, some people leaving here have nothing outside.

(Dave, 19, Cork Prison, joy-riding, assaults, robbery)

While Dave and Anthony were about the same age, from the same city, in prison for roughly the same types of crimes and addictions, and both involved in the mentoring project for roughly the same amount of time, their narratives expressed very different stages of personal development and acceptance of personal responsibility. The difference in these two young men's perspectives on life, addictions and the mentoring project seemed to exemplify the points made by the mentors about how the men themselves need to be ready to change. As one mentor is known for saying, 'The men themselves need to have reached the point called "Stop".'

Dave was boyish and playful in the interview, exemplifying a type of protest masculinity in the face of his imprisonment and the interview process itself:

Interviewer: 'Given that none of your brothers are in prison, does your family say anything to you for being in and out of here?'

Dave: 'Nah, they [family] don't say nothing to me at all. They know better than to say anything 'cos I'd just lose the plot like.'

Interviewer: 'What was school like for you?'

Dave: 'Was s****, being honest. I got expelled in 6th class, they didn't want me in there at all, like it was a b*****.'

Dave's interview became an opportunity for him to blame everyone else for all of the trouble he was in, never on any occasion accepting, admitting or even hinting that he may have been an actor in the drama of his life:

Prison is a b**** like. I'm sick to death of it at this stage ... Even before I came in the last time, I had changed. I stopped robbing cars, I stopped robbing f***ing houses and everything, you know what I mean. Didn't do nothing like. I was just in town one day drinking and a fellow said something smart and I gave him a crack like and he got up and we were fighting away. Next thing, a shade [prison guard] grabbed onto me like and I didn't know, it was a shade like grabbed on to me and swung me around and hopped me off the floor. Then I was in for assault and GBH [grievous bodily harm] and everything, f*** sake.

(Dave, 19, Cork Prison, joy riding, assaults, robbery)

Dave's casual attitude to life and responsibility – that everyone else was at fault as he more or less innocently fell into trouble – was exemplified in his attitude towards the opportunities of the mentoring project when it came his way:

When I met Pat [mentor] first of all about the Equal Group, he said to me 'Do you want to be in the Equal Group?' I said what the f*** is that? He said, all's I can remember anyways is that he said, 'You'll be a guinea pig' ... Pat, he'll sort out jobs and employment, and if I need a house, he'll help me with that.

(Dave, 19, Cork Prison, joy riding, assaults, robbery)

Anthony, in contrast, seemed to have been quicker to learn that he needed to take responsibility for changing his behaviour and beginning to deal with his addictions. If his own account is to be believed, he had begun to seek out structured supports before he met his mentor. Choosing to go to prison was, according to Anthony, his first step to recovery:


I left school just after the Junior Cert and went mad taking tablets. There was an old doctor down the road and he was an alcoholic and you could give him a bottle of whisky and he'd give you a prescription for whatever, you know ... He was struck off since, but like he was an alcoholic too ... I'm a drug addict and I was mad taking tablets and drugs. But I'm off everything in here now. I could get drugs in here, but I choose not to. I used to take a lot of coke and then I slipped into heroin, so I handed myself up to get away from the drugs. But it's not easy in here, within a confined space, with the drugs around – it's not easy to keep off them.

(Anthony, 20, Cork Prison, car crimes)

Meeting Larry as a mentor in prison was the extra support that Anthony felt he needed to sustain his own best efforts to give up drugs:

I see Larry every week. He calls up for me. He is the only person I talk to in here. Like if you want to see someone, you can put your name down to talk with them. But Larry's different. He comes looking for you. Nobody else would call on you. You'd have to put your name down for probation. But Larry calls for you. He is helping me organise getting into a treatment centre for when I get out. I'm looking forward to treatment when I get out. I know I need to go for it and Larry's helping me with that. It was always my plan from Day One, but he's helping me with it.

(Anthony, 20, Cork Prison, car crimes)



While the comparison of Dave and Anthony’s narratives evidences the mentors’ descriptions of how they meet the men ‘where they’re at and facilitate those who are ready to take responsibility’, they also show the challenges involved and the skills required of the mentors to actively engage and motivate prisoners who would, or could, be participants in the mentoring project. The mentors, while having different styles of working with the participants, agreed that ‘consistency’ and ‘being there’ for the participants were the main factors that allowed the possibility of engagement. As the stories in Chapter 8 will show, even initially reluctant prisoners were successfully engaged with in an ongoing way while they were in prison.

Summary

This chapter has discussed what the prisoners themselves had to say about the You’re Equal Project and the in-prison mentoring service they received. Some of the men obviously refused to engage at the very beginning. Yet, as we found, the mentors worked with great skill, patience and understanding to respect these men’s wishes, but also to keep open the possibility of the project for them at all times. In fact, as the interviewees reported, it was this consistency that made the real difference for them in helping to engage and hold them in this challenging work.

Issues such as mental health, learning difficulties and addictions make the work of mentoring very difficult. Some of the men often became engaged with the (false) hope of getting out of prison early if they participated. At the same time, early and unplanned releases make the work of the mentors not only frustrating, but also most difficult. In cases where participants who are in the early stages of being engaged with by the mentors are released early – before real engagement has taken place – there is a high risk of losing these men from the project once they are free to leave prison.

We will now examine what participants who stayed involved in the mentoring project had to say about the type and benefits of the supports they received *outside* prison from their mentors.



Findings:
What participants
had to say about the
mentoring supports
outside prison



8. Findings: What participants had to say about the mentoring supports outside prison

In strategically setting out to measure the success of this post-release re-integration project, we interviewed 9 ex-prisoners, 8 of whom had been participants in the You're Equal Project while in prison (the ninth, a woman, was a self-referral to the project after her release). This served to explore such questions as (a) how participants are managing to remain out of prison; (b) how participants are involving themselves in ongoing addiction counselling; and (c) how participants are involving themselves in employment, training or education. We examine here what the participants, all still engaged with their mentors, had to say about the mentoring role in their lives post-release.

In addition, during the research we became sensitised to a number of extra variables that became evident through the participants' interviews. These included (a) the challenges and possibilities of mentoring older participants (career criminals); (b) the role of mentoring women as participants; and (c) the potential of peer mentoring. These aspects are also discussed below.

Mentoring success: Ongoing support and re-integration

Having served his first prison sentence of 8 months in Cork Prison, Garry was released early, without any prior notification to his mentor. When he left prison and returned to live in his home county, some 150 miles away from the prison, all of his good plans began to go by the wayside as he struggled with the everyday challenges of not falling back in with his old friends and habits:

Changing friends was a big issue when I got out [of prison]. I went mad again the first month. Then I got in trouble again with the guards. Then again they gave me another chance. They didn't bring it any further, they just cautioned me like, when by right I should have been up for the 2½ years suspended sentence straight away. But they gave me that chance.

(Garry, 19, ex-Cork Prison, drunk and disorderly)

Garry admitted he had 'fallen off the wagon' and started drinking again when he was released early. Part of the problem was that the safety net of the mentor who had been working closely with him in prison was not alerted to the fact that he was about to be released early. Part of it was due to the fact that Garry was simply on for catching up and going wild with his pals when he got out of prison after 8 months:

It was easy talking about the plan when I was in prison. But, I don't know, when I got out and seen all the friends, like it was straight to the pub. So when I finished in the pub, I called up to the dealer and got a load of drugs off him ... I didn't bother ringing Larry [mentor] when I got out. But after that like, when I got into trouble I did. Larry was all the time trying to ring me when I got out, but I just didn't answer the phone, turned off the phone, whenever.

(Garry, 19, ex-Cork Prison, drunk and disorderly)

Garry did, however, reconnect with his mentor, Larry. The shock of getting into trouble again seemed to be the trigger that instigated the call:

Ah, Larry was delighted that I rang. I think it was a Wednesday when I rang and he travelled down to see me on the Friday [a 300-mile round trip]. I was back in addiction, back in trouble. It's hard to explain it. Larry was just there for me. He didn't turn his back on me. He said, 'OK, it's done now. You can't change it. We'll start out. We'll write out a new plan'.

(Garry, 19, ex-Cork Prison, drunk and disorderly)

Larry's consistency in being there for Garry, even after a month of letting him down and going back on the plan they had worked on together in prison, was the key to the development of their professional relationship:

I got a job now and I'm not living at home, so I'm not with the old friends in town. So that part of the plan is sorted out. The drugs are gone too. But I'm still drinking a bit. I'm meant to be going to AA, but I haven't. That's part of the plan like.

(Garry, 19, ex-Cork Prison, drunk and disorderly)

Recognising the positive and formative role of the mentor in his life, Garry admits:

We're a close family, but we don't really talk. I prefer to talk with Larry about my personal things. He comes down to me and we meet in a hotel or café and he's great to me. When he's leaving, he always says to me, 'My phone is always on'. Larry says I done everything myself. But, you know, it was encouragement I was getting, the push to do it from Larry that I was getting helped me.

(Garry, 19, ex-Cork Prison, drunk and disorderly)

After his very shaky start back into the community (back with his old friends, drinking again and not answering Larry's calls), it is surprising that Garry did not end up back in prison. He recognises the support he got from the Gardaí and the ongoing support that Larry provided:

Ah, Jesus, meself and Larry talk 3 or 4 times a week. He'd ring just to see how I'm getting on and what I'm up to. Larry being there to talk to, to make the plans. I'm planning on going back to school in September – it's for people who dropped out of school, to do the Leaving Cert. If I get good results in that, Larry was saying I could go to Agricultural College ... It's been great having Larry there to talk to, make the plans, and only for Larry being there to talk to, after the month when I got out I'd say I would have been back in Cork [prison] now.

(Garry, 19, ex-Cork Prison, drunk and disorderly)

Remaining consistent and being there for the participants – when they left prison, returned to their old ways and turned up again looking for the mentor's support – was crucial to the success of the mentoring work. Ian was 29 years of age when we interviewed him and, like many of the other young men in this project, he had got into trouble through alcohol. However, in Ian's case, he explained that he had never really been in trouble before:

Just like, I was going out with a girl for five years and it ended very badly and I went off the rails for three months and ended up in prison for criminal damage, assault, larceny, you know, that kind of stuff.

(Ian, 29, ex-Cork Prison, criminal damage, assault, larceny)

Like a number of the men who were the first in their family to go to prison, Ian spoke of the shame and disappointment he had brought to his family:

They [family] were very disappointed with me when I got myself into prison. But they stood by me like and I was very appreciative of that you know. I got a visit every week from my father and my sister. Some of the lads in there wouldn't have visits at all.

(Ian, 29, ex-Cork Prison, criminal damage, assault, larceny)

In Ian's case, prison was enough of a fright to make him reflect on his life and behaviour:

I was in Cork Prison and it was s****. It's filthy up there, you've no toilet facilities, you've one shower a week, food is manky, you're dealing with scum bags seven days a week, bullying, the whole lot. It's a pretty s***** place really.

(Ian, 29, ex-Cork Prison, criminal damage, assault, larceny)

At the same time, however, Ian was one of the men we spoke with who recognised the opportunities given to him inside the prison and how people had treated him well:

Rob, the Welfare Officer, supported me in prison and I done my Leaving Cert in jail. The teachers were very supportive if I had a problem or was feeling down. I could talk with them like. Colm O'Herlihy, the Head Principal, is a lovely, lovely guy. He was very helpful.

(Ian, 29, ex-Cork Prison, criminal damage, assault, larceny)

It was through Colm, the Head Principal, and the school that Ian was introduced to Larry and the mentoring project. While Ian claimed he was already focused on ‘never ever going back to jail’, he was also clear about how Larry’s mentoring had made the real difference to him being able to ‘put his plan into action when he got out’:

I met up with Larry [mentor] inside in prison. They started an Equal Group. They selected 15 people randomly and I was one of those people. It’s a post-release course. You sit down in group meetings and they try to get you to change your cycle of behaviour. It’s a rehabilitation system and it’s long overdue ... I will never ever go back to jail. I have had enough of it, with or without Larry. But having said that, Larry was a great help. He was always there for me if I needed him – at 10 o’clock at night, he was there for me. I could call him. He was just a great help, like a friend, you know what I mean. He is fantastic. I have great respect for the man.

(Ian, 29, ex-Cork Prison, criminal damage, assault, larceny)

Looking back on his time in prison and the role Larry played as his mentor, Ian was adamant that the mentoring project had turned his life around:

It was great. Basically, it helped me put my plan in action for when I got out. It was very helpful. They got me to focus on the type of life I wanted when I got out. And I’m after getting my life back on track, you know. I bought a car recently and I have some money in the bank and a job cooking. It’s something like I never had before, you know what I mean. Thirty years of age like, it’s about time I started copping myself on.

(Ian, 29, ex-Cork Prison, criminal damage, assault, larceny)

Mentoring self-esteem: Creating hope in men

All of the men we interviewed who were still out of prison claimed that the mentoring project had been the key factor that had made a positive change in their lives. Martin and Philip were 28 and 39 years of age respectively when we interviewed them. They had both been in prison in Castlerea and were adamant that the You’re Equal Project had been crucial for them in two respects: firstly, in helping them to organise the practicalities of creating a new life for themselves post-release and, secondly, in rebuilding their broken self-esteem through the help of the mentors, allowing them to believe in a hope-filled future for themselves outside of prison.

Martin, a 28-year-old Traveller man who had been in and out of prison since the age of 13, was clear that his mentor had helped by always being available to talk with him about anything and in helping to organise and support him in very real and practical ways, like being at the gates of the prison to meet him on the day of his release:

I met them [the mentors] the week I was getting out of prison and have been in touch with them ever since. They helped me sort out my money, where to live, AA meetings – basic things, helping me sort out my life to get back into living life in the real world ... when you’re used to living in jail, you’re not used to living life really, you know what I mean ... The day I was released, they said they’d meet up with me and help me get sorted and she [Siobhan, mentor] did. She gave me her number and I always knew they were there for me the far side of the phone if I had any questions, like. If I needed them to talk to about anything at all, they were there for me, basically showing you the right direction in life, backing you up whatever you need to do.

(Martin, 28, ex-Castlerea Prison, drunk and disorderly, assaults, robbery)

But mentoring for Martin was also about rebuilding his self-confidence and belief and respect in himself, helping him to find new hope for what he could become after spending years going in and out of prison:

I’m an alcoholic and I’m an addict, you know. Siobhan’s [mentor] been great. She educates you, shows you like. A lot of us in jail have been educated alright, but we’ve been treated bad for years. Also our self-esteem is gone down low and confidence gone. You know, people with good intentions like You’re Equal bring it all back up again to where you’re the true ‘you’ ... Since I got involved with them [the mentors], I got me [car] licence – first time ever I got a licence. I never had tax or insurance or anything like that. I have all that now, doing everything by the book, you know, thanks to them.

To be honest with you, without them [the mentors] I'd probably turn back to crime. But with them, you know, I am going somewhere. I know what my aim is. Without them, there is no way in my heart and soul I would have found my way of getting there without Siobhan – and that's 100% of the truth. What she's done for me has given me the hope of what I want for the future. Without Siobhan to give me a start, I would never have got going in the beginning. I go to AA four or five times a week, whenever I need to. I'm the Secretary of the local AA now. And I'm starting a course in addiction counselling. I'm starting in college in September. Thanks to You're Equal, things became possible that I never thought would be possible.

(Martin, 28, ex-Castlereia Prison, drunk and disorderly, assaults, robbery)

Philip was 39 years of age when we interviewed him. He was so eager to talk about the value of the mentoring project to him that he began to get into details before we even had the opportunity to turn the tape recorder on! He was most articulate and very clear on his own story. He accepted 'blame' and responsibility for his drinking. He was very focused on 'working on himself' and staying off drink and drugs. Although he had had a recent relapse with drink and drugs, lost his accommodation and was feeling quite down and frustrated with himself during the interview, he still remained determined to continue his progress through the mentoring project:

I was married for 18 years. That ended during my last sentence ... I've been getting in and out of trouble since I was about 22. I was an alcoholic since about then. I didn't know that until a couple of years ago. I only figured it out then ... I don't know how the wife put up with me, you know – guards at the door, court appearances and that. I was always a good provider, never abused her or anything like that, although I suppose you can abuse people in other ways than just physically ... She put up with it for years, but anyway we're good friends now ... When I see things going well for me, I get arrogant and complacent, you know. I'm not as strong as I thought I was. I got too complacent [relapse last week]. There is no excuse, looking for a bit of a buzz, you know. That's how I got back into trouble. I don't know what I was looking for.

(Philip, 39, ex-Castlereia Prison, drink-related offences)

Philip clearly articulated how the mentors actually went about doing their work of engaging in the prison and helping the participants map out their plans for the future:

I was in prison, finishing my sentence, got a letter saying I was selected for this [You're Equal Project]. Didn't know anything about it. Met with Siobhan and Gerry [mentors]. They interviewed me in the prison, told me what they were all about and talked about the areas they could help me with. And they were exactly the areas I needed help with ... During the first few visits, they got to know me, gave me some paperwork on aspects of my life that I thought I needed help with, gave me a few weeks to work on that. Mainly I was interested in getting something done about my alcoholism. They did that, they got me into Whiteoaks [residential treatment centre] within a few weeks of release. That was what I looked for straight away and it was done for me. The next battle I had was with the Social Welfare. They were stonewalling me, after treatment and everything. Only for Siobhan and a 2-week battle with them on the phone ... that was sorted out for me, you know. I couldn't have done that on my own ... I would have been lost, lost, you know.

(Philip, 39, ex-Castlereia Prison, drink-related offences)

For Philip, too, part of the success in engaging with the mentoring project was due to the hope it gave him for the future:

I separated from my wife during my last sentence and Siobhan [mentor] helped me get lone parents' allowance and accommodation. I would have been in a bedsit without these people, that's for definite. Without people like Siobhan, when you're coming out of jail you're facing a stone wall all the time, with social welfare, work, accommodation, homelessness, trying to get your rights and all that ... I would have gotten myself back in jail a lot sooner than I did get back in trouble ... I'm not sure I would have gotten into Whiteoaks [residential treatment centre], and if I did I would have ended up in a bedsit, not able to have my children with me. That would have had a massive impact on me, you know, trying to recover from alcoholism ... Only for this organisation [You're Equal], I wouldn't have had those comforts, you know ... Every time I came out [before], I was usually stonewalled and back on the drink. I never had any help with the issues I have on

a daily basis. They would never be addressed. There's nobody to help you ... It's not only financial help you need. You need help with your life. If this organisation wasn't here, I would have been lost completely, you know. All you get out there is stonewalled and discriminated against, and that's never going to change ... It should be illegal, you know, that it's let go on. You're Equal is here to protect prisoners. It's like waving a magic wand – I get stonewalled and I ring Siobhan, and in a couple of days' time things are fixed. It's like waving a magic wand on these people, the fact that I'm working with this organisation.

(Philip, 39, ex-Castlerea Prison, drink-related offences)

Mentoring older men: Challenges and possibilities

A specific subgroup of participants that we recognised in this evaluation project was that of older men in prison – men who might be called 'career criminals', men who had for one reason or another grown up and lived most of their adult lives going in and out of prison. We wondered about the impact and value of the mentoring project to such men.

Mark was 36 years of age when we interviewed him. He was in the middle of his most recent sentence of 14 months in Cork Prison. By his own admission, he had:

... been in prison 15 or 16 times since 1990. All for small stays like, 9 months, 12 months, 18 months. Nothing serious, you know, just driving offences, no tax and insurance, you know ... They all add up like, all the small sentences. I've spent the past 20 years in and out of prison.

(Mark, 36, Cork Prison, driving offences)

Mark's younger brother has also spent time in prison with him and was, at the time of the interview, serving a 4-year sentence on the same landing in the prison. Their family, including their elderly mother in poor health, lives 'just over the wall of the prison, you know, in [name of the estate]'.

Physically, Mark embodied a stereotypical image of a 'hard man', with shaved head and tattoos. However, during the interview he seemed patient and reflective; even within the prison, he was able to make the interviewer a cup of tea and apologised for not having a nicer cup to offer. Mark spoke of prison as if it had become his home:

Me brother's doing 4 years in here too. We go everywhere together. We're close, you know. But I mostly go in to cells with fellows I know. You know where to tread like, you have your privacy and boundaries – my locker's mine, his locker's his, you know what I mean. The cells are clean, but as I say, I'd like my own bedroom rather than a cell. You have a TV, radio, all the personal stuff, it's alright, yeah. There's no toilet in the cells, just an old chamber pot; if you want to go to the toilet, then you have to hit the bell there to get out ... It's not as bad as people make it out to be, you know. If you keep yourself occupied, keep yourself active, if you find yourself a routine, at the end of the day it could be worse.

(Mark, 36, Cork Prison, driving offences)

Prison as an institution had really imposed itself on Mark and how he understood his world. He advised that the prison could be a better place if they 'got some of the small things right, like putting in a ramp for visitors in wheelchairs' (a sister of his visits in a wheelchair). The hardest part of being in prison for him is the 'no contact' family visits: he has four children (two teenage sons and two younger daughters) and he does not like them visiting the prison (his daughters because he cannot hold them or kiss them on visits, his sons because he 'doesn't want to get them used to being around the prison in case it gets in on them'). Being a 'responsible father from prison' even extended to Mark planning to come back into prison if his son was ever jailed – in order for Mark to look after him:

I don't want to see my son coming up here [to prison] at all, you know. He's 16, he's still at school and he done well. He wants to join the army. That's a good thing, that's a good future. I don't want to see him coming up here at all, getting comfortable around here or

getting ideas about coming in here. Like, if he comes in here, I'll obviously have to come back in to mind him, to see no harm comes to him. When they know he's my son, he'll be left alone.

(Mark, 36, Cork Prison, driving offences)

Mark's crimes were mostly related to cars:

My fault is the driving. I can't keep away from the cars or bikes. I'm f***ing addicted to the yokes, do you know what I mean, anything with an engine.

Mark started robbing cars and driving without tax or insurance at the age of 12. He went on to buy cars, but again failed to get tax or insurance. He has also been caught twice for 'drunk driving', something he did say he was sorry about ('That was stupid and I shouldn't have done it. Just got drunk down the country and tried to drive home instead of just sleeping it off in the car'). The problem now for Mark is that, given his record, he knows:

I don't have a hope of getting insurance. I'm off the road for about 100 years ... I can apply in about 10 years, I think, but I couldn't see myself staying away from cars for that long.

(Mark, 36, Cork Prison, driving offences)

At the time of the interview, Mark had only recently met Larry, the mentor, and so, like many of the men at the start of the mentoring process, he was unsure of what it might actually mean for him. But he was appreciative of the opportunity to give something new a try:

I never got anything out of this prison, every sentence was to the day. I never got a break in this prison. So when Larry [mentor] came up to me to explain that the Equal Group was about making plans for when I got out of prison, I said fair enough, I'll give it a try. I'm going to Larry 'cos I want to try to do something different. I was in the same routine, going back to square one each time, going back to where I was, do you know what I mean. Getting back into the old habits. But, you know, being honest with you, I'm 36 now, I'm getting too old for it now. I need to change my ways, you know.

(Mark, 36, Cork Prison, driving offences)

The challenge of changing routines and habits for some of the older men in this evaluation was made all the more difficult when they were suffering with addictions of various sorts. Kieran, for example, was 44 years of age when we interviewed him. He had been sent into prison for the first time '7 or 8 years ago, when I was 36, due to the drugs when I had two assault charges against me'. Like a number of the men with drug- and alcohol-related problems, Kieran's problems had got progressively worse, hence his being somewhat older than others on the first occasion of being sent to prison.

As time goes on, the addiction gets worse. How it gets worse is your thinking, your conniving, your planning. It takes over your whole life and you can't be yourself ... I started drinking when I was 16 or 17, and when I got married at 18 then the drinking started to get in 'cos I thought I was a man like, now that I was married, you know, that sort of thing.

(Kieran, 44, ex-Cork Prison, drug and alcohol addictions)

Kieran remembered how going into prison was at first a scary experience, yet being so addicted he claimed he simply could not turn his life around:

You see, when you go into prison first, I don't care who you are, you're frightened, you have to be. Like you're meeting the maddest of the maddest and you're mixing with them. It's different if you're going in for what they call a short term; you go in and you come out and it's all over. But you can't get sober in there. I'm trying to dry out. I'm a dry alcoholic.

(Kieran, 44, ex-Cork Prison, drug and alcohol addictions)

Kieran's entire interview was saturated with talk of his drink and drugs addictions – how he simply went back looking for drugs as soon as he was released from prison each time, losing places in halfway houses due to using drugs on the premises. He was also now homeless, barred even from the homeless hostels, because, as he said:

I've been banging out hash the last time I was out, 15 months ago, so I am still barred ... I've two sisters who haven't spoken to me in 19 years because of the alcohol. My mother is in a nursing home. My partner won't let me down the garden path, let alone inside the door, and rightly so. I am barred from the homeless hostels ... so I've nowhere to go. Larry [mentor] tried to help me get into a drug treatment centre. I need to get away to get my head sorted, but what I'm worried about is how little time I have left. Like, where will I sleep tonight, where will I go?

(Kieran, 44, ex-Cork Prison, drug and alcohol addictions)

Kieran's narrative, while chaotic with the addictions and worries about being homeless, also showed how willing he was to accept responsibility for his own behaviour and not put the blame on others:

There's nothing up there [prison] for you at all. There's no help up there, none whatsoever. They do not care about you up there and why should they? That's their attitude – we didn't bring you in at all, you came in yourself, why should we look after you, give you this and give you that. But we are looking for someone who will help us with our problems when we come back out and help us to stay out. That's what we're looking for.

(Kieran, 44, ex-Cork Prison, drug and alcohol addictions)

Kieran openly admitted to struggling, and failing, to stay free of drugs. Yet meeting Larry in the prison and the invitation to get involved with the Equal Group was a lifeline for him. He was most respectful of the work Larry was doing with him and others:

When I was in Cork [prison], I got a chance to talk with Larry. He'd never interfere, he'd never cut across you, he'd let you finish and he'd never say you're right or you're wrong. That was the difference with all the other counsellors I've ever been with down through the years. I've never met no one like Larry.

(Kieran, 44, ex-Cork Prison, drug and alcohol addictions)

Similar to Mark and Kieran (*above*), John, at 42 years of age, was one of the older men we interviewed and, like the previous two, he had spent the last 20 years of his life in and out of prison. His particular addiction is gambling and he fed it by stealing things. It was, he remembered, easier than working as a young man:

Why should I be going to work when I could be gambling during the day? Then it snowballed, then it just got in on me. I got caught up in the gambling when I was younger. I got a buzz out of it, you know, I suppose like some people get a buzz from taking drugs. I never took drugs in my life, but I got a buzz from gambling.

(John, 42, ex-Cork Prison, gambling and robbing)

Having spent the last 20 years going in and out of prison, John clearly saw the mentors and the You're Equal Project as a new service, filling a gap and creating the possibility for change in the participants' lives:

Years ago, there was no base in prison. I've been in and out of prison for years. There was an open door syndrome. There was no one there to talk to you, like put you on the right track, you know. If they got full above [in the prison], they just threw you out, to nothing really. I often had trouble signing on and you'd need a bit of help that way. But there was no help like ... Now, only for Pat [mentor] there, I'd have no job and I'm the better person for it. If I have a problem, I can go and talk with Pat and if he can't do something for me, he'll put me in touch with someone that can, like. I have Pat's mobile number. I can talk to him. I can trust him. He wouldn't lie to you or put you on the wrong road. He's there for you. If he can help you, he'd try his best. That should have been there all along, but it wasn't. And they are wondering why people get back in trouble. But it's only common knowledge that if they don't get helped when they get out, 9 times out of 10 they will go back the way they were before and get back into trouble.

(John, 42, ex-Cork Prison, gambling and robbing)

For John, a large part of the work he has done with his mentor, Pat, was being helped to get a job:

If you are in and out [of prison] all the time, it's very hard to get trusted by people. It's very hard to get into a job, like. I've known fellows who had a job and someone found out they were locked up and they lost the job. I mean, even though they may have been doing brilliantly in the job, it was their past that caught up on them... Pat [mentor] got to know me and helped to set me up with a job, fishing, and it suits me. The fellow I work with now is just a genuine bloke. He doesn't care what I done in the past – that's in the past, like. If you do the work, he'll give you good money. He'll give you a chance. I'm at that four months now. When I'm working, I can't gamble. That's the beauty of it for me. I'm not like 20 anymore, playing hurling all day long. I need to be doing something or the boredom gets me.

(John, 42, ex-Cork Prison, gambling and robbing)

Mentoring women and mothers

Since Cork and Castlerea are both male prisons, we expected that the mentors would only be working with men. However, as the You're Equal Project developed and became known and trusted, a number of self-referrals came forward, seeking the support of the mentors in Cork and Castlerea. Regina was one of three women who referred themselves to the project. She was 27 years of age when we interviewed her; she had heard about the project and directly requested its support.

Regina had been given a 6½-year sentence, with 18 months suspended, for false imprisonment, robbery and burglary. She had served some of her time in Limerick Prison and the majority in Dublin's Mountjoy Women's Prison, the Dóchas Centre. She had two children, who were cared for informally by her friend during her stay in prison:

The hardest part of it [being in prison] was being taken away from the children. That was the hardest part of it, very hard on the kids like 'cos they go through the sentence with you. I mean, they're all over the place too, like with no parents there for them 'cos I'm not with their dad, and so they had no one, only my friend like. She was a Godsend now, she really was very good with the lads like ... Their father was too heavy on the drink to help and my sister is in a wheelchair and couldn't cope. My friend went to the social workers, but they wouldn't give her the fostering payment – they closed the case – so social welfare had to pay her the orphans' allowance.

(Regina, 27, ex-Dóchas Centre, false imprisonment, robbery and burglary)

Regina said she got to see her children once a month when she was in prison in Dublin, having seen them weekly when she was in Limerick (the cost of travel to and from Dublin was simply too much). Since her early (and unplanned) release, she has ended up living in a hostel in Cork for women and children, where the rule, due to staff shortages and underfunding, is that children are with their mothers 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. When we interviewed Regina, her children were 'hyper to have her home' and were in the middle of the school holiday, in the wettest summer ever remembered in Ireland. Regina spoke of what the support of a 'well-spoken' mentor meant to her as she tried to renegotiate her way back into society:

He's [Larry, her mentor] very well spoken, like. But people [social welfare, etc] wouldn't listen to me, like. He's very helpful, like, that way.

(Regina, 27, ex-Dóchas Centre, false imprisonment, robbery and burglary)

Regina explained how, having heard about the You're Equal Project from a friend she trusted, she gave Larry a call, having been released early and unplanned:

When I got out of prison, they just came about and said 'Pack your stuff, you're going home'. I had nowhere to live. I had nothing. When I was in prison, I was supposed to get things sorted out before I left, like job-wise. I was planning to sort out everything before I left, in the last couple of months before I got released. But when they left me out, I had

nothing sorted, so I just didn't know where I was. I was all over the shop. I didn't know what to do like, so I got in touch with Larry [mentor] after about a week and I'm dealing with Larry now for about 2½ weeks.

(Regina, 27, ex-Dóchas Centre, false imprisonment, robbery and burglary)

Regina, like a number of the fathers we interviewed, spoke about how missing her children was the greatest punishment of prison. However, unlike the fathers (who simply claimed to want to turn a corner away from their pattern of crime and offending), Regina was actively struggling to cope with trying to manage her life outside prison in a way that took care of her children. Her contact with Larry as a mentor was to a large degree focused on supporting her own commitment to change, while also helping to organise accommodation for herself and the children:

I will never put my kids through it again. My kids are great like, I've two great kids. They are very good children and I know they don't deserve this. I won't put them through this again. It's not easy like – nothing's worth being taken away from your kids and going through all that, you know. Nothing's worth that, like. I didn't go through all that for nothing ... Since I've been talking to him [Larry] now, I know I will get something out of it. I know he will help me get a place. He's going to help me get a job, he's going to help me do all these things, like ... I'll do it myself, but he's going to help me. He's just going to show me how to do it. He was explaining to me that's the way it was – he's the mentor, he'll help me make out a plan, but I have to do it myself, like.

(Regina, 27, ex-Dóchas Centre, false imprisonment, robbery and burglary)

Regina seemed to have reached a point of seeking help in her own life that only some of the men we interviewed had got to:

I'd take all the help I can get now. Before, I'd say 'Ah no, I'm grand, like, the way I am'. But not anymore. I take all the help I can get ... I've met with him [Larry, mentor] four times, but I feel good that I've met him 'cos I know it will be good and I'll get something out of it.

(Regina, 27, ex-Dóchas Centre, false imprisonment, robbery and burglary)

Participants' reflections on the success of peer mentoring

For Philip and Martin (*see above*), peer mentors had been the real key for them in developing trust in the project and hope in their own futures:

Talking to someone who has been through the mill, like, and can understand more, you can talk to them easier, you can build up a kind of a trust. That's very important 'cos, you see, when they [peer mentors] met me first, I found them easier to relate to, somebody who has done time, like. I found them easier to relate to 'cos they know what it's like. It's not easy being locked up, you know. You can't whinge about it either, but you see things, you feel different and you know when you come out of prison you think everybody is staring at you and alarm bells are going off after you've been locked up for years. But somebody who has been locked up, they can hit straight to the point, like What's going on with you? And you know they are not just talking the talk. They've been through it and they're well able to talk about it and share their experience too. That opens up the trust of talking. Well, it did with me anyway.

(Martin, 28, ex-Castlereagh Prison, drunk and disorderly, assaults, robbery)

Philip recalled how his mentor, Siobhan, had been there, waiting for him on the day of his release, and all the practical supports she helped to put in place for him that made a real difference to him getting back on his feet:

When I was released, Siobhan was there waiting for me and that felt good, you know. I had known her a while, a number of weeks, at this stage. She was someone I felt I could trust. I don't know why. I don't know really, it was just an instinct. She knew an awful lot, an awful lot about different areas in my life. While she didn't know me personally, about my life, she knew a lot about life. She has a lot of life skills, you know, and that's something everybody needs. She has a lot of that – to have tolerance for other people, to understand discrimination – and I would have picked up on that, you know, how aware she is, of society and what you're up against and that. So I had great faith and trust in her because of that ...

... Yeah, it was great when I saw her there that morning [of his release]. She just wanted to make sure I was going to do what I was going to do, just to reassure me that she was there. She would be on the phone and that ... We talked on the phone loads of times. I had many different problems that I had to address and, as I said, I was getting stonewalled all the time. So I had to be ringing her nearly every day. There was so many problems, you know, all because you're just out of jail. All the time, it's like you've disappeared, like you don't exist, so when you come out you find you have to start picking up the pieces, filling in forms, making authorities aware that you're here now. Then you've got to prove it, all sorts of questions, you know. For some reason, some people in authority like to sit there and make you go through that. It's like you're not entitled to anything, you know. I know I've done a lot of things, made a lot of mistakes, I'm well aware of it. But everyone's got the right to live, you know, especially if they're trying. There should be more help out there, that's what I'm saying. I don't know what I would have done without Siobhan. Even Whiteoaks [residential treatment centre], I'd no way of getting up there and she brought me up, and that was great for me. I learned an awful lot there in 5 or 6 weeks.

(Philip, 39, ex-Castlerea Prison, drink-related offences)

Mentoring: Measures of success one year on (a case study)

Bill was 43 years of age when we met with him. He had been with the You're Equal Project for the longest time and was one of the first men engaged with in the project. He was 12 months out of prison when we met him and we include his story here in some detail as evidence of the type of success the You're Equal mentoring project can have in challenging and supporting participants to turn their lives around.

Bill's story is not unusual among the men we met throughout this evaluation project. Drink, and his addiction to it, was the cause of his trouble. His narrative was bold and tragic, yet he was adamant that the success of the past year of his life was due to the support and work he received from his mentor. Prior to leaving prison, the case conference planning meeting, involving Bill's Probation Officer and mentor, had focused on Bill's need to begin addiction counselling and he was referred to the Probation-run treatment programme in Harristown House. On release from prison, and with the direct assistance of his mentor, he had been helped to secure supported accommodation for the first 11 months. Most recently, he had moved to semi-independent accommodation, which was a step he was nervous about but proud of. He had also secured a part-time job and had kept off the drink, with regular support from his AA group and his sponsor there.

Estimates quoted by staff in Castlerea Prison suggest that 80% of the men in prison are there because of drink-related crimes. Bill, while clearly taking responsibility for his offending behaviour, was adamant that he needed to deal with his addiction to drink if he was to put his life back on track:

I'm the age of 43. I've been married twice and due to drink I lost everything. My first marriage, I had one son there and due to drink I just walked out on that marriage, tried to take an overdose and just walked out on that marriage. Even at that stage, I didn't think that drink was my problem. I thought that everyone else hounding me was my problem. I went out there for another 13 years to drink and I met another woman, a lovely woman from [name of county], a perfect woman, and I got married to her and I had four kids with her.

(Bill, 43, 12 months out of Castlerea Prison, alcohol and robbery)

Tragically, however, Bill reported how he had fallen asleep with drink one night when he was meant to be minding his children and the baby fell out of the cot and smothered. His daughter's death and his guilt exacerbated his drinking and his attempts to commit suicide:

For four or five years, I just wanted to be with her [his daughter]. I tried suicide umpteen times, umpteen times. I couldn't take it. I even tried ropes, but they broke. I just wasn't meant to go. And in between that four or five years, I was in Cuan Mhuire [residential addiction centre] and I never got the message, I never heard the words, 'one day at a time'.

But nothing ever worked. The Judge said, 'I'll give you 6 months in Cuan Mhuire' and I said, 'I don't want Cuan Mhuire'. So he said, 'There's 11 months in Castlerea' and I said, 'Thanks very much' and walked away.

While going into prison brought great shame to Bill's family, he was adamant that it would take prison to help control his out-of-control drinking habit:

When I came into prison, nobody wanted to know me. I have four sisters and two brothers; I never got a word from them while I was in. My mother was so ashamed of me she didn't want to know me. But I was that sick from drink that I needed to change and every Monday I promised myself I wouldn't drink and every Friday I was drinking. I'd sooner live on the streets of Dublin than go home as I didn't want people interfering with my drinking and that's the story until I went to jail ...

My mother was very ashamed when I decided to go to prison. I broke into a priest's house, looking for money for drink. I gave myself up to the Guards. I was so sick, my head was melted. I couldn't see another way. Now, when I broke into the house, I didn't think I was going to do jail, but when it was offered to me I said 'Yes, let's break this cycle I am in. At least I know next Friday I won't be drinking'.

Going to prison created the holding space that Bill needed. He began attending AA meetings again in prison on Sunday mornings and working constructively with the Probation Service to organise a referral to the Probation-run addiction centre, Harristown House. Throughout the interview, Bill was appreciative of all the service providers within and outside prison who had helped him over the past two years. Most of all, however, he recognised and thanked Jerry, his mentor on the You're Equal Project, for all he had done to help rescue him:

I needed something to change my life and I would have to say that Jerry [mentor] has helped in changing my life. He has done umpteen things for me. He would often write to me. If I needed a chat or a friend, he is there for me. I can phone him. He gave me a lift to Kilkenny to see a residential centre and we spent the day just as two human beings, stopping off for something to eat and for a chat. I can say things to Jerry that I haven't been able to say to my mother like, that I can't say to my brothers. It's talking with him has made it easier.

For Bill, a key factor in this ability to talk together is that Jerry (like Siobhan and Marina) is a peer mentor (i.e. an ex-prisoner himself) – something that Bill (like Philip and Martin, *above*) was clear made a real difference:

What's incredible to me is him [Jerry] being a recovering addict himself and having been through the prison and having come out the far side and to see what he has today, like, you know, from having nothing and then coming out the far side and having a lovely woman and a lovely house. They're all the things that I want, you know, the normal things that everyone wants. But I want them today also. It's incredible to hear his story and, you know, to hear my story is quite good also in some ways.

Since getting out of prison, Bill has lived in a supported hostel and attended regular AA meetings there. He has found, and kept, a part-time job, gardening, and has reconnected in a positive way with his ex-wife to the extent that he has regular access visits with his children:

It's so hard every time I see the young lad. It's like tearing sticking tape off your leg trying to get him off each time. It's unreal, like, how much love he has.

Bill has also regained his hopes and dreams for his future, even though he is still taking 'one day at a time':

Just at the moment my plan is to remain sober. It's still early days of recovery, you know. That's what I want to do at the moment. I would like to get a nice job in the future. I would like to have my own apartment or my own house at some stage and I suppose the biggest goal I have is to have a van on the road or something. That would be my next goal or my next attempt at something, you know, but not just yet. It could be another 8 or 9 months away, I don't know.

Central to all of this life change for Bill has been the role of his mentor and the fact that he had 'been there himself':

He's [Jerry, mentor] a great head on his shoulders. But he's been there himself, he's done all these things, he's been in jail, he knows what it's like not to have anyone else. The biggest [meaning 'worst'] part of my life is when I get lonely. I can get lonely at times. I've just moved out into my apartment and it's lonely 'cos I'm used to living with the boys in the house [supported hostel] and the prison. But just today, I want to see if I can live with myself, just to be able to live with myself for a while, that's the next step on my stepping stones for me. I'm there [apartment/independent living] three days and I'm feeling shaky in myself. Not that I'll take a drink or anything, but just silly things, like wondering 'Will I cook now or will I wait till 6 o'clock?'

When we met with Bill in his apartment to interview him for this evaluation project, he had bought in cakes and buns and set the table with a pot of tea. He had spent the hour before we met talking with another newly released prisoner:

... just trying to give him my advice, for what it's worth, on how good the mentors are and how this place here gave me the supported start I needed when I came out of jail first. We all need a start.

Summary

The mentoring aspect of the You're Equal Project is in itself relatively newly established and in a real way only in process for 12 months. Thus, any medium to long-term measure of its impact or success in terms of stopping re-offending is limited. However, we are confident, having spoken in detail with the participants (all ex-prisoners) included in this chapter, that there are already very clear measures of success in helping these men begin to reclaim their lives.

Men spoke of being met at the prison gates on their release and of being supported in numerous practical ways – with introductions and assistance with medical and welfare services; lifts to and from appointments with addiction and accommodation services; support re-negotiating relationships with their parents, siblings, ex-partners and children. More than this, however, as this chapter has shown, these men were clear that the way the mentors did their work (being flexible, patient, supportive, 'always being there even when I f***ed up' and 'treating me like a human being') helped to rebuild the men's broken self-confidence and give them hope for their futures.

Many of the men who had worked with the peer mentors spoke at length about how they felt this had made a difference in how the peer mentors connected and built up trust with them – 'They lived it themselves, they know what it's like to be locked up, they can cut to the issue straight away. That makes all the difference.' However, the participants whose mentors were not peers, or ex-prisoners, were equally appreciative of the manner and way in which their mentors connected with them, building trust and helping them in practical and emotionally supportive ways.

In conclusion, all of the participants we interviewed spoke highly of the work the mentors were doing to help them rebuild their lives. Martin, a 28-year-old Traveller man who had been in and out of prison since the age of 13, may have summed up the experience and importance of the mentoring project best when he said:

I've just been a thug on the side of the road, like. I'm an alcoholic and I'm an addict, you know ... That was my life. My life was f***ed and they [the mentors] gave me a lifeline. Without them, I'd be f***ed, like. I would never be as good as I am now. They are like a foundation for me. They are my foundation, so they are. They are very important in my life. They are solid like and that's what it's all about – not the material things in life, but they [the mentors] have all the right intentions for me. Life is good now and I'm involved in lots of things that I would never have thought possible, thanks to them ...

There is an awful lot of young fellows that need people in their lives and they have nobody else and nobody to really talk to. If you save 4 out of every 10 or 3 out of every 10, it's more than what the system is doing now.

(Martin, 28, ex-Castlereagh Prison, drunk and disorderly, assaults, robbery)



Findings:

**Michael's story – A case
study in mentoring, the
You're Equal Project
and multiagency
collaboration**



9. Findings: Michael's story – A case study in mentoring, the You're Equal Project and multiagency collaboration

In this last chapter reporting on the findings of this evaluation study, we focus in some detail on the story of one participant, Michael, in order to highlight the core dynamics and processes involved in the You're Equal mentoring project and how this model of intervention has, even in its early months of existence, played a positive role in the lives of prisoners and ex-prisoners.

The relevant literature and every person we interviewed – from the Governors of the Prisons to the mothers of the prisoners – said that the *greatest risk to a prisoner's well-being and possible re-offending occurred immediately after their release from prison*. The fact that so many prisoners are released with very limited or no means of support and nowhere to go, without a plan or a strategy, means that personal deficits and structural inadequacies collide to create a high-risk opportunity for failure, re-offending and re-imprisonment in the immediate aftermath of release.

Michael was 30 years of age when we met him. He had grown up in a medium-sized town in the west of Ireland, with his younger brother and sister. Both he and his brother had attended a 'special school' until the age of 14, when Michael says he 'began to get in trouble with the guards and prison'. Michael is well known to the service providers within the prison, having spent the past 15 years 'in and out of prison, sometimes for 12 months, sometimes for 3 or 4 years at a time'. Michael's story is included here in some detail because it clearly exemplifies some success through the You're Equal Project, both in terms of the interpersonal aspects of the mentoring relationship developed in this case and also the multiagency collaboration developed through the work of the You're Equal Project.

Michael was in many ways a typical example of the young men we met in prison during this evaluation, where many of them had, by a relatively young age, spent many years in prison, spending periods incarcerated for months and years each time, with very short periods of release into their communities between crimes and convictions. Michael's crimes were 'burglary and robbing ... places like McDonald's and the local post office'. His last sentence was for armed robbery in his local post office; he had attempted this in broad daylight and in front of many of his neighbours, who clearly recognised him. While his case notes and records noted that he did at times 'drink a bit' and 'mixed in bad company', they also reported that all professionals who ever worked with Michael in the prison system found him likeable and believed his core issue was related to learning difficulties, which made it almost impossible for him to cope or manage to hold down a job or, indeed, live independently outside of prison.

The case notes of Michael's mentor, Jerry, described him as being:

'... a nice lad, who is needy and clingy. He often gets very down and depressed, with a history of depression and self-harm, with a pattern of isolating himself in his cell and refusing to come out to meet with or talk with people.'

Mentoring within prison: Case conferencing an initial engagement

Michael was referred to the You're Equal mentoring project in October 2006, 6 months before his expected release date of April 2007. Case notes show that at the initial case conference meeting, many of the prison's service providers recognised the potential benefits that the mentoring project could offer to Michael. Various professionals had worked with him in the past and, while they felt they had 'failed to make any real difference to his pattern of offending behaviour', they knew him well and his ways

of behaving. Thus, the picture of Michael that was put together at the initial case conference was clearly an important first step in helping the mentor plan how best to engage with Michael.

The Probation Officer's advice from previous experience was:

Just try to stay with him, even if he tells you to f*** off! And try to steer him away from going back to his home town. His family don't care about him anyway.

This advice supported the efforts of the mentor in the early stages of the work, where Michael had got used to having no visitors during his time in prison and was now refusing to leave his cell to meet with anyone, including the mentor. 'Staying with Michael' at this early stage of trying to engage him in the mentoring work quite simply meant that the mentor had to continuously ask to meet with Michael, until such time as Michael 'cheered up enough to agree to meet with [the mentor]'. However, even this first step in getting Michael to agree to meet with his mentor was achieved in part through the encouragement of both a teacher in the prison school and the Industrial Manager, both of whom were fully committed to the You're Equal Project and knew and cared enough about Michael to believe he would benefit from the work of the project.

The mentor's early notes of developing the relationship with Michael describe just how challenging the engagement work is – work that was complicated all the more given Michael's learning difficulties and possibly learned patterns of communication when he was being challenged or confronted with his behaviour. The mentor's reflective case notes record the following:

I found Michael to be very hard work. Whenever the conversation gets difficult, he reverts to a child-like role, asking a question like 'What's your name?' or 'What day is it today?' He seems very defensive at times ... Michael is not due for release until April 2007, so we have some time to work together. My feeling is that sympathetic hand-patting is not helpful and that perhaps a tougher, more pragmatic approach might help him move forward and get real.

Mentoring within prison: Pre-release reflections on patterns of offending behaviour

An initial phase of the mentoring in-prison pre-release work includes the mentor helping the participant to reflect on his previous patterns of behaviour on being released. In Michael's case, there was a clear pattern: on each of his many previous releases from prison, he had come out on a type of a high, returned straight to his family who did not want him (and felt they could not support him), of him then feeling rejected, getting down and depressed, beginning to drink again, blaming others for his problems, robbing, being re-arrested and finally being sent back to prison.

Michael's pattern of re-offending was so ingrained that questions were being asked by the service providers involved if he may be getting into trouble purposively in order to be imprisoned, thus going back inside to the one place he felt secure, a place that over the past 15 years had become his home? His mentor questioned him as to what he would wish for on the next occasion of his prison release and the case notes report Michael's wish list:

- live with my family;
- work with computers;
- have a circle of Christian friends; and
- not to be in prison.

The next phase in the in-prison mentoring process is focused on helping the participant to focus on how they might move from such general wishes and hopes for the future to 'actually doing something different when they are released, something that will in fact break their previous cycle and pattern of behaviour' (from interview with Michael's mentor). The mentor's notes of Michael's initial narrative of his history and pattern of offending behaviour are a good example of a frozen narrative, where the prisoner

articulates a sense of simply being stuck in offending behaviours, which he has not yet been successfully challenged on or supported enough to actually take responsibility for:

[I] spent a good bit of time with Michael, but still the same frustrations. He seems to think that how his life is now is how it will always be and he has no real belief that it might change, or desire or ability to change it. We talked about how he felt when he committed his offences and when he got caught. He talked about 'the buzz' of the offences as a counter to his boredom and he talked of the terrible 'come down' and depression of being caught afterwards – 'Oh God, I've done it again!'

The mentor's case notes continue, with details of the meeting where Michael was challenged to engage, or not, in the mentoring process. In this meeting, the mentor worked strategically to perturb Michael's long-standing techniques of avoiding personal responsibility:

[While] Michael seemed pleased to see me, he was very distracted and kept picking up a book and looking through it. Finally, I suggested we end the session because my time was valuable and while he was welcome to it, if he'd rather read a book that was fine. He seemed rather surprised at being challenged and [he] put the book down. We had the usual 'round the houses' conversation, but we did establish that he would like to continue his education after release, which I thought was a good sign.

As Michael's case exemplifies, mentoring is a fine art in balancing engagement techniques, where participants are both invited and challenged to critically reflect on their personal responsibilities and patterns of behaviour, as well as to become open enough to plan and ask for the supports they will need once they are released so as not to fall back into their previous routines, but to map out a new path. The mentoring relationship contains the possibility of both helping participants work on themselves (or to help refer them to other service providers who can better assist in such life planning work) and also helping them to organise structural issues, such as housing, welfare payments, health supports and job opportunities.

In cases where the participants have been successfully engaged with by the mentors and worked with to develop the mentoring relationship in prison, there is some possibility that the mentors will be able to assist them through the most challenging phase of early release – the first few days of freedom.

Mentoring during early release: The first few days of freedom

Michael's story clearly shows some of the skills required by the mentor to engage, hold and challenge a participant in order to work with them on their needs and patterns of behaviour. This case study also clearly shows the necessity of the community of support, both within and outside the prison, sustained through the Local Area Networks, which enables the mentors to do their work effectively.

As already mentioned, Michael was well known throughout the prison – not as a troublemaker in any way, but rather because he had spent so much of the last 15 years in prison. He was liked, but pitied, we felt, in almost a patronising, well-meaning way. An example of this paradox was when one of the prison officers gave Michael a present of a child's colouring book, something the mentor noticed and took the time to discuss with the well-meaning prison officer. Prior to this conversation, the prison officer had never thought of Michael as a 30-year-old man, but rather more like a youngster based on his child-like behaviour and interactions with other people. Following the conversation with the mentor, the prison officer's next gift to Michael was a book about art, accompanied with a conversation about his favourite type of art.

We found many such small examples of how the presence of the mentors, and the way they understood and spoke of the participants, influenced and changed the way the men were understood and spoken about within the prison. Being seen and spoken

about as participants in the Equal Group made a real difference for many of the men we spoke with. They began to see and talk about themselves in a new way – a small, yet significant step in the process of mentoring.

The in-prison network of support in Michael's case included the Prison Governor, Industrial Manager, a school teacher, a Probation Officer, the Chaplain and some well-disposed prison officers. Since being referred to the You're Equal Project, Michael was included in the regular case conference meetings, where his progress, needs and plans for the future were discussed in a supportive and safe environment. Besides the prison staff, members of the out-of-prison support services were also at these meetings, including the Linkage Programme. Thus, Michael and his mentor were held in a supportive multiagency network of collaborative support – a key feature of the You're Equal Project.

Records of these case conferences show how the multiagency collaboration came together to map a supportive release plan for Michael. Previously, he had been used to simply being let out of the gates of the prison to find his own way home to a family that did not want him and could not cope with him. The Chaplain and Probation Officer reiterated that the family context had not changed and that going home, even though it was on Michael's wish list, was simply not possible, let alone advisable. Various options for supported accommodation were reviewed at the case conferences, with the mentor following up by gathering further information and making links with such services.

A crucial part of the planning for Michael's release was suggested by the Prison Governor, Industrial Manager and Probation Officer. This was that Michael would be granted 'temporary release' for one day in the week prior to his release date. The plan was for the mentor to spend the day with Michael, bringing him out of the prison to visit his mother (who had not visited him during his 13 months in prison) and also to visit the supported accommodation suggested for him, to review it and also to have a type of a mock interview for a room there. The intention was to help break the ice and set up the accommodation for the following week. On the day of the temporary release, the Governor made €100 available to Michael to allow him to buy some clothes for himself for his release.

Again these small examples of multiagency collaboration exemplify how the You're Equal Project has brought the in-prison and outside-prison groups together in a coherent strategy of forward planning in an attempt to assist newly released prisoners to overcome the immediate challenges of the first few days of release.

Mentoring work: Negotiating relationships and bridging worlds

A key aspect of the mentoring work we observed as part of this evaluation project was how the mentors worked with the participants to assist them negotiate their way back into the world outside prison. Many of the men had been in prison so long that the world outside had simply changed (one man who left prison during the time of this evaluation had never handled euros). Often their previous family life was gone and they did not know if their partners, wives or families would have them home again. Most of the men on their release were simply lost.

In Michael's case, the service providers knew that he was not welcome home; his mother claimed she had to care for a sibling who was needier than Michael. Yet Michael had either never been told this directly or he had not been able to accept it. This situation involved the mentor organising and facilitating a meeting between Michael and his mother, in which she was supported to be frank with her son about the future. Then the mentor had to work to support Michael through the shock, anger and sadness of yet another rejection, holding him, as it were, in the mentoring relationship so that he could work through his feelings and move on to planning and organising alternative plans for accommodation.

Once again, this summary may seem simple, but it contains within it examples of some of the skills required of a mentor – an ability to see the bigger picture, to help participants map out and plan a post-release future for themselves, a capacity to negotiate family systems, a strategic ability to facilitate those that need to be part of meetings at various times. Mentoring work involves a capacity to work directly with an individual, ‘meeting them where they are at’, holding them (as Michael’s mentor described) through the ‘wobbly bits, the panics, the setbacks, the falls ... being there for them consistently, but going at their pace’. At the same time, the mentor also has to understand and have the confidence and trust of the wider system and service providers, the network of support, so that services (such as supported accommodation, welfare payments, health services and addiction counselling) can be organised.

As researchers on this evaluation project, we had the opportunity to spend the day with Michael and his mentor on the day of his temporary release. We observed the dynamics involved in the mentoring work and experienced close-up what it was like for Michael to be out of prison for the first time in 13 months. As he said himself, ‘It’s exciting, but it’s scary too, you know. It’s very good of Jerry [mentor] to take me out like this’.

Michael welcomed us along for the day trip, which would involve being together from 10am to 6pm with a 300-mile round trip from the prison to his home town. Michael understood that we were working as part of the You’re Equal Project, trying to find out what was good or bad about the work the mentors were doing. He very quickly began praising the project and how ‘good and nice’ Jerry was to him:

Michael: I don’t get any visitors. My family haven’t visited since I went into prison this time, 13 months ago. So Jerry’s very good. He visits me up in the prison, isn’t that right, Jerry, don’t you ...?

Interviewer: And what do you and Jerry talk about?

Michael: Jerry’s helping me sort out getting a job and staying learning the computers when I get out of prison next week and where I will live and that sort of thing. He is helping me to not get into trouble again, to break my old ways, do you know.

Mentor: And we were planning today too, weren’t we? What did we plan for today, Michael?'

Michael: Well, Jerry, you said I could go to the forest park for a walk and then I also want to see my mam. And are we still going to visit the hostel? And the man in the prison gave me this money – should I give that to you?

Even in the initial few minutes of meeting Michael, he was likeable yet childish. Spending the day with him clearly showed just how vulnerable he is and how it seems impossible for him to think of independent living. He struggled to understand money and shopping, but was excited, thankful and careful as he chose an outfit of clothes to wear on the day of his release. During the day, there were elements of mentoring that included care work and direct support where, for example, the simple exercise of shopping was about capacity-building, but also, at a deeper level, about self-esteem. The walk in the forest, along a lake shore, was a visit to one of Michael’s favourite places, somewhere he missed greatly during his time in prison. This element of doing something ‘soulful’, as the mentor described it, was something this mentor brought to his work with the men: taking time to walk in the countryside or drive through scenic routes was not just a chore of the rural aspect involved in the Castlerea mentoring project, but was a clear intention in this mentor’s work to create soulful opportunities to be with the person, allowing them quiet time and trusting that when the moment was right they would have something important to say.

By the end of the day with Michael, he had walked and talked his way through the forest park, relaxing, breathing, remembering his childhood and years in prison, beginning again to plan for the future. He visited the supported accommodation and handled

himself very well through an interview for a place there, taking time to consider his options. Paradoxically, after 15 years in and out of prison, Michael seemed nervous of the prospect of living in a home with a group of men, possibly missing the security of his own cell already or still hoping to simply return home to his mother.

The meeting with his mother was difficult. He was told directly that he could not come home, a rejection that seemed to cut him deeply, yet afterwards he spoke of how happy he was with the way he managed himself – ‘I didn’t lose the head like I used to’. He shopped and managed his money and spoke of getting out of prison the following week, reassuring himself a number of times that Jerry, his mentor, would be there for him.

At the time of writing, Michael has been out of prison almost 6 weeks. He is living in the supported accommodation organised by the mentor; he receives regular visits and contact with his mentor and he is currently beginning a supported work scheme. The mentor is working hard to organise an assessment to review Michael’s level of learning difficulties and make recommendations for his future needs and supports.

While Michael is only 6 weeks out of prison, the future will tell the longer term measures of success. There are, however, a number of clear, short- and medium-term measures of success evidenced in Michael’s story of his involvement with a mentor in the You’re Equal Project. These are:

- Michael’s intrapersonal habit of isolating himself and cutting off people, rejecting offers of support, telling people who got close to him to f*** off has begun to be broken through the consistent efforts and patience of the mentor’s engagement with him in prison.
- Michael’s release was well planned through the in-prison case conferencing system that has been developed as part of the You’re Equal Project. Thus, he had a planned and supported temporary release day to help him ‘break the ice of going home’. He was also met by his mentor on the day he was released and brought to his supported accommodation.
- He has been supported to manage and deal with his feelings of being rejected by his mother.
- He has been supported and challenged to critically reflect on his previous patterns of getting into trouble and being sent back to prison.
- He had been linked in with medical and social welfare supports.
- He has been set up with an appointment for an assessment of his learning difficulties.
- He is currently engaged in a sheltered workshop programme.
- Six weeks out of prison, he is not homeless, depressed or in trouble with the Gardaí.



Summary and Recommendations



10. Summary and Recommendations

This study has sought to evaluate the You're Equal Project in terms of its core aim – *'the maximisation of employment opportunities for prisoners and ex-prisoners through the development and mainstreaming of integrated appropriate training, mentoring and guidance services, and associated research and dissemination to influence the employment sector and inform policy within the prison sector'* (You're Equal Development Partnership Agreement, 2006).

In seeking to evaluate the You're Equal Project, this study sought to evaluate:

- the macro elements involved in creating and sustaining the multiagency and multidisciplinary collaboration central to the You're Equal Project;
- the micro elements involved in the mentoring work.

Rather than simply measuring the success of this project based on the number of participants who successfully secured employment after their release, this study explored the deeper issues associated with prisoners and ex-prisoners' efforts to become employable. This issue of *employability* was explored in relation to the barriers and supports that affect ex-prisoners' ability to engage in work on their release. Further, the type of work done with the participants by the mentors pre- and post-release in helping them to seek and secure employment was also examined. Thus, this evaluation study has been concerned with exploring not just *what* worked with the prisoners and ex-prisoners, but also *how* it worked.

This report concludes with a summary of the research study and highlights a number of key issues and recommendations relating to:

- the partnership approach to multiagency collaboration;
- management and coordination of the project;
- outputs of the project;
- the mentoring process, including reflections on peer mentoring, mentoring in rural locations and mentoring workloads.

In doing so, it is hoped to make a specific and positive impact on policy and practice in regard to the employment-related experiences of ex-prisoners.

Structure of the You're Equal Project

International research highlights the enormous challenge faced by ex-prisoners in re-joining the labour market. Furthermore, the first few days after release from prison can be absolutely crucial in terms of ex-prisoners' re-offending and re-arrest. Without sufficient material and social support upon release, the cycle of release and re-arrest can become increasingly difficult to break. Thus, the You're Equal Project identified the need to bridge the gap that exists in the provision of pre- and post-release services, and set out to provide an element of throughcare service to ex-prisoners.

The You're Equal Project is a significant attempt by a group of service providers in the community and voluntary sectors in partnership with the statutory services to meet the needs of prisoners on their release from prison. A small group of key people and agencies were responsible for driving the project through the You're Equal Partnership European Funding Proposal. The project started its development phase in June 2004, when time was spent agreeing parameters and putting the necessary infrastructure and personnel in place; then it continued through to December 2007 (when it was evaluated) and is ongoing.

The work of the You're Equal Project is organised, structured, supported and maintained through a fully consultative, participative management structure and framework involving multiagency and multidisciplinary collaboration (*see Chapter 4*). This

framework includes a Management Committee; the Castlerea and Cork Local Area Networks; the Mainstreaming and Policy Group; a Practicalities sub-committee; a Finance sub-committee; a Research sub-committee; a Self-employment sub-committee; a Case Management Group at Castlerea Prison; and an In-prison Equal Group in Cork Prison. The project is staffed on a day-to-day basis by the team of You're Equal Ltd., consisting of a Project Coordinator, an Administrator, 5 mentors (including one volunteer), a Self-employment Development Worker and 2 Community Employment (CE) workers.

Profile of participants

A review of the case files and project records highlights how the profile of the 98 participants in the You're Equal Project to date is broadly similar to the profile of Irish prisoners, where the 'typical criminal' tends to be young, urban, undereducated males from the lower socio-economic classes and the so-called underclass (IPS, 2005).

The following is evident from a broad overview of the participants' profiles (*for full statistical analysis and breakdown, see Chapter 5*). Of the 98 participants in the You're Equal mentoring project, 49 of them were serving a sentence of less than 12 months, a further 46 were serving a sentence of between 1-5 years, while only 3 were serving a sentence of over 5 years. Offences committed were mainly for assault and arson, generally while under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol. Other offences committed included possession of drugs for sale or supply; burglary and robbery, including shoplifting; road traffic offences, ranging from no insurance to car theft; breach of barring or protection orders; public order offences and assaults causing harm. Only 2 men were up for manslaughter charges. Many of the participants had multiple charges.

In terms of age profile, 44 of the participants were younger than 24 years of age, while a total of 76 were younger than 34. In terms of ethnicity, 91 of the participants were Irish by origin, including 15 who said they were members of the Traveller Community, while 7 presented as being of other ethnic origins.

With regard to relationships and families, 77 of the participants were single, while 14 were either married, separated or divorced; 63 participants stated they had no children or they chose not to answer the question; 81 participants said they had no care responsibilities.

In terms of employment, only 25 of the participants were employed on a full-time basis at the time of sentence, while 66 were unemployed to varying extents. 61 of the participants had recognised accommodation issues at the time of their release from prison and only 31 were going home on release. With regard to education and literacy, 34 of the participants said they had left school before the age of 14; while 72 participants said literacy was not an issue, 26 of them stated that they had literacy difficulties. Of the 98 participants, 6 had mental health issues, 1 had a physical disability and 5 had an intellectual disability. In terms of addiction status, 52 of the participants admitted having current drug and/or alcohol issues, while a further 31 admitted former drug and/or alcohol issues.

Research methods

In addition to reviewing case files, project records and minutes of planning, coordination, management and mainstreaming committee meetings, we also strategically carried out a total of 44 interviews (16 participants, 5 mentors and the Project Coordinator, and 22 key stakeholders in the form of prison professionals and service providers). The opinion of all those interviewed was that You're Equal was successful in its aim. Those interviewed claimed to show clear evidence of how the participants themselves had benefited from the project and the mentoring supports. The service providers

both inside and outside the prisons also spoke at great length about the additional add-on benefits that the project had brought to multiagency and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Partnership approach to multiagency collaboration

A key finding in this study is how foundational the core principles of partnership are to the You're Equal Project. The initial funding proposal for the project was based on key principles of community development, as well as the pillars of the EU EQUAL Community Initiative, where key drivers of the project spoke in terms of developing a new model of working with prisoners and ex-prisoners, within and outside prisons.

As this evaluation has shown, the early phase of the project was not without its challenges, requiring careful management and communication skills on the part of the key drivers of a newly emerging project. The dynamic at the inception of the project was the challenge of bringing two divergent work models together on the issue of re-integration – the partnership 'ground-up' model of the project and the 'total' institution model of the prisons, two different institutions and working cultures, two different traditions, ideologies and rationales, all creating an interesting and initially challenging dynamic. Yet, as this study shows, the careful management of these issues from the earliest phase ultimately led to the establishment of trust among the relevant organisations and individuals involved in the project.

Significantly, the vast majority of service providers interviewed in this study spoke about the positive development of this new approach to multiagency collaboration and communication. A systemic shift occurred in workplace practices through the development of this partnership approach, where many traditional service providers have become task-focused, rather than role-focused, as they become more prisoner-centred.

As this study has found, the in-prison collaboration, together with the Local Area Networks of support, facilitated and supported by the national collaborations of the Management and Mainstreaming Committees, has been central in developing the positive development of a new partnership that is prisoner-centred in its efforts (*see Chapter 4*).

Recommendation:

- This underpinning philosophy of partnership should be considered as a core principle and way of working. It has generated new means of multiagency collaboration, both within and outside prisons, which is now focused on the needs of prisoners and ex-prisoners. This multiagency partnership should continue and be supported.

Management and coordination of project

This collaborative and boundary-spanning project was at first a challenge for those leading and involved in the initiative. However, vital to its success has been the structure of multiagency support that is central to the management of the project. The organisation and management of the You're Equal Project encompasses quite a significant system of partners from widespread geographical and institutional backgrounds. Thus, the project is structured in a highly organised manner through the Management and Mainstreaming Committees to the Local Area Networks at both Cork and Castlerea Prisons. The Project Coordinator is the central liaison person and answers to the Management Committee and through its ratification, to all the other committees, networks and sub-committees.

A review of some international models of multiagency collaboration, attempting to respond to what is variously referred to as the 're-integration', 're-entry' or 'resettlement' needs of ex-prisoners, highlights similar management structures to that developed by

the You're Equal Project. A key lesson to take from these international models might be how flexible they have been from time to time in inviting and including new partners as the need arose.

A specific aspect of the Irish model of management is the partnership-style organisation of the You're Equal Project, which does appear to be a development unique among this type of mentoring and ex-prisoner support project. While it cannot be considered as entirely without precedent, the You're Equal partnership model does appear to be a positive new departure, offering a considered pre-existing structure and philosophy for the project, something which had to be generated from elsewhere in these other cases.

A core objective of this partnership ethos of management in the You're Equal Project has been to include service users (prisoners and ex-prisoners) at all levels of its management and organisational structures. To a degree, this endeavour has been successful: prisoners and ex-prisoners have been involved from the planning stages of the project and attend many of the various committee and sub-committee meetings. However, it is recommended that:

Recommendation:

- Further time and effort should be given to enhancing and supporting the direct involvement of prisoners and ex-prisoners in the various levels of organisation and management of the You're Equal Project.

The greatest success of ex-prisoner involvement in the You're Equal Project to date has been the role that the peer mentors – ex-prisoners themselves – have played in the development of the project. (Two of the four paid mentors employed on the project are ex-prisoners.) These peer mentors have played a very positive role in the lives of some of the participants they have mentored. In addition to this significant role, a further beneficial influence relates to their role and value as important members of the multiagency and multidisciplinary management and coordination of the project.

Recommendations:

- The You're Equal Project would not sustain itself or support the work of the mentors without the support of the Management and Mainstreaming Committees, together with the Local Area Networks at both Cork and Castlerea Prisons, where the Project Coordinator is the central liaison person. This collaborative and boundary-spanning management system should continue to be supported.
- The You're Equal Project has made considerable strides to include service users at all levels of the project. This involvement of prisoners and ex-prisoners should continue to be developed and monitored in order to increase the number of participants at all levels of decision-making in the project.
- The greatest success to date in the You're Equal Project has come in terms of the role played by the peer mentors. Building on their positive contribution, new peer mentors may now be encouraged among participants and supported at the various committee and sub-committee levels.

Outputs of the project

In addition to the formal management and support structures of the You're Equal Project, the work done by the newly structured multiagency collaboration (of being prisoner-centred together) has generated a number of key outputs, with an exponential developmental effect within the two prisons involved. Over a relatively short space of time, a number of 'tangible products' have been produced, which would not have existed prior to, or without, the You're Equal Development Partnership. These include:

- 2 FETAC Level 5 accredited modules, developed by members of Cork Local Area Network, with the assistance of NEVA;
- EXPAC were contracted to develop an awareness-raising DVD;

- the self-employment training programme, developed by Castlerea Local Area Network and piloted in Castlerea Prison;
- the inclusion of prisoner issues and matters pertaining to their families on the Citizens Information Board website (*see* www.citizensinformation.ie).

Each of these products, or outputs, is relatively new to the market and therefore it may be too early to measure their longer term success in terms of impact. However, all the service providers interviewed commented positively on how engaging in the creation of these products as shared projects led to enhanced multiagency collaboration.

Significantly, prisoners and ex-prisoners have had a crucial level of participation in the creation of these outputs. As such, new knowledge based on an empathetic understanding of the realities of life in prison has emerged through this partnership. The collaborative creation of these tools for raising awareness about the lives and needs of prisoners and ex-prisoners has been a most positive output in itself. Such nuanced understandings of the experiences, barriers and challenges, as well as the pathways to success for prisoners' re-integration to society upon release, are a very significant investment in the future of the Irish criminal justice system.

Recommendation:

- The You're Equal Project was established to work with prisoners and ex-prisoners on issues of resettlement and re-integration. As this report has shown, considerable achievements have been made at both Cork and Castlerea in developing multiagency collaboration within and outside the prisons. Through this collaboration, the project has created some very useful and tangible products for the market. We recommend that these outputs be evaluated in the near future.

Mentoring process

The You're Equal Project employs four mentors, two based in Cork and two in Castlerea, and has a further voluntary peer mentor based in Cork. Since June 2006, the mentors have delivered a mentoring service to 98 prisoners. This service has developed a new model of working with ex-prisoners and is flexible in its approach, including work being done out of normal working hours (between 8am and 10pm) and over weekends.

Because the mentors have been working for only a relatively short time (18 months) to date, it is difficult to measure the longer term or 'hard' outcomes of the project, such as the participants' rates of recidivism or their progression into education, training and/or employment. However, as this study has shown, we did meet with participants who have remained out of prison, continued to attend AA meetings and other addiction treatment services, have gone back into full- or part-time education, are pursuing training courses and have secured (and kept) full- and part-time jobs. Furthermore, both the participants themselves and the network of service providers clearly articulated the immediate, shorter term or 'softer' outcomes as a clear sign of success in the project.

In highlighting the various processes and outputs from the mentoring work, we have focused on the personal narratives of 16 strategically chosen participants from both Cork and Castlerea Prisons – participants who have worked with each of the mentors and who were involved in each of the three phases of the project. Thus, we have been able in this study to comment on each phase of the mentoring process (from early engagement through to post-release aftercare), highlighting the challenges, set-backs and successes of the mentors' work.

The process of initiating the mentoring relationship has generated key lessons to be learnt within the system. For example, the partnership agencies have become sensitised to the security priorities of the Irish Prison Service in negotiating access to prisons. Similarly, the mentors soon became aware of the necessity for the project to negotiate

and manage service links with both Loughan House and Shelton Abbey, to which detention centres many of the participants were being moved prior to their release. The mentors also became aware of the challenges of trying to keep in touch with prisoners when they are released (often in an unplanned manner). Due to these early set-backs, the mentors lost contact with a number of the initial participants. However, the experience became vital learning for the project, which evolved and developed in a critically self-reflective manner throughout the 18 months of its existence.

The mentors have developed their working relationships with services inside and outside the prisons. Key to this have been the planned Local Area Network meetings outside the prisons and the establishment of the case conference review meetings within the prisons. These regular meetings have served the dual purpose of providing a prisoner-centred forum for throughcare planning, as well as creating a positive and successful means of sustaining multiagency and multidisciplinary collaboration. The in-prison case conference review meetings are chaired by Senior-level officers in the Irish Prison Service. They are multidisciplinary and prisoner-centred, and all those involved claim they have generated a positive systemic change within the institutions, where client-centred throughcare plans are constructed and reviewed.

We believe that great learning and wisdom has been generated by the You're Equal Project team and mentors over a relatively short pilot phase. While the service providers from the various agencies and professional backgrounds clearly articulate the new environment of multiagency, prisoner-centred, throughcare planning, the participants themselves are most appreciative of all they feel the mentors have done in helping them to re-integrate.

Recommendations:

- The You're Equal mentors could not sustain themselves in this most challenging work without the ongoing peer support, supervision and training provided to them. This should continue and it is also recommended that the mentors engage in further training (on the basis of the model of work described in Chapters 6 and 7).
- We recommend both the Mentor Training Programme, provided by the Omega Foundation, and the course on Motivational Interviewing as appropriate training for mentors (*see Appendix for details*). In addition to these, we would recommend further in-depth training in Redeployment Counselling and the Information Providers Programme, as well as some shorter, more solution-focused courses such as advocacy training, immigrant rights and entitlements, and conflict management and resolution. Also highly recommended for mentors are the two FETAC modules drawn up by the You're Equal Project, namely 'Understanding Imprisonment' and 'Restorative Justice'.
- The boundary-spanning role of the mentors and the Project Coordinator – bridging the in-prison and out-of-prison networks of support – has been recognised by all as being a key success factor in the mentoring work. This role should be protected in the future and mentors should continue to be employed 'outside of the prison service' in order to protect their perceived 'independence'.

Peer mentoring

Some of the key architects of the You're Equal Project were most keen to pilot and evaluate peer mentoring as a core part of the project. The two mentors at Castlereagh are peer mentors (ex-prisoners themselves). As discussed above, the peer mentors and the Project Coordinator (also an ex-prisoner) have greatly influenced the development of the entire project through their participation and contribution to the Management Committee and various sub-committees. Furthermore, many of the service providers spoke about how important the peer aspect of mentoring is for participants, especially those who struggle with trust issues within the prison context. Similarly, many of the

Castlerea participants mentioned directly (and without being specifically asking) how their experience of working with a peer mentor was the very factor that helped them believe in themselves and turn their lives around.

Those participants in the Cork You're Equal Project did not work with peer mentors, but they were equally appreciative of the support they received from their non-peer mentors in changing their offending behaviour.

Thus, while on the basis of this initial small-scale study we cannot claim that peer mentors are more successful than non-peer mentors, we can, however, state that both peer and non-peer mentors are as effective as each other.

A key challenge and lesson in this project has been how important it is for all mentors, including peer mentors, to be suitably approved for security reasons to enter the prisons. As discussed in some detail in this report, while this is primarily a post-release project, key to its success is the opportunity and time the mentors have to build trusting relationships with the prisoners in prison, prior to their release.

Recommendation:

- The You're Equal Project has included peer mentors. All of the participants who worked with peer mentors recognised the positive way they had brought their own life experiences to the mentoring relationship. Similarly, those participants who worked with non-peer mentors also recognised the skills and qualities that these mentors possessed. On the basis of this initial short-term study, it is recommended that ex-prisoners be considered as possible mentors in the future and, like every other candidate, they should be interviewed on the basis of their overall skills and competencies for the job.

Urban/rural mentoring

A further challenge to the role of mentors and to the work of the project as a whole is that created by the demands of working in a rural context. From the start of the project, the development team were concerned to reflect upon the challenges posed for partnerships and mentoring projects situated in rural areas. Clearly, as this report has shown, there are significant demands placed on the mentors in travelling long distances to meet with participants and attend Local Area Network meetings. All the mentors went to great lengths to facilitate the transport needs of the participants. Larry and Pat, for example, based in urban Cork, often visited participants as far away as Waterford, West Cork and Kerry. Most notably, however, for Jerry and Siobhan, based in rural Castlerea, their entire way of working with participants is predicated on the need to travel great distances to access scarce support services dotted throughout the countryside, such as supported accommodation, addiction services, welfare, training and employment.

A review of the addresses of participants at the time of their imprisonment shows that in the case of the 45 official referrals to the You're Equal Project in Cork, 38 of the men actually lived in Cork, 3 were from Co. Waterford and 2 from Co. Kerry. In contrast, in the case of the Castlerea project, only 2 of the men were actually from Co. Roscommon, while 5 came from Co. Sligo, 4 from Co. Longford, 15 from Galway (city and county), 3 from Co. Donegal, 2 from Co. Cork, 1 from Co. Tipperary, 2 from Co. Monaghan, 2 from Co. Cavan, 4 from Co. Mayo, 1 from Co. Derry, 1 from Co. Leitrim and 1 from Co. Westmeath.

This geographical spread of participants associated with the Castlerea project has a significant impact on how the mentors do their work. From our own experience of doing the research at Cork and Castlerea, we clearly understood that while all of the mentoring work was challenging and required a range of skills, there seemed to be a level of ease created simply by the physicality and closeness of a city-based service in Cork. For example, doing the interviews with the participants and key stakeholders involved only a short walk or public transport between the various agencies concerned.

However, in Castlerea we experienced first-hand the challenges involved in running such a project in a rural location. Services are not centralised in any way and service providers go to great lengths to accommodate and support the You're Equal Project. Mentors travel great distances to connect with and support ex-prisoners, who are released from prison to return to places like Sligo, Cavan or Limerick. The lack of regular public transport in the region makes everything more difficult, not just for researchers and mentors but also for prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families trying to visit.

A stark measure of the level of time and cost needed to run this project across such a rural geography is the cost of travel, where on average the Castlerea mentors claimed close to €16,000 in 2007 in comparison to the €4,000 associated with the Cork mentors (see Chapter 5). While travel is a necessary cost in this project, we have also shown in this report how many of the mentors actually use this time travelling with the participants in a creative and soulful way, to engage, relax, build up trust and allow the men the space and time to gather their thoughts and reflections as they construct a new life plan for themselves (see Chapter 6).

A second observation specifically on the rural challenges associated with running the Castlerea project is about the contribution, in terms of time and energy, that all partners in the Local Area Network (which, because of the geographical spread of services, is not all that local) give in commuting to network meetings and in-prison case conferences. While all members of the You're Equal partnership are praiseworthy in this regard, the solid support and leadership that the Roscommon Partnership Company continues to give to the entire project is noticeable, especially given the fact that so few ex-prisoners actually come from or return to live in Co. Roscommon.

Recommendation:

- The You're Equal Project has been piloted in two regions and prisons – Cork (urban) and Castlerea (rural) – thus allowing for a comparative analysis of the service needs in these settings. We recommend that account be taken of the additional demands, and costs, of time and travel that are clearly associated with providing this service in a rural setting. The challenges of long-distance commuting, poor public transport and distance from other support services have a direct impact on the caseloads and expenses involved for the mentors working in the countryside. We recommend that the rural aspect of this service continues to receive adequate support and funding.

Mentors' workloads

A key aspect of the mentoring work we observed as part of this evaluation study was how the mentors worked with the participants to assist them in negotiating their way back into the world outside prison. Since the mentoring aspect of the You're Equal Project began in June 2006, the project has worked with a total of 98 participants, referred in equal numbers at Cork and Castlerea Prisons.

The mentoring model has to date worked with 15 randomly selected participants, with 6 months left to serve on their sentences, in each of the two prisons on three separate occasions. Caseloads in this work are cumulative (see Chapter 5): the mentors are each still working to support 9 of the men from the initial intake; they are also working with 13 participants from the 2nd intake and engaging with new participants from the 3rd group, together with a growing number of self-referrals to the project at both Cork and Castlerea (see Table 12).

The primary function of a mentor is to be a transitional figure in the mentee's development. In terms of the process involved in the You're Equal Project, mentors can help individuals reach significant decisions about complex issues relating to their efforts to re-integrate into society after their release from prison. While not being there

to solve problems per se, mentors can illuminate issues and help participants plan a way through them. A review of the international literature on models of mentoring shows that in some cases the mentors were volunteers and others were paid professionals.

A key feature in the success of the You're Equal mentoring project, as far as all the mentors were concerned, was that they are contactable by mobile phone between 8am and 10pm and at weekends. This in itself sets them aside from any other 'professional' service. The mentors' flexibility in responding to and meeting with the participants – both on a planned basis inside and outside prison, and also at times unplanned (when the men are in crisis and need their mentor) – is crucial given the nature of this work and the vulnerable profile of the participants.

A key issue, however, relates to the workloads and appropriate ratio of mentor to participant that could be productive. One, maybe extreme, example in the literature reviewed showed that US Parole Officers had, on average, a caseload of 69 parolees and were able to make, on average, 1.6 face-to-face contacts with each per month. While the Irish Probation Officers interviewed as part of this study remembered coming into the Probation Service wanting to do the type of work they believed the mentors were engaged in, the key issue for them was that heavy caseloads prevented them from having the time needed to build a trusting relationship with the prisoners in prison and then having the time and possibility to follow through on this supportive relationship when the prisoners were released.

Throughout this report, we have given detailed descriptions of the nature of the work that the mentors actually do and cited the work of individual mentors in particular case studies (*see Chapters 5, 8 and 9*). The time taken in terms of face-to-face contact, behind-the-scenes planning, the phone calls, letters, associated travel costs, the challenges of relapse, multiagency network meetings and so on – all this work is very difficult to quantify, given the qualitative nature of this relational and process work. However, an analysis of a small random sample of cases (*see Chapter 5*) indicates the type of work and level of input in terms of time and other resources required in these cases.

Thus, in making a recommendation in terms of an appropriate caseload for mentors, we believe that the current system of intake – of 15 participants – is a model that has worked and should continue. It could be developed in terms of moving away from a solely random selection to a more careful hand-picking of participants due for release, where the in-prison case conference collaboration might see them as suitable candidates for the mentoring project.

It seems to us improbable for a mentor to work with any more than about 8 high maintenance participants at a time (*see Chapter 5*), some of whom will be in prison at the relationship-building stage, while others will be very recently released from prison and trying to negotiate the high-risk space and time associated with that phase of their lives. Some will be transitioning to a more secure and settled re-integrated life, while others will still be continuing to struggle with addictions, relapse, accommodation, family and work.

Recommendations:

- The flexibility and ability of the You're Equal mentors to be contacted outside working hours has been recognised by all, and in particular by the service users themselves, as being key to supporting the participants through crisis points. This flexibility of service should be continued.
- The caseloads of the You're Equal mentors have evolved over the time of the project. Careful consideration must be given to what constitutes a 'reasonable' caseload. Obviously, demands on the mentors' time are greatest at the time of prisoners' release; however, other crises (such as addiction relapse, housing or relationship difficulties) cannot easily be predicted by the mentors as they try to manage their caseload. It seems to us that the allocation of 15 participants at a time offers some balance and, on the basis of this preliminary study, we recommend that the appropriate caseload for each full-time mentor be kept in the region of this figure.
- The You're Equal Project began based on the random selection of participants and has strategically begun to move towards more careful selection of participants through the processes of case conference reviews and Local Area Network meetings. We support this shift in emphasis, based on the wisdom the mentors and service providers have gained in regard to the challenges of attempting to work with some participants.

Conclusions

In this study, we have found that the mentors used the time in their working week to great effect, supporting a large number of participants while continuing to give them a quality service based on relational support. The mentors at both prison locations have succeeded in supporting many participants through some very challenging times, working with them on issues such as self-esteem, housing, addictions and relationship issues. As shown in this report, some men have already succeeded in gaining, and keeping, jobs. However, the long-term value and success of this project will take more time to show itself through, for example, more of the participants gaining and keeping jobs, staying free from drugs, alcohol and crime for longer, and continuing to have an improved sense of self.

Appendices

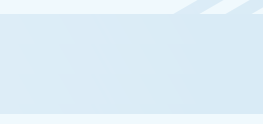




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Useful websites

British Think Tank 'Reform': www.reform.co.uk

Chance Project, Czech Republic:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/data/document/0701-msf-cz-prisoners.pdf

Citizens Information Board, Ireland: www.citizensinformation.ie

Ready 4 Work Programme, Department of Labor (USA):

http://www.dol.gov/cfbci/images/Focus_Group_Reentry.pdf

Sociological Association of Ireland (SAI): www.sociology.ie

SOVA Project (Supporting others through volunteer actions), UK:

www.sova.org.uk

StAMP Mentoring Programme, Community Restorative Centre (CRC), New South Wales, Australia:

<http://www.crcnsw.org.au/PDFs/CRCAnnual%20Report%202006.pdf>

You're Equal Ltd., Ireland: <http://www.youreequal.com/index.html>

Appendix: Training of mentors

The mentors in the You're Equal Project have, to date, either as a group or individually, accessed relevant training in various forms. All have undertaken the Omega Foundation's Mentor Training Programme. Three of the mentors trained in Motivational Interviewing at basic level, while 2 of them took the advanced-level course, with one of the latter going on to do the Facilitator Training for the course. Some of the mentors have also undertaken training in Addiction Counselling at local level and a course on Working with Families of Addicts. Details of the training courses provided to the You're Equal mentors are given below.

Mentor Training Programme, Omega Foundation

Aims

- Skills training and development for mentors.

Objectives

- Mentors to gain an understanding of support work.
- To provide relevant information and tools to empower.
- Mentors to perform their roles in an effective and professional manner.
- To challenge existing concepts and practices.
- Mentors to gain necessary skills to carry out their duties effectively with clients.
- Mentors to gain insight and understanding into self-management issues.

Time allowance

- 3 days per week for 3 weeks.

Programme modules

- Group introduction
- Programme overview
- Timetable, hopes, fears and expectations
- Exploration of needs and aspirations
- Group communication exercise
- Introduction to support/mentor role
- Self-management
- Time management
- Personal boundaries
- Professional boundaries
- Personal boundaries (*continued*)
- Professional boundaries (*continued*)
- Engaging clients
- Building rapport and trust
- Basic intervention types
- Basic intervention styles
- Basic intervention skills
- Creation and maintenance of care plans
- Goal-setting
- Accountability
- Sabotage
- Wrap-up and closure

Motivational Interviewing

Training in Motivational Interviewing gave the mentors a safe grounding in the techniques used in the interaction between, in this instance, mentor and participant (prisoner or ex-prisoner), as well as giving them the skills and knowledge to motivate people – in a process of interviewing, assessing and actively motivating participants towards change.

The basic introductory course, attended by 3 of the mentors, was delivered over 2 days by Merchants Quay. The other 2 mentors, who had already completed the introductory course, attended a 3-day course of advanced-level training, delivered by the Institute for Integrated Counsellors and Psychotherapists (IICP).

Future training needs

Future training needs identified by the You're Equal Project, in conjunction with the researchers from WIT and the mentors themselves, include:

- Citizens Information Board course;
- Information Providers Programme – FETAC-accredited (*see below*);
- Redeployment Counselling (*see below*).

In addition, some shorter, solution-focused courses are recommended to enhance the mentors' knowledge base on:

- Advocacy training;
- Immigrant rights and entitlements;
- Conflict management and resolution.

Also highly recommended for mentors are the two FETAC modules developed by the You're Equal Project, namely:

- Understanding Imprisonment;
- Restorative Justice.

Information Providers Programme

The aim of this programme is to equip information providers with the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to provide a high-quality, impartial and confidential information, advice and advocacy service to the public.

Diploma in Redeployment Counselling

The Diploma in Redeployment Counselling has been undertaken by 2 mentors in Castlerea, as well as the Self-employment Development Worker. This is a pilot course, accredited by the National Counselling Institute of Ireland, and provides the mentors with a grounding in adult guidance counselling. This will enable them to have an understanding of the basics of counselling skills and theories, as well as a knowledge of the process of working with people who are, in effect, unemployable.

