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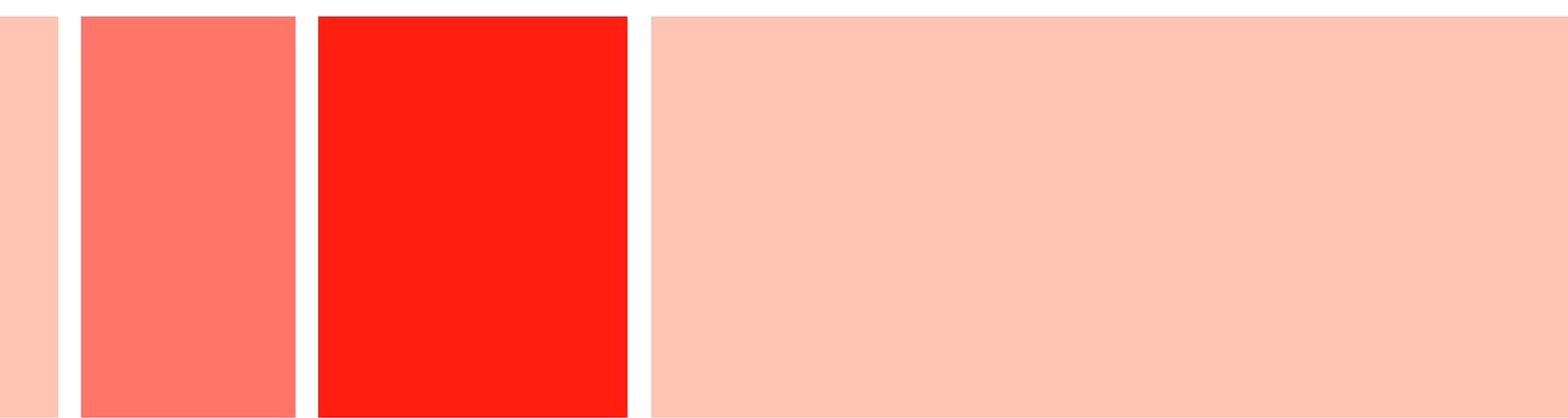


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Evaluation Of The Transitional Support Scheme (TSS)

Executive Summary



EVALUATION OF THE TRANSITIONAL SUPPORT SCHEME (TSS)

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**Mike Maguire, Katy Holloway
(University of Glamorgan)**

**Mark Liddle, Fionn Gordon, Paul Gray, Alison Smith,
Sam Wright
(ARCS Ltd)**

Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Assembly Government

For further information please contact:

Name: Robert Willis

Department: Dept of the First Minister and Cabinet

Welsh Assembly Government

Rhydycar Business Park

Merthyr Tydfil

CF48 1UZ

Tel: 01685 729138

Fax: 01685 729546

Email: robert.willis@wales.gsi.gov.uk

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Acronyms

CARAT services	Counselling, Assessment, Referral, Advice and Throughcare
CJIT	Criminal Justice Integrated Teams
DIP	Drugs Intervention Programme
DIR	Drug Interventions Record
ECL	End of Custody Licence
G4S	Group 4 Securicor
HMP	Her Majesty's Prison
NOMS	National Offender Management Service
OASys	Offender Assessment System
OGRS3	Offender Group Reconviction Scale (revised)
PGA	Peer Group Advisor
SSOM	Support Services Outcome Measure
TSS	Transitional Support Scheme
WAG	Welsh Assembly Government

Executive Summary

The Transitional Support Scheme (TSS), an all-Wales project funded by the Welsh Assembly Government, is one of the largest and longest established mentoring schemes for ex-prisoners in the UK. It offers 'through the gate' assistance to short-term male and female prisoners with substance misuse problems. The Scheme is run by Group 4 Securicor (G4S) Justice Services, which covers Gwent, South Wales and Dyfed Powys with eight mentors; and CAIS/Nacro Cymru, which covers North Wales with three mentors and employs an in-reach worker in HMP Altcourse. This report presents the results of an evaluation conducted in 2008-9, to assess TSS in terms of the quality and effectiveness of its organisational processes and practices, and its impact on the client group. The main findings were as follows:

- Over a period of five years, TSS has developed a very effective practice model. Its managers and most of its mentors are now highly experienced, skilled and well connected with other agencies. Feedback from external stakeholders was overwhelmingly positive about the quality of its work. The Scheme was perceived as building trusting and supportive relationships with its clients, plugging important gaps in services for ex-offenders (including providing support to the relatively neglected group with alcohol problems), and fulfilling a significant 'bridging' role by assisting and encouraging offenders to engage with other agencies.
- Perhaps the most important contribution that TSS makes to the resettlement of prisoners is in helping their 'transition' in the critical first days and weeks after release from a highly unstable situation to one in which they are able to engage meaningfully with agencies which can help them build a more stable lifestyle and start moving away from crime and substance abuse.
- TSS has not only met its referral targets, but has achieved impressively high post-release contact rates in comparison with other evaluated mentoring schemes (seeing 56 per cent of clients face-to-face outside prison at least once, 39 per cent two or more times, and 18 per cent at least six times). Its mentors also continue to work quite intensively with a significant proportion of clients for periods of up to three months.
- A number of areas were identified in which improvements might be made, notably expanding the coverage of Welsh short-term prisoners across different establishments, enhancing record-keeping systems and practices, and building more strategic relationships with other agencies.
- Using data from the Police National Computer, the two-year reconviction rates of all male TSS participants over 21 who were released from a variety of prisons in 2004-6 were compared with those of a sample of similar prisoners (ie male short-termers with substantial drug problems) who were in HMP Parc during the same period but did

not participate in TSS. The expected reconviction rates of both groups were calculated, using the revised Offender Group Reconviction Scale (OGRS3), the standard predictor of re-offending used by the Ministry of Justice. As OGRS3 is based on static risk factors and therefore does not take account of drug problems, these predictions were adjusted based on national reconviction data on male short-term prisoners with drug problems (as defined by OASys, the national Offender Assessment System), which were provided for us by the Ministry of Justice.

- No significant difference in reconviction rates was found between TSS participants as a whole and the comparison sample, both groups being reconvicted at rates close to those predicted. However, when the TSS participants were divided into smaller groups, according to the extent of face-to-face contact they had had with mentors after release, some fairly strong differences were apparent. In particular, those who had 2-6 such contacts were reconvicted at a considerably lower rate (71%) than either the comparison group (77%) or the TSS participants who did not maintain contact (83%), despite predicted rates for all three groups remaining similar.
- While by no means conclusive evidence that TSS mentoring has an effect on reconviction rates (it may be, for example, that those offenders who maintained contact were more motivated to desist from crime than those who disengaged early), this echoes a very similar finding from the Probation Resettlement Pathfinders (Clancy et al. 2006). It thus adds further support to the argument that 'relational continuity through the gate', maintained for at least a few meetings post-release to ease the transition from custody to community, is an important element of effective resettlement practice (Maguire and Raynor 2006; Lewis et al. 2007) .
- Other statistical data was collected to measure the 'distance travelled' by TSS participants in terms of tackling criminogenic needs such as employment, housing and substance abuse. The evidence suggests that sizeable proportions of TSS clients made progress in these areas. There was also evidence of high levels of engagement with clients and effective 'bridging' to other services.

A number of more detailed process issues were explored. It was found that:

- The induction and continuing training of mentors was found to be wide-ranging and generally appropriate.
- Mentors generally felt well supported in their role, and despite the long distances between some mentors and the project managers, all were confident that support was accessible when needed.
- Generally speaking, referrals were appropriate in terms of the targeted group (male and female short termers with substance misuse

problems). The two branches of the Scheme adopted different policies in terms of prisoners with Class A drug problems: while the G4S team worked with this group, Nacro/CAIS left them to the DIP team (also managed by Nacro) and focused its efforts on those with alcohol or less entrenched drug problems.

- Referral systems at HMPs Parc and Altcourse, where the two branches of the Scheme have close links and a regular presence, worked well, but referrals from other prisons were patchy and required frequent reminders.
- Some problems were experienced in obtaining risk information from prisons referring clients, which involved managers and staff in a considerable amount of 'chasing'. Ideally, strategic level agreements would be reached with prisons whereby such information would be supplied on a routine basis.
- While there were many examples of excellent partnership working, and good relations between mentors and staff in other agencies, there was a perceived need for more strategic relationships with statutory agencies in particular, including more formal agreements on, for example, referral procedures to ensure that these do not rely too heavily on cordial relationships between individuals.

The following were identified as clear examples of good practice:

- In-reach work
- Provision of gate pick-ups
- 'Assertive outreach'
- Local networking
- Enhancing offender engagement with support services
- The involvement of Peer Group Advisors
- The Scheme's focus on alcohol

Finally, the research raised a number of 'questions for the future':

- How thinly should the jam be spread? First of all, should more effort be made to recruit participants from a wider range of prisons (which would require a considerable amount of effort to gain a relatively small numbers of extra referrals) or should efforts be focused primarily on the prisons holding the largest numbers of Welsh prisoners? And secondly, should the level of mentoring be restricted to, say, one meeting a week and a maximum period of three months post-release? Or should the Scheme be more 'client led' so that offenders who wish to receive more intensive and/or extended periods of assistance are

given more attention than others and/or continue to be mentored for much longer periods?

- Should TSS be expanded and/or 'mainstreamed'? Some interviewees argued that TSS services should be offered not only to more prisoners, but to other categories of offender, including those on remand or on community sentences. Others felt that clients would benefit from more structured activities. This raised the possibility of a TSS becoming more of a mainstream service, perhaps including closer integration and joint commissioning of TSS services with those of other agencies such as the DIP and Probation. While keen to get TSS on a more secure financial footing, its key staff were wary of such moves, fearing that the Scheme might lose its unique character and be 'swamped' by larger organisations with different agendas and priorities. The general view was that any expansion should be taken slowly, the first priority being to consolidate present funding and partnership agreements.
- Can the Scheme use its experience to help take forward the philosophy, aims and practice of mentoring in the field of offender rehabilitation? Although it has often been mentioned in strategic documents as a promising form of intervention, its use has been restricted mainly to small and short-lived projects varying in philosophies and styles of working. A scheme with the experience of TSS could potentially articulate and disseminate a clear method of working (with a coherent 'model of change' – hopefully evidenced as effective) that would influence practice nationwide.