

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: Newman University		
Unit of Assessment: Social Policy and Social Work		
Title of case study: Participatory Research with Ex-Offenders and Offenders		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014-2016		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Mike Seal	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Reader	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2008-2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>This pioneering and innovative project, delivered in partnership with Revolving Doors Agency, facilitated service-user involvement in substantive changes to (and the commissioning of) Probation and Prison services across the UK. As well as a direct and transformative impact on those directly involved (ex-offenders, offenders and staff) new empirical research findings led to significant changes in practice and policy in the field of offender management, both nationally and internationally, with project recommendations and resources reaching beyond the UK into Europe, South America and the Far East.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Between 2014 and 2016, Dr Mike Seal led a research project working in partnership with the Revolving Doors Agency (http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/why-were-here). Revolving Doors is a charity based in London working across England and Wales that works with adults with multiple and complex needs who are in repeat contact with the criminal justice system (the 'revolving door' of prison, release and reoffending). This repeat contact is often driven by associated needs and issues such as poor mental health, substance use and homelessness. Revolving Doors was commissioned by the National Offender Management Service and The Ministry of Justice to develop materials to support service-user involvement in the criminal justice system and to test and review service-user involvement practice in Probation and Prison services. Following an initial scoping exercise and literature review into historical and existing approaches to client involvement in these services, service-users from two Probation Trusts were trained in participatory research methods and supported to conduct qualitative research within Hertfordshire (Watford) and Bedfordshire (Luton) Probation Services, HMP Norwich and HMP Holloway, with staff, clients and managers. In Watford, the research team examined client and worker understandings of care and support, housing issues, experiences of employment services, the interface between Probation and the Prison services and experience of community payback. In Bedfordshire the research focused on client experiences of reception services, client/staff relationships and perceptions of sentence planning. These insights into service-user involvement approaches were then extended into the arena of service commissioning via the Commissioning Together project; a three-year project (2014-2017) supported by the City of London Corporation's charity, City Bridge Trust. This work involved offenders and ex-offenders in the service participating in the commissioning of services in the London Boroughs of Wandsworth and Barking & Dagenham. Service-users were trained in research methods and supported to examine services for ex-offenders and offenders in their Boroughs. A final stage of the project involved the roll-out of the Handbooks with Mike and project participants acting as consultants to a series of Action Learning Sets in other Probation services nationally. This led on to the commissioning of new services nationally with the aim of improving health and reducing re-offending through more effective integration of services and improved pathways in the community. Findings were then presented at the National International Offender Management Conference.</p>		

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Seal, M. (2018) *Participatory Pedagogic Impact Research: Co-production with Community Partners in Action*. Routledge: London

Seal, M. (2016) *Service user Involvement with Offenders in the Community*. London: RDA
Available at:

<http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/involvement/peer-research/noms-toolkits>

Accessed 20/1/21

Seal, M. (2016) *Improving your Prisoner Involvement Systems: A Toolkit for Staff*. London: RDA.

Available at: <http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/involvement/peer-research/noms-toolkits>

Accessed 20/1/21

Seal, M. (2016) *Running a Peer Research Project with Offenders in the Community: A Handbook for Staff*. London: RDA

Available at:

<http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/involvement/peer-research/noms-toolkits>

Accessed 20/1/21

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The project was delivered in 2 broad streams, both of which aimed to improve understanding of the value and the logistical challenges involved in implementing rigorous peer research and service-user involvement in commissioning of criminal justice services. Several concrete outputs were produced, all of which were significant in terms of producing changes to practice, policy and user engagement.

These included:

Practice guidelines and 3 service toolkits for use by Prison and Probation services, endorsed by the National Offender Management Service and the UK Ministry of Justice.

Running a Peer Research Project with Offenders in the Community: A Handbook for Staff

<http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/file/1865/download%3Ftoken%3DmrEpVlaa>

set out how to implement a peer research project with offenders in the community

Improving Your Prisoner Involvement Systems: A Toolkit for Staff

<http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/file/1863/download%3Ftoken%3D1cQMW1W>

focused on how to improve prisoner involvement implementation systems,

Service User Involvement with Offenders in the Community: A Toolkit for Staff

<http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/file/1861/download%3Ftoken%3Dmj5AoJXw>

provided guidance on how to create service user involvement with offenders in the community.

Outputs also included a book on Participatory Pedagogic Impact Research Co-production with Community Partners in Action (Seal, 2018), leaflets designed by clients and still used by services, and a film which has become a main resource in a number of training programmes for Probation.

Impact on participants

There was a direct and transformative impact on the service-users who were involved in the research project as peer researchers. Some went on to form a Community Interest Company and were in turn commissioned to undertake training on the client experience for services in other areas. We have testimonies from participants that the project contributed to their permanent desistance from crime and to them gaining employment on the basis of their participation in the project. At least one of the participants has gone on to become a consultant, advising in the area of service user involvement. Other group members went on to become independent researchers through the Revolving Doors Peer Research Network. We also have

testimonies from Probation and Prison service staff and management about how the project changed their perception of clients and the benefit the project has had in terms of creating systemic cultural change.

Impact on Probation and Prison services nationally

Following a meeting with the Ministry of Justice, the Service toolkits and guidance (designed for probation and prison staff, including managers and prison governors) were incorporated into a nationwide training programme. Probation and Prison services were supported in implementing the guides and toolkits within their services. The guidance on peer research was piloted within two joint commissioning services and this led to a series of recommendations to the commissioners in those Boroughs. This continued for two more years with a number of Probation services participating. The findings of the Commissioning Together project were presented at the National IOM Conference in 2016 to an audience of commissioners from across the country, many of whom went on to work with Revolving Doors in changing their commissioning processes. Commissioners in Wandsworth and Barking & Dagenham are currently using the insight gained from the research in their Strategic Needs Assessments for the 2017-2020 commissioning cycle.

The Revolving Doors Agency has identified clear evidence of improved local services and service pathways:

“In Wandsworth our work resulted in a new criminal justice pathway for individuals with mental health needs, improved transitions between services, the secondment of a mental health practitioner and redesign of the personality disorder pathway”.

And in Barking and Dagenham, research findings have, according to Revolving Doors Agency:

“strengthened co-commissioning of substance misuse and domestic abuse, driving the development of a new substance misuse specification that requires providers to address the needs of survivors of domestic violence and abuse. Individuals involved in the project gained new skills and confidence. The project has supported their individual recoveries from problems, such as substance misuse and mental ill health, and their engagement in and commitment to their local communities”.

In Bedfordshire new training was developed for reception staff and the reception building was physically changed. The group of service users produced a video about client staff relationships that was adopted as training material for Bedfordshire and three other Probation services. The same group also produced a leaflet for clients on how to get the most out of probation. This was adopted by 4 Probation services across the region. In Hertfordshire a new service-user reference group was set up to monitor the implementation of recommendations and protocols in housing and prison services. In Wandsworth commissioning procedures were changed and a new client reference group established. Some of the members went on to form their own social enterprise which was then commissioned to undertake further research and conduct training with staff. In Dagenham a video on effective client and worker relationships has been adopted by 4 probation services in their core training. The spirit of the project also continues through the Revolving Doors “Experts by Experience” scheme where offenders and ex-offenders regularly talk to MP’s, Select Committees and a network of researchers across the country.

Impact on Probation and Prison Services internationally

The research team was asked to speak at the International Offender Management 2016 (London) and World Congress of Probation (2016) about the project. The peer researchers on the project presented a leaflet advising how to make the most of time on probation and a booklet dealing with the experience of a first night in prison (‘First Night’). These resources were subsequently adopted by Probation and Prison services in Japan, Peru, Mexico, Taiwan, Brazil, Italy and Poland.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Revolving Doors Agency, South Bank Technopark, 90 London Road, London SE1 6LN
2. The project toolkits are available to view and download at:
<http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/involvement/peer-research/noms-toolkits>
3. [The handbook for staff is also included among the social welfare collection at the British Library: Running a peer research project with offenders in the community - The British Library \(bl.uk\)](#)
4. The facilitation and training work by Mike Seal is referenced in Terry, I. and Cardwell, (2016) *Refreshing Perspectives: Exploring the application of peer research with populations facing severe and multiple disadvantage*. London: RDA. Available at <http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/file/1849/download?token=Yi0tjhmo> Accessed 20/1/21
5. Mike Seal was one of the presenters at the second seminar of Revolving Doors' research network which discussed how and why to use peer research as a methodology in building the evidence base around severe and multiple disadvantage: [Seminar Presentations | Revolving Doors \(revolving-doors.org.uk\)](#)