

For the attention of The Harris Review Committee,

I was really pleased to attend the event at NCVO on Thursday 25th September and be able to offer some contributions on behalf of Safe Ground and all the people we work with, to the review.

Please find some notes below.

Some great examples of purposeful activity and constructive use of resources with yp in custody are often one off interventions or programmes (Safe Ground Man Up or Family Man programmes in ISIS, Leap and Khulisa programmes, for example); but less often are they systemic programmes or cultures like the Family Intervention Wing in HMP Parc and the visits system there which, being run by the FIU team instead of security for the last 5.5 years, reports a reduction in violent incidents during visits of 99% (from 1 per week to 1 (physical removal of someone from visits hall) in 5.5 years.

The scheme also reports a 65% reduction in drug dog indications due to work with families over time. Surely this would be a useful model to develop across the youth estate if not all prisons.

Prison Service staff do a very difficult job in extreme conditions and are hugely undervalued, undertrained and under resourced. The pressures and contradictions they experience daily, backed up by our work with groups of Senior Management and Officer grades, makes it very difficult and confusing for staff to feel they are able to deliver quality services to people for whom life can get better. Rather, staff feel vulnerable, threatened, unsafe, resentful and often sad and disappointed at the endless cycle of reoffending, ungrateful prisoners and anger on the wings.

The changes to the IEP system mean that education is more of a privilege and can be removed as part of punishment for adjudications and behavioural issues. For young people, this may be an unnecessarily counterproductive approach to encouraging engagement. Many young people have not ever been engaged with education and prison could serve them as a way to discover new talents, skills and abilities.

The policy drive for increased focus on accredited learning and functional skills may well impede many young learners from more active, participative and creative learning opportunities not included in the LARA framework for OLASS delivery; Safe Ground and other arts programmes like Music in Prison or violence and conflict reduction programmes like Leap and Khulisa all fall outside OLASS criteria. So often 'good practice' depends on individuals and is lost when they leave or move on.

London prisons being on emergency regime due to staffing crisis and over crowding is a significant issue for health and well being of residents and staff in prisons nationally. Violence is increasingly common and staff ability / capacity for managing and de-escalating it is less and less.

Benchmarking and the new Fair and Sustainable agenda make Prison Service pay and conditions almost impossible for Prison Officers to do the highly skilled and experienced kind of youth work required in a YOI or with young people.

Men having 45 minutes a day to attend to all personal and practical tasks/activities; phone calls, applications, gym, shower, shopping, library visits, for example is a difficult and pressured environment in which people are likely to feel angry, resentful, unattended and unable to be responsible, active members of any community or family inside or outside the prison.

Recruitment, selection and training of staff is a serious issue that needs urgent attention and inclusion/input from relevant VCS partners. Safe Ground has extensive experience of family relationship work, relationships between officers and prisoners and, delivers a drama therapy

training programme for Prison Officers, dealing with issues of emotional well being, authority, power and control and how the role impacts on people who work in prisons. We would be more than willing to contribute expertise to the design of imperative skills and values for effective work with groups, young people and families, all currently missing from Prison Officer training.

Young people are often regarded as 'difficult', troublesome and demanding. Youth work skills and values need to be embedded as basic service delivery standards.

Control is often used as a tool of power and authority confused with power and so abused to differing degrees.

The issue of 'gangs' and the response to dealing with the issues as perceived may in fact entrench and support the kinds of segregation and separatism experienced by many young people. This could perhaps be challenged rather than colluded with, but would require significant cultural confidence and a leadership and operational team equipped with the skills and values to shift the existing divisions.

HMP Parc alongside the physical visits scheme also operate visits by Skype and the Family Intervention Unit concentrates on ensuring and promoting family contact, visits, inclusion and relationships as central to men's rehabilitation and re entry to society. Families are often unfairly punished by the CJS and self inflicted death amongst young people is often related to family issues- as well as isolation, fear, bullying, mh issues and self-loathing.

The macho, authoritarian, closed nature of prisons lends itself to homophobic, racist and misogynist attitudes none of which are conducive to a supportive, caring, safeguarding environment that protects people's dignity or capacity for reflection, development or learning.

Sorry for long email rather than separate document but hope this is in some way helpful,

With best wishes and thanks for the panel's insightful, considered and patient forum.

Charlie

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<http://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/Dmjc4f6ggZc64s72vi68/full>

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