

Volunteers and NGOs in a Rehabilitative Prison System

A report on a Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship, 2017

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Winston Spencer Churchill on prisons and penal policy

I shall certainly be very glad to be able to announce it to the House of Commons the first real principle which should guide anyone trying to establish a good system of prisons should be to prevent as many people as possible getting there at all. ...

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. A calm and dispassionate recognition of the rights of the accused ... and even of convicted criminals against the state, a constant heart-searching by all charged with the duty of punishment, a desire and eagerness to rehabilitate ... all those who have paid their dues in the hard coinage of punishment, tireless efforts towards the discovery of curative and regenerating processes and an unfaltering faith that there is a treasure, if only you can find it in the heart of every person – these are the symbols which in the treatment of crime and criminals mark and measure the stored up strength of a nation, and are the sign and proof of the living virtue in it.

Speech to the House of Commons, July 1910

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Background

From June to October 2017 I undertook a series of visits and discussions in the UK, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Finland and Sweden, enabled by the generous support of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust (New Zealand). The focus of the fellowship was the role of non-governmental organisations, particularly those with a significant volunteer workforce, in the rehabilitation and re-settlement of prisoners.

I wanted to get an international perspective on how prisons work with their communities, and in particular to study how this is done in countries which have *either* maintained a relatively low incarceration rate (which is generally accepted as the best overall indicator of the effectiveness of a country's criminal justice system) *or* managed to reduce their prison populations over the last few decades. The overall purpose is to bring back insights that can be used in my work with the New Zealand Howard League for Penal Reform and the Yoga Education in Prisons Trust, organisations which actively seek to expand the network of volunteers working with prisoners and to find new opportunities for working effectively with prisons to support the journey of offenders towards a life without crime.

"It takes a village..."

Aroha nui to a range of people whose advice and generous support was crucial to my completing this fellowship:

- My wife, Mai Chen, who added the role of sole parent to her already busy schedule during my lengthy absences, and our son, Jack, who seized the opportunity to show us that he has maturity beyond his years;
- Ray Smith, CEO of the NZ Department of Corrections, who assisted in making contact with European prison system leaders;
- Professors Rosie Meek of London University and Alison Liebling of Cambridge University, who linked me with organisations and individuals in the UK;
- A group of dedicated professionals who took time out of their schedules to orchestrate my visits, answer my naïve antipodean questions and engage in discussions during long car journeys on the challenges of making prisons better and finding effective alternatives:
 - Frits Langeraar and Ilona Vegh – Dutch Prison Service
 - Hans Barendrecht – Director of Prisoner Care (Netherlands)
 - Mika Peltola – Finnish Criminal Sanctions Agency
 - Jenny Kärholm, Manager – Research Unit, Kriminalvarden, Sweden
 - Gerhard Ploeg – Kriminalomsorgsdirektoratet, Norway
 - Kieran J Moylan – Care and Rehabilitation Directorate, Irish Prison Service
- Individuals who inspired me by their commitment of time, energy and talent to mending systems that are broken so that people who are broken can mend themselves:

- In Finland: Kati Sunimento (Criminal Sanctions Agency), Elina Toijanaho (Suomenlinna Open Prison), Maarit Suomela (Krits Probation & After-Care), staff at Kris, Kaija Schellhammer-Tuominen and Katja Hakkarainen (Silta-Valmennus)
- In the Netherlands: Peter Hennephof (Chief Executive the Dutch Prison Service), Piet Verbruggen (Nieuwersluis Prison), Dew Koesal and Ineke Koenders (Stichting Surant), Lilian Oosterhof (Krimpen in des IJssel Prison), Fokko Drent, Sophie Lorijn, Maarten Antoons, and Monique Dijkstra (Veenhuisen Prison), Richart Pintura (graffiti artist and ex-prisoner)
- In Norway: Rita Nilsen (Retretten), staff at Bastoy and Hassell open prisons and at the City Mission, Alexander Medin (Gangster Yoga)
- In Sweden: Caroline Benstsson (Kriminalvarden), Annika Lundquist (Buff), Maria Johansson and Josefin Wikkstrom (Krimyoga), staff at Norkopping and Skanes Prisons, Emma, Johann and Hedwig (Research Unit, Kriminalvarden)
- In the United Kingdom: Nick Hardwick (former Chief Inspector of HM Prisons), Dr Philippa Tomczak (Sheffield University), Anita Dockley and Frances Crook (Howard League for Penal Reform), Kimmett Edgar (Prisons Reform Trust), Tris Lumley and Grace Wyld (New Philanthropy Capital), Nathan Dick (Clink), Ben Crewe (Cambridge University)
- In Ireland: Michael Donnellan (Head of the Irish Prison Service), Fergal Black (Director of Care & Rehabilitation, Irish Prison Service), Fíona Ní Chinnéide (Irish Prison Reform Trust), Martin O'Neill (Governor, Cloverhill Prison), Graham Betts-Symonds (Irish Red Cross), Dorothee Potter-Daniau (Alternatives to Violence), Paddy Richardson (IASIO), Larry Tuomey (St Vincent de Paul)

Introduction: Crime, Punishment and Rehabilitation

All heat, not much light

Few debates in the public sphere generate so much heat, and so little light, as the question of how we should treat those who offend against our laws and cause harm within our society. What constitutes a fair and “sensible” sentence? What should the balance be between punishment and rehabilitation? What rights and role should the victims of crime have? What rights should prisoners lose and what should they retain? Should prisoners be expected to work while in prison? Is it the job of prisons to address “the roots of crime”, and what might those be? How should we decide that offenders are ready to return to the community?

The scope for argument seems endless and there are passionate advocates with strongly polarised and entrenched positions. Meanwhile, the general public seems largely disengaged and uninterested, except to give a cursory thumbs-up to any proposal which claims to be “tough on crime” and conversely to complain about the burgeoning cost of running prisons (\$1 billion per annum and rising) and about a re-offending rate that suggests, for many prisoners, that time in prison does not bring about a change in behaviour.

What are prisons for anyway?

Is there anything we can agree on regarding the purpose and objectives of our correctional system (both prisons and non-custodial sentences)? I believe there is. Research in New Zealand and elsewhere confirms that most members of the public, when asked their opinion, say the correctional system should be rehabilitative, that is, it should require, encourage and support offenders:

1. To accept responsibility for their offending and recognise their need to regain the trust of the community
2. To take steps to leave behind a life of crime, including:
 - Altering criminogenic patterns of behaviour (e.g. addiction to drugs, attitudes towards violence, management of anger, attitudes towards community values)
 - Seriously addressing the barriers (such as educational failure, lack of marketable skills, or poor social skills) which could prevent them reintegrating into society, particularly finding and keeping gainful employment, and
3. To make genuine efforts to restore family and civic relationships; to prove themselves willing and able to become good parents/children/siblings, good partners, and responsible neighbours and workmates.

Immediately another round of arguments starts, about alternative visions on how to achieve these goals. Are punitive “tough on crime” sanctions effective as a deterrent? Should the onus be on the individual prisoner to seek help, or should the prison system provide programmes, and incentivise uptake? And if so what kind of programmes? Moreover, how can prison life be structured so as to incentivize genuine engagement in rehabilitation, rather than tokenistic compliance? How should the interests of others (victims of crime, the general public, and the families – especially the children – of offenders) be identified, understood and protected? Who should take the initiative in restoring family relationships?

Studying success, not failure

To answer this, I chose to study prisons and national correctional systems that seemed to “work”, and to look at the role volunteers and community organisations play in that success. There is a common tendency for penal policy to be driven by failures: that is, focussing on high-profile cases in order to “learn not to repeat our mistakes”. As one researcher commented to me, this is analogous to seeking to learn about sharks by studying only shark attacks. Focussing primarily on risks and how to manage or eliminate them usually means that the judiciary and correctional staff are required to impose even more restrictions on the lives of prisoners and to monitor and report on a growing list of measures. While this may prevent failure, it can also prevent success (and, perversely, make failure more likely).¹

I decided to study “success”, which I defined as:

- Countries with lower than average re-offending rates,
- Countries where the overall the prison population has been trending down or has been lower than average, and
- Countries whose populations have relatively positive perceptions about their correctional systems (and may even be quietly proud of them!)

Within the time and resources available, this led me to look at prisons and programmes in Sweden Norway, Finland, the Netherlands, and Ireland. In addition, because I was invited to two conferences in London and Cambridge, I visited some sites in the UK and talked with prison reformers there (who are generally unhappy with the state of their prisons, but acknowledge that some points of light exist).

What can we learn from focusing on excellence?

While I do not claim to have undertaken a comprehensive study, my observation is that the correctional systems that succeed in the above objectives, and can therefore genuinely claim to be rehabilitative, focus upon four key principles:

1. Normalisation: that is, a commitment to making the culture of prisons resemble normal society as much as possible, with the aim of re-building trust and trustworthiness amongst offenders, as a pathway to restoration of liberties;
2. Family/whanau relationships: maintaining and, if required, restoring strong and positive relationships between the offender and their family;
3. Restoring offenders’ sense of control and responsibility for their own physical, mental and emotional health, and
4. Education and training for work, life and social skills.

These are rehabilitative process, but they are also social processes; they require engagement with other people and cannot be learned within the confines of a cell. Individuals matter and relationships matter. By contrast, the key relationships in a prison environment (prisoner-to-officer, and prisoner-to-prisoner) are often characterised by control, fear, stress, and cycles of

¹ For an explanation of why learning from success is a more effective approach to quality control, as applied to health care, see: <https://learningfromexcellence.com/>

passivity and aggression. These generally undermine rehabilitative efforts and reduce the motivation of prisoners to change. While prison staff and management can, with adequate training and resources, create a more positive environment, the big takeaway of my research is that, to achieve a rehabilitative focus, a correctional system cannot rely entirely upon paid professional staff. Contact with families, albeit subject to controls, is at the heart of effective rehabilitation; and contact with members of the community as volunteers or service providers can be instrumental in helping prisoners find and commit to a path of personal change. Conversely, if, both during and after incarceration, communities and families disown offenders (as may be their natural impulse) the chances of rehabilitation are minimal and we are setting up offenders to harm and be harmed.

Where volunteers and NGOs can become the game-changer

As noted, a key part of successful correctional systems is the skillset and mindset of prison staff. This, in turn, is a result of investment in training, recruitment standards, management practices and working conditions. (In Norway, for example, the standard prison officer training programme is accredited as a bachelors degree.) However, volunteers and NGO staff bring a vital additional element which, in successful rehabilitative prison systems, complements and enhances the work of professional staff, while in overcrowded, poorly-managed and under-resourced prisons it can ameliorate conditions so that some genuine rehabilitative work can nevertheless proceed.² The additional value that volunteers and other ‘outsiders’ bring is:

- A sense of authentic no-strings-attached connection which can greatly increase a prisoner’s motivation to learn and change;
- An opportunity to draw upon community resources to broaden the range and volume of programmes available to prisoners;
- An ability to innovate and experiment in ways that prison staff and management find difficult, because of their core responsibilities and risk-averse culture;
- A natural tendency to link rehabilitative goals with a broader set of prisoners’ personal goals (for example, cultural connection, personal health and fitness, education, and spirituality) that can make an important, though sometimes oblique, contribution to successful rehabilitation;³
- A clearer mandate to see a prisoner’s rehabilitative journey in the context of the needs of their family and whanau, which are generally excluded from the focus of prison staff;
- A practical example to offenders of a voluntary, pro-social ethos which in many instances inspires prisoners to commit to civic virtues and undertake restorative work of their own, inside or outside of the prison;
- An ability to add to a local ‘flavour’ to prison life so that it reflects its community rather than just conforming to impersonal national standards;
- A credible means of educating the general public about what really happens inside prisons and what prisoners are really like (usually via word of mouth amongst friends

² Some NGOs in such systems (the UK is an example) have contemplated withdrawing their work out of fear that it enables the prison system to stumble on despite inadequate resources.

³ There is a link here with an ongoing debate between the two major theoretical models of prisoner rehabilitation: the Risk-Need-Receptivity (RNR) model, which focusses upon “treating” specified criminogenic factors, and the Good Lives Model (GLM) which argues that rehabilitation is best achieved by teaching offenders to pursue their legitimate goals by means that do not involve committing crimes. Volunteers and NGOs can implement a GLM model, whereas prison staff are obligated to pay more attention to criminogenic risks as a first (and sometimes only) priority.

and family), resulting in greater overall understanding of and support for correctional policies; and

- An additional, though usually informal, feedback loop and accountability mechanism which, if handled carefully, can bring to light deficiencies in prison systems and encourage performance improvement.

In the case studies and examples listed below, it is clear that these benefits need to be nurtured and facilitated. There can be a “clash of cultures” between prison management and outside agencies, especially in high-security institutions and remand prisons, where complex and strict procedures are used to maintain safety and security, or in institutions under stress due to high occupancy rates and frequent prisoner movements. This culture clash requires a level of attention and negotiation that prison staff can find distracting (“we need to stick to our knitting, which is humane containment”), and that volunteers and NGO staff can find onerous (“how can we work within a system driven by risk-aversion and control?”). However, it can be overcome, and my impression is that it is definitely **worth** overcoming it in order to help a correctional system function as a genuinely rehabilitative experience for more prisoners.

Innovative Correctional Practices: Case Studies of Engagement between Prisons and the Community

The appendix to this report provides a full list of the sites and programmes I visited. Here I want to highlight some signal examples of innovative approaches, and how the community plays its part.

Normalisation and the “Porous Prison”: Finnish Open Prisons Policy

I visited open prisons in Sweden and Norway, but it was in Finland where the concept of the open prison has been most systematically incorporated into correctional practice. While I was surprised to find that the open prisons I visited had quite a low level of engagement with NGOs and volunteers, it became obvious that this was because the prison culture, staff and systems encouraged a high level of engagement between prisoners and families, and between prisoners and mainstream social service, health, employment and community support agencies. These were “porous” prison environments, which retained physical boundaries but allowed for regular interchange across those boundaries and thereby created a much greater sense of ongoing connection with the “outside” world.

Finland has a population roughly similar in size to New Zealand’s, but has 26 prisons housing only 3,100 prisoners in total, including those on probation, which gives the country one of the lower incarceration rates in the developed world. (New Zealand has 19 prisons, housing around 10,700 prisoners, plus around 20,000 on probation or other forms of community-based supervision.)

At present, 70% of prison places in Finland are in closed prisons, and 30% in open prisons. I was told the intention is to shift the ratio further in favour of open prisons. The prison service and probation services were brought together in 2009, in what was perceived as an important change, which encouraged integrated sentence planning around four key goals:

1. All prisoners to leave custody via an open prison, to aid reintegration;

2. Shorter sentences (as short as 3 months, on average), combined with sentence plans that focus on early rehabilitation, followed by rapid movement to an open prison or release on probation;
3. Sentences to be served close to home to maintain links to families and allow pre-release planning (for things like housing, education and employment);
4. 15-21 year olds avoid prison altogether, and are handled by youth programmes

Sentence plans are developed in centralised assessment centres, and identify where a prisoner will serve their sentence, under what conditions, required rehabilitation programmes and expectations around release. More serious offenders will usually begin their sentence in a closed prison, but the Finnish system recognises that in a custodial culture prisoners can easily avoid taking responsibility for their actions or for their rehabilitation. To shift from making bad decisions to making good decisions, it is not helpful to be in an environment where one makes no decisions. While there are custodial elements to the open prison regime, there are tempered and complemented by the systematic involvement in the lives of prisoners of people with a non-custodial mindset such as mainstream educational, health or social services providers, non-government organisations and ordinary members of the community.

I visited Suomenlinna Open Prison, on a small island a short ferry ride from Helsinki. The prison has no perimeter wall or fence, and tourists visiting the adjacent medieval fort regularly stroll in looking for information or trying to buy a coffee! The prison is contracted to provide maintenance services in the historic site, which is Finland's most popular tourist attraction.

There are 100 prisoners in residence, 40% of whom are foreigners. The prison employs 16 guards (5 are on at a time; 2 days on, 4 days off). There are 3 senior officials (1 rehab, 1 admin; 1 security) and a deputy warden. The prison warden is also responsible for probation in the Helsinki region. There are also 3 instructors and 1 social worker.

Every prisoner has one officer whom they relate to for practical matters. Prisoners wear electronic ankle bracelets, and regularly leave the prison campus for work placements, such as maintenance work on the island, vocational programmes, or to access mainstream services (e.g. libraries, churches, AA/NA).

As rehabilitation aims at a life without crime, a key focus is to increase problem-solving and interaction skills. A gradual, controlled release is a basic concept in the Imprisonment Act. The release phase involves intensified work, as part of this strategy. Prisoners have the option of supervised probationary freedom (eg beginning 6 months prior to release), which involves work or study as elements in a structured day. There are some limitations, such as no night shifts and no self-employment. It is perceived as a tough option, demanding hard work, focus and a commitment to demonstrating trustworthiness.

Finland had one of the highest incarceration rates in Europe in the 1960s, but as a result of a number of reforms, including open prisons, it now enjoys relatively low rates of re-offending and its correctional system enjoys high rates of public approval. As a final benefit, Finland's open prisons are significantly cheaper to run than its closed prisons.

A feature of the Finnish system (and indeed all of the Scandinavian systems) is that there is relatively little NGO/volunteer activity *inside* of the prison system. The reason for this is:

- These systems hire and train staff with advanced skills in motivating prisoners to embrace the challenges of rehabilitation and to act in pro-social ways, so the staff-prisoner relationship is deliberately managed for therapeutic effect;
- Maintaining family connection is given a high-priority, not as a ‘privilege’, but as an important therapeutic and rehabilitative activity; and
- Prison facilities and routines are designed around a principle of normalisation and, in the case of open prisons, provide opportunities for prisoners to interact with ordinary members of the community, such as mainstream education, social services and health providers.

NGO and volunteer activity becomes more prominent around the process of release and resettlement, with a handover of responsibility from correctional staff to organisations such as Kris and Krits (see below).

An Intentional Community within a Prison: Die Compagnie

Krimpen aan den IJssel Prison, near Rotterdam in the Netherlands, is home to Die Compagnie, a unit within the prison housing around 25 prisoners, run jointly by the prison and Prisoner Care (a faith-based NGO). Die Compagnie applies a philosophy of restoration – of self, family, and victim. Prisoners apply to join the unit, and spend more time out of their cells than in general units within the prison. However, as it brings additional responsibilities and requirements Die Compagnie is not seen as an easy option.

The culture of the unit emphasizes responsibility, and staff and volunteers support this via motivational practices. In the daytime prisoners generally have work duties within the prison, for example, in the kitchen or laundry, and in the evenings they are expected to take part in organised activities. These are organised around a shared evening meal, which is prepared by a roster of prisoners, and eaten at a large table. Volunteers from Prisoner Care come in Monday to Thursday from 5-10pm (photos and bios of all the volunteers are pinned to the wall of the unit). The volunteers share in the meal, and facilitate or simply participate in a discussion about relevant issues, such as employment, business skills, dealing with stigma, social and political issues, moral and ethical dilemmas, etc. The discussion may be prompted by a presentation, a video, or a special guest, such as a local business person or entrepreneur talking about developments in technology or workplace practices, or others who bring a motivational message. Prisoners are expected to participate fully in these discussions, according to agreed ground rules. (Although Prisoner Care is a Christian organisation, the unit neither requires nor advocates any commitment to a particular faith.)

Staff in the unit wear more casual clothes and work on projects with prisoners in a facilitative manner (co-production, rather than being in charge). Staff I spoke to sometimes work shifts in other units in the prison, wearing the full prison-officer garb, and said they find the work in Die Compagnie much more satisfying professionally, due to the more relaxed security and more collegial way of working with prisoners. (“I feel I am actually helping someone change their life; not just controlling them.”)

Family visits happen in the unit itself, in a family room, which adjoins the main area, so as to normalise things as much as possible. Prisoners book the room in advance, and there is also Skype facility available in this room.

Die Compagnie also has a prisoner council where all the prisoners meet to discuss and decide internal issues. These meetings are facilitated by a volunteer; and no staff are present. They adopt a problem-solving approach, with group discussion based on agreed rules.

All prisoners have detainee plans and undergo a behavioural review every six weeks. Once they become eligible for temporary release, Prisoner Care volunteers accompany them to visits and interviews outside the prison (such as to look for employment or check out accommodation options). The volunteers continue the link with prisoners after release, providing support with employment, accessing social services, and so on.

Re-engineering Prison around Family: Veenhuisen Prison

Successful correctional systems recognise that the sense of responsibility an offender has towards their family is perhaps the strongest source of motivation to create a life without crime. Most prisoners at least aspire to be good family members (even if the family is in some respects dysfunctional and may have contributed to their offending). Those who have children or grandchildren want to be able to provide for them, to be an example to them and help them grow up well, so that “they don’t make the same mistakes I did”. Research confirms that maintaining and strengthening family bonds is a key factor in desistance for offenders themselves.⁴

Conversely, the children and partners of prisoners often suffer “collateral damage” from the imprisonment of their parent/partner. A prison sentence is also, for the family, a sentence of economic hardship and strained relationships, leading in many instances to family breakup, state dependency, ill-health, and emotional distress. Moreover, the children of prisoners have a greatly elevated risk of criminal offending and imprisonment in later life, so much so that, without intervention, they should be regarded as ‘offenders-in-waiting’. Hence, successful correctional systems seek to maintain and (where necessary) restore and strengthen the links between offenders and their family. They permit, equip and support family members to take part in the process of rehabilitation (always, if necessary, taking steps to manage situations where the offender may have a history of domestic violence or abuse).

The management and staff at Veenhuisen Prison, in the north of the Netherlands, have sought to transform the experience of prisoners’ families as a way to reduce the damage on children and reduce re-offending by prisoners. Features here include:

- Each prisoner and their family has a single, consistent point of contact in the prison;
- There is a family-friendly meeting room encouraging relaxed family time (but with unobtrusive supervision if that is required, e.g. if the prisoner has a history of child abuse);
- After enlisting the help of a group of prisoners’ children, the waiting area was painted in bright colours with comfortable furniture, and the passage to the meeting area was marked by a fun footprint trail and a staircase made to resemble a feature from a pirate ship. Every effort was made to make family visits positive and low-stress.

Staff at Veenhuisen are modelling their approach on the Family Intervention Unit at Parc Prison in Wales, where a ‘whole family’ approach dubbed “Invisible Walls” supports prisoners,

⁴ See, for example, Lord Farmer’s recent Report “The Importance of Strengthening Prisoners’ Family Ties to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime”, UK Ministry of Justice, August 2017.

partners and children for up to 12 months pre-release and six months post-release via three integrated ‘hubs’ of activity (prison, transitional and community). The design of all systems and practices within the unit have been re-engineered in order to promote healthy family interaction (including addressed issues of violence and abuse) and support family functioning post-release. Re-offending rates for prisoners who have gone through the unit are significantly lower than other comparable prisoners.

In addition to the programme at Veenhuisen, most of the prisons I visited placed a great emphasis on family stability and health, with a very supportive approach to family visits. In the Swedish and Norwegian open prisons, for example, separate apartments were available for prisoners to have extended visits (up to six hours) by their partners and children, including (yes!) “conjugal visits”. Social work staff ensured these visits were safe for children.

Training prisoners to be catalysts for change: Irish Red Cross, Samaritans Listeners and St Giles Trust Advisors

I encountered several examples of programmes which sought to harness the skills and motivation many prisoners have to make a positive impact on their environment. Many prisons provide opportunities for prisoners to work (in prison kitchens and laundries, or in workshops), for which they may receive a small payment or increased privileges, as well as relief from the boredom of prison life. But it is an important step beyond this to give prisoners a role in the actual rehabilitative work of the prison or in improving the quality of life within the prisoner community. The three examples below brought an ethos of volunteerism and civic engagement into the prison regime, and incidentally increased the motivation, confidence and employability of the prisoners involved. (It has to be noted that, in all cases, the programmes have posed major challenges to the custodial mindset of some prison staff and managers, who resisted the very idea that prisoners could work in semi-professional roles. I was told that many staff who initially opposed the programmes came in time to support and promote them.)

Cloverhill Prison, Ireland: Red Cross Country-Based Health & First Aid (CBHFA) Programme

A highly critical review of the health status of prisoners in Ireland led to an innovative programme in Cloverhill Prison in Dublin in which the Irish Red Cross enrolls prisoners in formal training in country-based health and first-aid (using a standard Red Cross training programme used, for example, as basic training for work in developing countries or refugee camps) and then enlists them as public health workers within the prison.

Prisoners apply to do the course, which covers:

- Principles of public health and first aid;
- The ethics of working with communities (e.g. neutrality, impartiality, humanity) to which all Red Cross staff must commit;
- Communication skills, within and across cultures;
- Community assessment tools, such as mapping, country focus groups, seasonal calendar of health issues, key informant interviews; and
- Simple techniques for co-design and implementation of public health programmes.

Crucially, there is a requirement for practical learning, which takes the form of the prisoners engaging with their own community (i.e. their landing or cell-block) to identify and understand

health issues and work through solutions. The prisoners on the course are included in roundtable discussions with the prison governor, residential manager and nurse to address real-life issues such as: protection against flu and other infectious diseases, HIV transmission, oral health, hygiene, and so on. Prisoners canvas ideas, work these into practical solutions, address security or logistical issues, negotiate resources with the prison governor, educate their peers, measure results and then review and evaluate programmes.

The result is a win for the prison and its prisoners (better health outcomes), and for the participants, who gain a qualification, with practical experience, and become more employable upon release, in many instances finding jobs or volunteer roles in health promotion agencies.

Prisoners as Pathfinders and Peer Mentors: Samaritans Listeners, St Giles Trust Advisors

The Samaritans “Listeners” programme operates in many prisons within the UK and Ireland, and involves prisoners undergoing the standard Samaritans telephone-counselling training programme, after which they can work within the prison offering confidential and practical advice to other prisoners. Listeners operate according to strict rules around confidentiality and are themselves supervised and mentored by experienced volunteer counsellors.

I met Listeners (identified by a green t-shirt) on duty in Wormwood Scrubs Prison in London, in the receiving office, where prisoners arrive from the Court and are processed, and in normal cell blocks. Staff on the floor told me that, after some initial nervousness, they greatly value the role of the listeners in intervening early in issues that otherwise may result in violence or self-harm, and in creating a more positive atmosphere within the prison. (That said, Wormwood Scrubs is a prison, like many in the UK, that is a “tinderbox”, with high rates of violence and self-harm, exacerbated by chronic overcrowding.)

Evaluations of the Listeners programme show that, in addition to the benefits to other prisoners (and the prison environment in general), the Listeners learn skills and attitudes that assist their own rehabilitation and increase their employability post-release.

These same effects are also observed by the St Giles Trust, which runs a programme in UK prisons in which prisoners are given formal training as advisors, earning a qualification which equips them to work in a variety of social services or customer-facing roles in business. Indeed, graduates from the programme form an important and growing element of the workforce (paid and voluntary) in agencies dealing with prisoner resettlement, especially for youth offenders.

“So, now you’re back from outer space” – Re-settlement programmes: Kris, User Voice, Norwegian City Mission, Krits

During the hours and days immediately after their release prisoners are at highest risk of self-harm and re-offending. This is true of all correctional systems, even those which make determined efforts to keep prisoners engaged to some degree in family and community. It is a period during which a prisoners’ ambitions to go straight and the programme of education and resettlement planning are suddenly “stress-tested” and sometimes found wanting. One ex-prisoner I spoke to described his experience as like that of an astronaut returning from outer space: a risky re-entry process in which he experienced a profound sense of unease and alienation, a worry that he had picked up “viruses” in the form of instincts and behaviours that worked inside prison but would not serve him now, and “wobbly legs” from having now to

perform simple tasks and human interactions which had been tightly-controlled or denied inside prison. The only difference, he said, is that astronauts return as heroes, whereas we come back bearing the stigma of criminality.

Many of the individuals I spoke with, regardless of how well they regarded their prison systems, identified re-entry and re-integration as challenging issues that, if not handled well, could squander the good work that may have been started inside prison. Four points were repeated:

- Post-release support services tend to be “poor cousins” compared to custodial services in terms of both resources and the attention of managers and planners;
- They require a very different mindset and skillset to that of custodial environments or probation services which tend to be risk-averse and control-oriented;
- For this reason, NGOs and community organisations are often instrumental in providing a bridge back to an authentic normal life;
- Nevertheless, they operate with often unresolvable tensions (for example, around the civil liberties of their clients, the expectations of communities, stigmatisation and risk) and are sometimes seen as accountable for whole-of-system-failures when an ex-prisoner re-offends, is harmed or fails to readjust to normal life.

I met a variety of people involved in prisoner re-settlement and observed a range of best-practice programmes. These are set out in more detail in the appendix. However, four programmes seemed to me to hold particular lessons for New Zealand:

Shared learning, identity and community: Kris (Sweden and Finland) and User Voice (UK)

Kris is an organisation which operates in Sweden and Finland. It was founded and is run entirely by ex-prisoners with a mission “to help young offenders stick with a drug-free and crimeless lifestyle”. They offer peer-based case management, hobby, social and leisure activities, via:

- A drop-in service staffed by support people (all ex-prisoners);
- Other forms of specialised peer support;
- An organised weekly schedule of events;
- Theme days, camps and sports programmes; and
- Public education, including visits to schools.

They advertise in prison, and use sports programmes as a major “hook” for their work. They run sports activities inside of prisons (futsal and football, volleyball, badminton). The branch I visited in Tampere, Finland, had 9 workers, who total 36 years in prison, and 88 years of sobriety. Their annual budget was 480,000 euro.

They focus on working with prisoners during the trial release period (prisons themselves make contact as prisoners approach this phase). Prisoners can choose to enter the *Kris* programme, which helps them develop an exit strategy around housing, substance abuse, social support, family, work, and so on. There are heavy requirements on participants (sobriety, participation, good citizenship) and it is perceived as a tough option.

The *Kris* service package includes:

- Pick up from the prison gate;
- Prison leave support;
- Study guide – building cognitive skills; and
- Employment support (contact with employers).

User Voice is a British organisation, established and run by former prisoners. Its primary focus is not direct service-provision, but instead “building the structures that enable productive collaboration between service users and service providers”. It does this by:

- User Voice Councils, which are democratic processes designed for use within prisons and other correctional settings, which enable the voices of prisoners and other service-users to be heard and brought to bear on collective challenges and solutions.
- User Voice consultations, which are projects that help service providers access, hear and act upon the insight of their users.
- User Voice peer support, in which former prisoners are trained to provide support and role modelling for those who are leaving custody, either in one-to-one counselling or in group sessions, including helping clients engage in self-advocacy.

User Voice draws out insight from the lived experience of system users, using a variety of innovative action research and consultative processes and ensuring a safe environment that overcomes the natural reticence of ex-prisoners, the effects of stigmatization and barriers related to literacy and culture. Its customers (who include many social service and criminal justice agencies) report significant benefits in terms of better service design, a deeper understanding of key performance measures and innovative ideas that are unlikely to have arisen from traditional methods of programme design and evaluation. Meanwhile, the ex-prisoners involved in the process have in some cases progressed into ongoing advisory roles or employment by social service agencies.

As with the Red Cross and Samaritan Listeners programmes described above, both these deliver a double-layer of benefit by harnessing the skills and motivation of ex-prisoners to support the rehabilitative journey of others in a more authentic way than mainstream counsellors and social workers.

Stable housing: Krits (Finland) and City Mission (Norway)

Two NGOs I visited focus on stable housing as a key determinant of successful reintegration. In Norway the City Mission manages a portfolio of apartments suitable for ex-prisoners, whom they often also engage in social, educational and work-skills programmes. The apartments are not owned by the Mission, but Mission staff, including a number of former prisoners, seek out landlords who are prepared to provide greater security of tenure and to facilitate the delivery of support services (often simply by befriending their new tenants in a way that enables challenges such as mental illness or addiction recovery to be better understood and accommodated).

In Helsinki, Krits (not to be confused with Kris) is a probation and after-care foundation founded in 1870, which provides a range of resettlement services but is also a significant provider of housing to prisoners upon release. They own 63 apartments (including an apartment building in Helsinki) of varying sizes, and provide secure accommodation to aid ex-

prisoners re-establish themselves in the community. This housing asset is the base for a variety of social support services, including family therapy, service brokerage and an ombudsman service. Some apartments house several clients and function as half-way reintegration services.

Where to Next: Recommendations for the New Zealand Context

New Zealand needs to encourage a model of correctional policy and practice that provides scope for innovation, change, responsiveness, experimentation, and shifting investments around a portfolio of different delivery modes – this despite the fact that much of the public discourse around corrections, and the configuration of our current correctional system (facilities, locations, staff training) encourages the exact opposite of each of these qualities!

1 Invest in the eco-system of volunteer and non-government organisations

I believe there is a vital role to be played by the non-government sector in supporting a virtuous cycle, at three levels:

1. *Within prisons and community corrections:* Direct work with prisoners and ex-prisoners by NGO staff and volunteers (appropriately trained and supported) operating under a trust-based restorative model of engagement, which complements, but progressively displaces, the control-based engagement required by state agencies;
2. *In policy debates:* Advocating for a more innovative mix of delivery in our correctional system, allowing New Zealand to explore the kind of rehabilitative and restorative practices that have been successfully road-tested in other jurisdictions, such as those I visited. This should involve engagement, based on evidence of what works, with the correctional authorities, the broader criminal justice system (including the judiciary and the parole board); and
3. *In public discourse:* The New Zealand public appears to have low levels of trust in their criminal justice system, particularly in comparison to public perceptions in the Netherlands and Scandinavia. This makes it difficult for senior officials and ministers to lead the public discourse. However, a healthy, well-informed voluntary sector can provide an important and credible voice to educate the public regarding prisons, prisoners and the process of rehabilitation.

To achieve this, I have two major recommendations:

1. **That prison and community corrections managers should seek to form and maintain alliances with voluntary agencies and NGOs to increase the level of volunteer involvement in offender rehabilitation, working in partnership with staff and contracted providers; and**
2. **That co-ordinated multi-year funding should be provided by government (through Vote Justice and Vote Community Development), in partnership with the philanthropic sector, to support the ‘soft’ infrastructure (such as information sharing, research/evaluation, networking, training) for a healthy eco-system of voluntary agencies and NGOs working with offenders.**

New Zealand could benefit from adopting the model of Clink (or C-link), which is a UK organisation whose sole purpose is to better “link” NGO activity in the criminal justice space and support it through sharing information, sponsoring research, hosting networking activities, advising on effective governance, providing professional development and advocating for the sector with major funders and government.

2 Restore public engagement and ownership of the prison system

The broader vision to emerge from my fellowship is of a corrections system that is a whole-of-society (not just whole-of-government) response to social harm, based upon the principles I observed successfully at work in Northern Europe. While prisons lock some people in, they also lock others (the majority of us) out, despite the fact that everything they do is done on behalf of the community. In this light, I have specific recommendations related to each of the four principles identified above (some of which, I acknowledge, would require significant re-framing of penal policy and practice!):

a Normalisation and re-building trust

- Commit to a programme of system change (including the design and location of facilities) to shift the balance from large high-security institutions to small, local prisons (including open prisons) where offenders live as much as possible in a normal civic environment, and practice skills of self-management, self-efficacy and good citizenship;
- As part of this, restore full voting rights to all prisoners, and encourage civic education;
- Allow prisoners to access mainstream health, education and social services from within prisons, with priority being given to mental health services;
- Invest in staff training and recruitment to support this shift, in particular skills such as motivational interviewing, non-violent conflict resolution, understanding of mental health and trauma issues, and ‘dynamic security’ (as practiced in Scandinavian prisons).

b Strengthening family/whanau links with prisoners

- Prioritise the housing of prisoners at facilities within one hour’s travel of their family/whanau;
- Ensure that visitor facilities and procedures are welcoming for children, and can accommodate extended family visits (with the minimum necessary supervision) of up to half a day;
- Partner with social services agencies to facilitate inter-generational family therapy, including the use of temporary release to maintain family connection and accountability.

c Restoring offenders’ sense of control and responsibility

- Prisons should encourage peer-to-peer and public-service programmes within prisons as an opportunity for them to ‘give back’ and make better use of their time inside⁵;

⁵ A useful guide to such programmes is the 2011 report from the UK Prison Reform Trust, “Time Well Spent: A practical guide to active citizenship and volunteering in prison”.

- Prisoners should be encouraged to participate in self-directed or democratic processes which give them a say in significant aspects of their lives and require them to work effectively with others;
 - Reframe the parole process as a “contract for rehabilitation and good citizenship” to provide greater certainty for prisoners that, if they achieve agreed rehabilitation goals, parole should follow as a matter of course.
- d Education and training to transition to purposeful work (paid or voluntary)
- Replace “sentence-planning” with “return-home/return-to-work” planning, to be initiated immediately upon sentencing and, if possible, prior to sentencing (for example, where an offender plans to plead guilty);
 - Involve external agencies (in literacy, education, self-care & management, work skills, addiction management) and potential employers in this planning process from an early stage;
 - Use probation, sentence-reduction and financial measures to create incentives for offenders to take personal ownership of their plans and to encourage employers to recruit from the prisoner population.

John Sinclair, March 2018

Appendix 1: Outline of fellowship activities

Ireland

Cloverhill Prison, Dublin

At Cloverhill I met with the prison governor, Martin O’Neill, and Graham Betts-Symonds, from the Red Cross, to discuss the public health programme jointly run by prisoners and prison health staff.

The context was Judge Michael Reilly’s November 2016 report “Healthcare in Irish Prisons”, which recommended systematic health needs assessment, and transfer of responsibility from the Irish Prison Service (IPS) to the Irish Health Service. The work the Red Cross has been doing could pave the way for this.

Essentially, the Red Cross has been delivering its standard Country-Based Health and First-Aid (CBHFA) training programme (used to train volunteers to work in developing countries) to selected prisoners, with a view to them participating in peer-to-peer health promotion initiatives within their cell-blocks (as the practicum part of the course) and ultimately co-producing health promotion programmes within the prison. Upon completion, prisoners gain a recognised qualification which can assist in employment post-release (and which is often incorporated into release-to-work programmes; i.e. prisoners participate in community health initiatives as volunteers or paid staff).

The course has three modules:

- Module 1 – The fundamental principles of the Red Cross (eg neutrality, impartiality, humanity, etc). Participants are required to commit to these, as they are essential to the role.
- Module 2 – Communication skills and techniques for use in at-risk communities.
- Module 3 – Community health assessment; how to use tools, such as mapping, country focus group, seasonal calendar of health issues, key informant interviews

Graham started the programme in Cloverhill, and it has now spread to more than half of Irish prisons. Key elements in the success of the programme have been:

- Undertaking a “sensitization programme” for staff, who often take time to change attitudes towards empowerment of prisoners
- A clear team structure within the prison (a teacher, a nurse, the prison governor, and two volunteers) and formal status and processes (e.g. they meet regularly in the boardroom; and where they sit is important! The prisoners are equal partners in the conversation.)
- Information is shared about health needs and risks, and prisoners play an equal role in prioritising these
- A prisoner committee generates ideas (e.g. a clothes bank, wipes for phones, a needle exchange!)
- The governor needs to make sure the ideas are actually implemented!

The training programme supports both health care and prisoner education, both of which are already in the prison budget. Each participating prison runs one course in every academic year. A teacher and a psychologist interview prospective candidates (c.20 in the group) and the teacher and a nurse anchor the programme, with Red Cross trainers.

Alternative to Violence Programme (AVP) – Dorothee Potter-Daniau

AVP is a well-known and well-attested group programme that teaches skills in peaceful conflict resolution. It consists of three workshops which take a whole weekend, with a group of around 20 participants. It is funded by Care and Rehabilitation under a service level agreement (formerly grant funding).

Staff and governor support is very important, and can vary over time. If possible, they include staff as participants (staff often don't recognise that they have conflict resolution issues too, and the course provides excellent training in self-awareness for staff around how they use or misuse the existing power relationship within prisons and elsewhere).

They have a smaller contract funded by CDI which trains young people to go into youth prisons to train both staff and residents in restorative practices (trust, sense of community).

Participation in all programmes is voluntary; but there is some tension over this (e.g. "soft referrals" in the form of incentives for prisoners to attend).

Prisoners have the opportunity to undertake training as peer facilitators. This involves participating in all three levels of workshop, and then a facilitators workshop. This qualifies them as apprentices who can work as part of the workshop team. This obviously takes a long time and is a significant investment of time, requiring support from prison management. To make best use of peer facilitators, AVP shares them with the Red Cross who offer a shorter 1 day "culture of non-violence" course.

Volunteer training is similarly intensive. They do all 3 levels as participants, and get a certificate (6 week gap between 1-2-3). They come from a variety of backgrounds, but chiefly they are retired people or students of psychology or similar disciplines. It takes 6 to 12 months to complete training and then they are expected to participate in 3-4 workshops a year.

The AVP was the subject of a Research-Impact Report which provided evidence of the benefits of the programme.

Paddy Richardson – IASIO

IASIO contracts with the Irish Prison Service to provide resettlement services for prisoners upon release. Their initial focus is on three essentials:

1. Stable and appropriate housing
2. Income support through the social welfare system, and
3. Health-care, and in particular addiction services

Often the clients are on incentivized regimes for early release, and so are seeking employment or full-time training.

In 2016, IASIO received 3,000 referrals; 75% of these became successfully engaged in the programme; 450 were helped into jobs and the rest into full-time education. Paddy noted that significant improvements had been made in the prison and probation services, but that the crucial third step of community services had yet to be sorted.

IASIO has run successful “jobs expos” within prisons which bring a range of employer representatives into prisons to meet with prisoners undergoing rehabilitation and training. These educate employers regarding the benefits for employing ex-prisoners, and often result in offers of employment upon release (which can support an application to the parole authorities for early release).

Saint Vincent de Paul, Mountjoy Prison

Saint Vincent de Paul director Larry Tuomey explained that they have for a number of years run the visitors centre at Mountjoy Prison. This is a space next to the entrance to the prison where families can assemble prior to visits. It is staffed by volunteers during all visiting times, and provides information, a cup of tea, an option of supervised childcare, and signposting services.

Prison visits can be stressful and intimidating, especially in an old prison like Mountjoy, which is not at all designed to be welcoming to families, especially young children. Prison staff need to focus on managing the logistics of prison visits, and are not resourced or specifically trained to deal with visitor issues that do not relate directly to that. Nevertheless, from a broader perspective, those who come to visit prisoners have an important, and largely unsupported, role to play in supporting better outcomes for prisoners (mental well-being, ability to focus on purposeful activity, ability to cope with the challenges of imprisonment and to make realistic plans for after release). What is more, SvP sees this work as an extension of their work with at-risk families and youth. The families often have a range of social, educational and health needs themselves, and the visitors centre is a potentially valuable early-intervention point of contact. Of particular importance is the risk pertaining to the children of prisoners who have a very high risk of themselves becoming involved in offending and being imprisoned in future.

Irish Prison Service

I travelled to the Head Office of the Irish Prison Service and had a discussion with Michael Donellan, the head of the IPS, Fergal Black, Kieran Moylan

The discussion focussed primarily on the process of prison reform, which has seen a steady decrease in the prison population in Ireland.

They stressed the need for dialogue at every level – politicians, academics, police, judges, other government agencies, NGOs, and the public. At a high level, a Penal Policy Review Group was established, with respected members of the judiciary, academics and community leaders, to make specific proposals around sentencing reform and other aspects of penal policy. At the operational level, a Joint Agency Response to Crime (JARC) was established to support significant shifts in professional practice, including adopting “problem-solving” approaches to policing. These forms of dialogue provided an ongoing mandate for change and a forum in which to resolve emerging issues.

Nevertheless, once the direction of travel was agreed it was important to set specific goals in order to keep things on track. In Ireland the initial goal was to reduce the prison muster by 1,000 via a “sinking lid” policy on prisoner numbers. The default mechanism (which everyone sought to avoid) was simply to release low-security prisoners to keep numbers under the target level. This had the effect of galvanising efforts around preparing prisoners for release, and putting more emphasis on structured release programmes (for sentences of 1-8 years, prisoners normally served 75% of their sentence in prison, but this was reduced over time to a rule of thumb of 50%).

Firm and positive leadership was an important element in the success of the reforms, particularly in responding to “sentinel events” (such as high-profile crimes committed by prisoners on early release). These have the potential to undermine public support for reforms, even though they do not challenge their rationale. Michael Donellan emphasized the importance of his role in taking responsibility for such events and learning from mistakes, but not backtracking on the overall reforms because of isolated incidents.

The Netherlands

My visit was organised by Frits Langerar and Ilona Vegh of the Dutch Prison Service.

PL Nieuwersluis Womens Prison, Zandpad

I met with Piet Verbruggen, senior manager at the prison, who outlined the recent history of the Dutch prison system. The Netherlands has reduced the size of its prison estate from 16,000 to 11,000 cells; and has a legal maximum of only 8,000 domestic prisoners (2,500 fewer than New Zealand, despite the Netherlands having 18 million people). It has closed several prisons and has kept a number of prison facilities open only by contracting with other European countries to house their prisoners. The reduction is due to a combination of factors: law changes (for example, relating to drug offences), early intervention in high-risk populations, and diversion to alternative responses to crime.

A salient difference between the European prison population and New Zealand’s is their higher literacy rate. If prisoners can read it opens up many more pathways for them towards desistance, eg training, volunteering, employment.

Nieuwersluis is a women’s prison, and there is a perception that women are more committed to change; men tend to be more on a “war footing” with institutions. The prison programme incorporates a variety of features to support this:

- The prison focusses on the “U-turn programme” as a conceptual framework for helping prisoners to understand the changes they want to make and how to go about that – check it out
- The prison promotes a pro-social environment through practices like shared plates at meal times, and a prisoner council, via which prisoners propose and negotiate improvements in the prison regime
- The prison workshop provides training in a range of vocational skills

- The prison is also committed to fostering creativity, both with programmes such as the Exodus poetry programme and by displaying public art works within the prison complex

Volunteers play two important roles in the rehabilitation programme at the prison:

- First, the prison houses a reintegration centre for detainees (RIC) run by an NGO, Stichting Surant. I spoke with Dew Koesal and Ineke Koenders, who run the centre (which is one of several similar reintegration support centres within Dutch prisons). Staff at the centre help prisoners to identify needs and advise prisoners on how to deal with various issues post-release (primarily housing, income, and employment). The centre has computer terminals with internet connection so that prisoners can access resources to assist them plan for their release, acquire necessary documentation, apply for programmes, and so on.
- Second, volunteers are frequently used to accompany prisoners on leave as they attempt to implement their release plans (eg going to meetings and job interviews in nearby towns, using public transport).

Die Compagnie, Krimpen in des IJssel Prison

At Krimpen aan den IJssel Prison, I met with Lilian Oosterhof (director) and Hans Barendrecht (director Prisoner Care NL), and had a guided tour of De Compagnie, a unit within the prison, run jointly by the prison and Prisoner Care (a faith-based NGO), using a philosophy of restoration – of self, family, and victim.

Prisoners apply to join the unit, and as it brings additional responsibilities and requirements (they cannot be disputing their sentence, for example) it is not seen as an easy option. The climate emphasizes responsibility, and staff support this via motivational practices. Prisoners are required to enrol for SOS, a programme that encourages them to take responsibility for their actions. Many also have work duties within the prison, for example, in the kitchen, laundry, etc.

All prisoners have detainee plans and undergo a behavioural review every six weeks. They become eligible for temporary release in order to prepare for reintegration (such as looking for employment). Prisoner Care continues the link with prisoners after release, providing support with employment, social services, etc.

Staff in the unit wear more casual uniforms and work on projects with prisoners in a facilitative manner (co-production, rather than being in charge). Staff I spoke to sometimes work shifts in other units in the prison, wearing the full prison-officer garb, and said they find the work in Die Compagnie much more satisfying professionally, due to the more relaxed security and more collegial way of working with prisoners. (“I feel I am actually helping someone change their life; not just controlling them.”)

Volunteers from Prisoner Care come in Monday to Thursday from 5-10pm. They share a meal, and lead/participate in a discussion, structured or otherwise, about relevant issues, such as employment, business skills, dealing with stigma, etc. There are regular visits by local business people, entrepreneurs and others who can bring a motivational message or otherwise expand the horizons of prisoners. Family visits happen in the unit itself, in a family room, which

adjoins the main area, so as to normalise things as much as possible. Prisoners book the room in advance, and there is also Skype facility available in this room.

Die Compagnie also has a prisoner council where all the prisoners meet to discuss and decide internal issues. These meetings are facilitated by a volunteer; and no staff are present. They adopt a problem-solving approach, with group discussion based on agreed rules.

Veenhuisen Prison

Veenhuisen is an old prison on the site of a somewhat notorious ‘social experiment’ during the 19th century in which residents of overcrowded slums in Amsterdam were enticed into the countryside in order to set up a model community (which never quite eventuated). Despite its age, the prison has a pleasant woodland atmosphere, due to a large central courtyard (about the size of a 400 metre athletics track) with mature trees.

I met with Fokko Drent, Sophie Lorijn, Maarten Antoons, and Monique Dijkstra, who explained two important features of the prison regime: the families programme and the re-integration partnerships with external organisations.

Family Approach

The management and staff at Veenhuisen have sought to transform the experience of prisoners’ families as a way to reduce the damage on children (who have a greatly elevated risk of educational and social difficulty, including a risk of offending) and reduce re-offending by prisoners (maintaining and strengthening family bonds is a key factor in desistance). Features here include:

- Each prisoner/family has a single point of contact in the prison
- There is a family-friendly meeting room encouraging relaxed family time (but with unobtrusive supervision if that is required, e.g. if the prisoner has a history of child abuse)
- After enlisting the help of a group of prisoners’ children, the waiting area was painted in bright colours with comfortable furniture, and the passage to the meeting area was marked by a fun footprint trail and a staircase made to resemble a feature from a pirate ship. As part of the design process, a video was taken from child-height so as to identify features small children may find scary. Every effort was made to make family visits positive and low-stress.

Staff at Veenhuisen have studied the impact of similar changes at Parc Prison in Wales, and Ormiston Prison (UK). The Family Intervention Unit at Parc Prison places a high priority on the health of family relationships and the role of fathers in active parenting from prison. (So far 500 prisoners have graduated from the programme at Parc, and less than 1/3 re-offended.) At Ormiston, an NGO (Barnados) runs a homework club and a scout troupe within the prison facility in order to help reduce the stress of family visits and encourage children to maintain a positive relationship with their fathers.

Reintegration partnerships

As with any prison system, reintegration is an inherently complex process, involving social work activity to arrange:

- Housing (working with municipalities, arranging rental subsidies, etc)
- Income (establishing work qualifications, welfare entitlements, identity documents)
- Financial issues (dealing with debt, teaching financial literacy)
- Health care (health insurance, treatment of chronic illnesses, addiction treatment)

Veenhuisen has a designated staff officer for chain cooperation (Monique Dijkstra) who connects with a range of external parties to make and support these arrangements. These include local government social teams, and a range of NGOs such as Fier, Humanitas, and Exodus.

A number of key messages came through my conversations at Veenhuisen:

- The importance of creating a purposeful culture, focussed on reintegration (which is preferably scheduled within a timeframe that maintains prisoner motivation)
- Recognising that the judicial and penal process suspends the prisoner's "story" (like a bicycle with the chain fallen off) and effort is needed to help them restart that narrative, with a more positive objective.
- A key part of this alternative narrative is rehabilitation plans that extend longer than the sentence, at both ends. That is, starting to plan rehabilitation pre-sentence ("why not get started, especially if the prisoner intends to plead guilty?"), and developing a phase that focusses on what needs to happen post-release.
- Authentic connection with family and with the community leads to commitment and motivation. No matter how well-trained and competent prison staff are, there are limits to what they can achieve because they are part of the custodial environment.
- Public engagement helps to change public perceptions, and therefore support for alternatives. This is an important benefit from involving ordinary community members in the lives of prisoners wherever feasible.

Volunteering Day 2017 NGO Day

On my last day in Amsterdam I attended part of an annual volunteering day run by "Young in Prison", an NGO which works in a number of countries supporting programmes for incarcerated young people. There were performances, talks and displays celebrating a range of volunteer organisations working within Dutch prisons, with a strong emphasis on the link between creativity and (inner, then outer) freedom, including:

- Richart Pintura – a graffiti artist and former prisoner, who runs workshops on how to turn graffiti skills into paid employment;
- A storytelling programme – in which facilitators assist participants to choose an incident from their lives and structure it as a narrative (a great way of indirectly teaching skills that help us re-frame our story to support an alternative version of the future)
- A marching and drumming group – a low-tech, high-energy way of learning performance skills

At the open day I spoke with Peter Hennephof, the Chief Executive the Dutch Prison Service, who explained that this national event was one the ways the Dutch prison system had sought to develop a healthy community of NGOs.

Finland

Mika Peltola, Coordinator for International Affairs, organised my visit. He briefed me on the Finnish Criminal Sanctions Agency, which operates out of 15 community sanctions offices and 26 prisons.

Finland currently has 3,100 prisoners in total, including those on probation, which gives the country one of the lower incarceration rates in the developed world. At present, 70% of prison places are in closed prisons, and 30% in open prisons. The prison service and probation services were brought together in 2009, in what was perceived as an important change, which encouraged better planning.

The Finnish Government has adopted four key goals, as follows:

1. All prisoners to leave custody via an open prison, to aid reintegration;
2. Shorter sentences (as short as 3 months, on average), combined with sentence plans that focus on early rehabilitation, followed by rapid movement to an open prison or release on probation;
3. Sentences to be served close to home to maintain links to families and allow pre-release planning (for things like housing, education and employment);
4. 15-21 year olds avoid prison altogether, and are handled by youth programmes

Sentence plans are developed in centralised assessment centres, and identify where a prisoner will serve their sentence, under what conditions, required rehabilitation programmes and expectations around release.

Rehabilitation aims at a life without crime. A key focus is to increase problem-solving and interaction skills (NB: literacy is not a big issue for Finnish nationals). Social rehabilitation aims to maintain and increase their social abilities and everyday life skills. Third sector operators are involved mainly in social rehabilitation programmes, rather than in programmes run inside closed prisons.

A gradual, controlled release is a basic concept in the Imprisonment Act. The release phase involves intensified work, as part of this strategy. Prisoners have the option of supervised probationary freedom (eg beginning 6 months prior to release), which involves work or study as elements in a structured day. There are some limitations, such as no night shifts and no self-employment. It is perceived as a tough option, demanding hard work, focus and a commitment to demonstrating trustworthiness.

The cost structure of various sanctions options is as follows:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| • Daily cost of closed prison pp: | 208 euro |
| • Daily cost of open prison pp: | 147 euro |
| • Daily cost of probationary liberty under supervision: | 75 euro |
| • Daily cost of community service: | 15 euro |

Suomenlinna Open Prison, Helsinki

Elina Toijanaho, Senior Criminal Sanctions Officer, showed me around the prison, which is located on an island close to Helsinki. The prison has no perimeter wall or fence, and tourists visiting the adjacent medieval fort regularly stroll in looking for information or trying to buy a coffee! The prison is contracted to provide maintenance services in the historic site, which is Finland's most popular tourist attraction.

There are 100 prisoners in residence, 40% of whom are foreigners. The prison employs 16 guards (5 are rostered on at a time; 2 days on, 4 days off). There are 3 senior officials (1 rehabilitation, 1 administration; 1 security) and a deputy warden. The prison warden is also responsible for probation across the whole Helsinki region, which assists with managing the transition between prison and release on probation. There are also 3 work/educational instructors and 1 social worker.

Every prisoner has one officer to whom they relate for practical matters. Prisoners wear ankle bracelets, and regularly leave the prison campus for work placements (chiefly the maintenance work on the island), vocational programmes, or to access mainstream services (eg libraries, churches, AA/NA).

Like every Finnish prison, and most Finnish houses, they have a sauna!

Kati Sunimento, Senior Specialist

There is a low level of voluntary work within Finnish prisons overall, as a full range of services is provided by the prison system itself, and staff and management actively seek to create social and cultural opportunities relevant to the prisoners and their sentence plans. The main NGO relationships are with the Red Cross visitors, Kris (an organisation founded and run by ex-prisoners) and Krits (an aftercare organisation – see below).

NGOs receive funding from a national funding pool for welfare organisations (across all sectors). Volunteers work according to a set of guidelines (clearly expressed in a 1 page document). Each Prison Director grants permission to volunteers who work in their prison, and all volunteers have to work through a recognised organisation (ie no independents).

Krits (Kriminaalihuollon tukisaatio) Probation and After-care Foundation

I spoke with Maarit Suomela, Development Director at Krits. It was Finland's first prison-related NGO, set up in 1870, for the purpose of improving the deprived status and living conditions of released prisoners.

Krits employs around 30 workers in a number of roles:

- They liaise with external agencies to secure social services for ex-prisoners. Finnish municipalities (of which there are 300) – rather than central government – have legal obligations to provide care and services for their citizens, including housing, drug treatment, and work-related rehabilitation

- They are a significant provider of housing to prisoners upon release, and own 63 apartments (including an apartment building in Helsinki), of varying sizes (some house several clients and function as half-way reintegration services).
- They provide an ombudsman service
- They provide family therapy (e.g. father-child programmes; family camps; programmes to counter stigmatization)
- They operate a “Gateway to Freedom” website, aimed at prisoners’ families, with practical information and advice, and pages for children. (Note that digital skills are relatively low among the target demographic.)

Kris is funded via the national social fund and also has an endowment in the form of its property portfolio (requiring a programme of renovation work, some of which is undertaken by clients as part of their tenancy).

KRIS - Tampere

KRIS is an organisation founded and run by ex-prisoners with a mission “to help young offenders stick with a drug-free and crimeless lifestyle”. They were founded in Sweden and now operate in seven locations around Finland (Tampere was the first), and offer peer-based case management, hobby, social and leisure activities, out of a central city base, providing:

- A drop-in service staffed by support people (all ex-prisoners)
- Other forms of specialised peer support
- An organised weekly schedule of events
- Theme days, camps and sports programmes
- Public education, including visits to schools

They advertise in prison, and use sports programmes as a major “hook” for their work. They run sports activities inside of prisons (futsal and football, volleyball, badminton). In 2016 they had 9 workers, who total 36 years in prison, and have been sober for 88 years. Their annual budget was 480,000 euro.

They focus on working with prisoners during the trial release period (prisons themselves make contact as prisoners approach this phase). Prisoners themselves choose to enter the Kris programme, which helps them develop an exit strategy (around housing, substance abuse, social support, family, work, etc). There are heavy requirements on participants (sobriety, participation, good citizenship) and it is perceived as a tough option.

The Kris service package includes:

- Pick up from the prison gate
- Prison leave support
- Study guide – building cognitive skills
- Employment support (contact with employers)

New Kris staff/volunteers can re-enter prison, but this is subject to a 2 year stand-down for high-security, and 1 year for open prison.

Each Kris centre has a yearly meeting with its local Prison Director to sort out deliverables. Advocacy on larger policy issues happens via its national organisation.

Silta-Valmennus

I met with Kaija Schellhammer-Tuominen and Katja Hakkarainen at Silta-Valmennus, which translates as “Bridge-Coaching”. It is a multi-service center, offering education, employment, training and rehabilitation to build the work skills of people who are hard to employ. Prisoners are only one category of client, and participate alongside those who are long-term unemployed, have substance abuse issues, mental illness or other health issues.

It was founded in 2000 by a local civic organisation, and is a non-profit. It is not itself authorised as an education provider, but works through partnerships with accredited providers.

It provides a range of services, including:

- Twenty different workshops and small businesses offering on the job training.
- Supported housing
- Rehabilitation
- Coaching for freedom (counselling service)
- Prisoners learning path (advice on education options)
- Youth work
- A drug users service – substitutions programme (methadone)

It averages 44 clients per day (65% under age 30), and around 1400 clients start the programme per year. 73% of clients reach the goals they set.

Around 80 specialists are employed, and the annual budget is around 6 million euro.

Funding comes from a variety of sources:

- Ministry of Education and Culture
- Municipalities
- European social fund
- STEA (Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations)
- Ministry of Justice
- Private sector

Kaija and Katja commented that, in many instances, prisoners have already acknowledged their desire to participate prior to sentencing (i.e. an intention to plead guilty and seek help), and that in these cases it would be good to begin service planning, and hence incorporate client activity into sentencing plans. This is especially important given the move to shorter sentences, which leave a smaller window of time to work with. They were concerned that 3 month sentences are too short a time to achieve a rehabilitation plan. This was the only time I heard anyone argue for longer sentences!!

Sweden

My visit was organised by Jenny Karnholm, Head of Research at Kriminalvarden.

Caroline Benstsson, NGO Liaison, Kriminalvarden

Like other Scandinavian countries, the Swedish prison system has a relatively small involvement with NGOs and volunteer organisations. This is because the prison system here is well-resourced and has a good range of programme options for prisoners, combined with a sentence-planning system that aims to ensure prisoners are engaged in purposeful activity.

Key NGO relationships are:

- Kris – the organisation of former prisoners, which runs post-release programmes;
- The Red Cross prison visitors programme (a standard Red Cross programme, focussed on giving prisoners an independent point of contact with whom to raise any issues of human rights or quality of life);
- An organisation which assists prisoners who wish to leave criminal gangs;
- Programmes to support the children of prisoners.

The NGO community receives funding from the Kriminalvarden budget totalling 15 million euro per annum.

Annika Lundquist, Bufff

Bufff is a programme focussed on parenting education amongst prisoners. It was founded in 1999, with support from the public inheritance fund. It runs:

- Support groups for the children of prisoners;
- Parent support groups which promote the principles of the UN conventions which relate to children's rights; and
- A group-based programme (10 meetings of 2 hours) in which prisoners learn about child development and parenting. Support for participants continues after release.

Bufff has also been involved in efforts to improve the process for children visiting parents in prison, with a view to reducing the potential for harm and to maintain positive parent-child relationships throughout a sentence.

Maria Johansson, Josefin Wikkstrom, Krimiyoga

Krimiyoga is a programme that trains prison staff (from all areas, including education and administration, as well as prison guards) to lead yoga classes for prisoners. Managers select staff to enrol in the programme, which requires no previous yoga experience, and involves an initial 3 day training programme, with 8 weeks of practice, and then follow up training. This equips "Yoga Inspirers" to lead four standardised yoga sessions:

- Yin yoga (focussing on long-held stretches which address pain and stress in the body, and encourage self-calming and better sleep)

- Yin/yang (a more vigorous practice which adds postures to strengthen and align good posture)
- Back-care (focussing on relieving back pain)
- Sun-salutations (a more aerobic practice which works the whole body).

Around 300-400 yoga inspirers have gone through the training, and 120 are currently active in teaching classes. Note that Swedish law requires that prisoners in solitary confinement break their isolation every day, and yoga is a good option for this. There are currently three trainings per year, and the intention is to make yoga more widely available within the prison system.

The programme is non-sectarian, although it also focusses on the ethical principles behind yoga (universally accepted concepts such as non-violence, self-awareness, and truthfulness) as well as the physical and energetic practices.

The programme has been particularly successful in involving older prisoners and those with physical and mental disabilities in an accessible form of physical activity.

One of the unexpected benefits of the programme is that prisoners see prison staff in different roles (guard in the morning; yoga instructor in the afternoon) and this normalises and humanises prisoner-staff relationships.

In 2012, the research unit at Kriminalvarden studied the programme using a randomised control trial. Researchers assigned participants randomly either to 10 weeks of yoga or to a metabolically-equivalent exercise programme. The yoga participants reported less stress, better sleep-patterns, increased psychological and emotional wellbeing, lower levels of aggression, self-harm and anti-social behaviour. They also performed better on a computerised attention and impulsivity test. The difference between the groups was most significant when it came to the changes in impulsivity, anti-social behaviour and attention.⁶

Norkopping Prison, Hakim Lahmini, manager

This is a remand prison in central Norkopping, with 50 cells, above the police station. It has two exercise areas, and a small yoga room.

Despite being a remand prison, it has a workshop (voluntary) in which prisoners can opt to work doing simple tasks (labelling stationery products), in accordance with good occupational therapy practice, for which they receive a small payment.

As with other Swedish prisons, NGO involvement is limited to the Red Cross visitor programme.

Skanes Prison

Skanes Prison is an open prison holding 58 prisoners, about 15 minutes' drive outside of Norkopping. It is an open campus, with no perimeter fence (though monitored electronically

⁶ Kriminalvarden, Sweden, "Yoga Pa Anstalt: En Randomiserad Kontrollerad Studie", Nora Kerekes, Cecilia Fielding, Susanne Apelqvist, 2012

with a system of perimeter sensors). Prisoners live in small dormitories (with individual cells, that are locked at night) and engage in a range of educational and vocational programmes.

I spoke with a number of staff and prisoners, and visited the school, workshops, gym, yoga room and family visits building (where prisoners can have extended visits with partners and children, subject to consideration of security issues, such as a history of domestic violence). I was very impressed by the attitude of the staff towards prisoners, which was friendly but purposeful. Staff explained that they naturally practice motivational interviewing techniques, encouraging prisoners to take responsibility for decisions, and work towards plans they themselves have made (or at least shaped).

This atmosphere of trust and shared goals makes it easier to address security issues where required (such as arrangements for home visits or temporary release) and to carry out requirements such as periodic drug tests without too much angst. Staff commented that they rarely have to use control and restraint, as there is a high level of trust and compliance from prisoners.

[“The Voluntary Sector in Criminal Justice: Setting the Research Agenda” at the University of Sheffield](#)

This conference was a perfect opportunity to become acquainted with voluntary sector leaders working in criminal justice in the UK, and to take part in discussions relevant to my fellowship. It was hosted by Dr Philippa Tomczak, who has recently published research into the role of voluntary sector agencies in the prison system, and featured a mix of researchers and practitioners.

A number of sessions stood out:

Dr Emma Hughes (California State University)

The diversity and complexity of the US prison system (federal prisons, state penitentiaries, county jails, all with their own governance arrangements) means that voluntary sector engagement differs markedly from prison to prison and state to state. While this can foster innovation, when a prison governor is supportive and allows voluntary agencies to innovate, it creates problems system-wide:

- A lack of coordination and information sharing which inhibits the dissemination of best practice
- High degrees of variability (“zip-code lotteries”) between prisons, which result in some prisons having a wide array of programmes while others have virtually none, with limited incentive to even things up. San Quentin prison in San Francisco, for example, offers a wide range of programmes, largely because it is located in the midst of a large, socially-progressive urban area. However, prisons located outside of urban areas have little or no programming, so that overall 50% of inmates in California have no rehabilitation, while San Quentin has more volunteer programmes than all other of the 34 prisons combined.
- Difficulty sustaining evaluation and research, and hence getting consistent data on outcomes

Professor Martine Herzog-Evans (University of Reims)

Reforms of the French probation system have involved the state system progressively narrowing the scope of what probation officers do and creating gaps to be filled by voluntary “associations”. This appears to have pleased no one, with probation officers required to focus on compliance work and vacating the programmes space for the NGO sector, without a clear mandate or expectation to coordinate these roles. It highlights a risk that, when a government-provided service comes under pressure (from budget constraints or increased demand) the work of rehabilitation is seen as less urgent and is transferred progressively to an NGO sector working with limited resources and relying to a large degree upon voluntary labour and donated money. Hence, the NGO sector is seen as propping up an underfunded or otherwise inadequate state system (whether or not there is clear evidence of this).

Nevertheless, the benefits of volunteers in prison are clear. It creates a purposeful culture and a permeable culture, which otherwise would not exist at all. It provides a window on the outside world for prisoners, which can sustain their motivation to change their behaviours and acquire better skills; and also a window for volunteers which gives them a clearer perception of who prisoners are, how prison affects them and what is needed to assist their rehabilitation.

Rehabilitation requires some kind of separation from the custodial culture, because it is about personal change that is embraced voluntarily for genuine long-term motives (a better life for oneself and one’s family), and not change that is either forced upon inmates or encouraged merely for short-term gain (such as improved conditions or better prospects of parole). This means encasing a separate rehabilitative culture within the prison environment, either by custodial staff trained to modulate their role with inmates (guard to counsellor), or by distinct programmes staff (who labour under the perception that they are still “part of the system”) or by volunteers (who have a natural advantage which assists with building trust and authentic engagement).

Grace Wyld (New Philanthropy Capital)

New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) is an organisation devoted to providing research and analysis to improve the performance of charities. In the course of my research, I also had a long Skype conversation with NPC’s chief executive, Tris Lumley. The following summary melds insights from both conversations.

1. Volunteers provide the sense of permeability; but it is important that there is a difference between voluntary and staff provision (i.e. it is important that volunteers are not just a reserve army of workers)
2. Often charities lack the resources and sometimes the motivation to subject their work to evaluation (and prison authorities have limited incentive to do so as well, as “anything out of the ordinary is probably good for prisoners”). This can make it difficult to create a feedback and quality improvement loop, with the result that NGOs (and prison management) can miss out on potentially useful information about the effectiveness and value of volunteer programmes.
3. NGOs are often asked to prove that their interventions are “evidence-based”. As a sector we need to respond to this, although we need to be clear that:

- a. The meaningful outcomes (reducing reoffending) are by definition long-term and hard to measure; so we need to find intermediate outcomes that act as reliable proxies
 - b. As in most social services research, we are measuring “contribution” rather than “attribution”
 - c. We need to recognise the context of an incumbent prison model that has a questionable evidence base itself, and so resist an unrealistically high expectation of what can be achieved within a system that is in many respects dysfunctional.
 - d. One of the issues is that prisons keep lots of data (for the purposes of operational management and reporting on outputs, expenditure, risks, etc), and that more use could be made of this data for research, rather than management/reporting purposes;
 - e. Sadly it is often difficult to access this data for evaluation of volunteer programmes, or the data is only obliquely relevant to research questions.
4. 64% of justice sector charities use donated funds to subsidize their public sector contracts; this reflects a reluctance to correctly price services. NGOs justify subsidizing services as a necessary investment to prompt long-term change in the prison culture (by modelling alternatives and innovations that prisons themselves can’t, don’t or won’t attempt) and in public perception of prisoners.
 5. As public engagement is part of the purpose of NGO work in prisons, it is important not to confine the outcomes to those for individual prisoners, but to bear in mind benefits in terms of increased public understanding of offenders and their rehabilitative journey.
 6. However, this raises the question of what is the model of organisation change we are envisaging, and how do we ensure this actually happens, rather than just wishful thinking? The theory of change is not just in respect of prisoners, but also in respect of prisons as communities and institutions. How are trying to change prison culture, and why, and how will we know if it is happening? And if the policies and practices of prison systems head persistently in the wrong direction (e.g. through chronic overcrowding) at what point should NGOs withdraw their support, or threaten to?

For example, User Voice is an intervention in itself, in which prisoners to lead their own organisation, identify priorities and strategies, source funding, and so on.

Appendix 2: Research Interview Questions Used during the Fellowship

1. *What role(s) do volunteers play in prisoner rehabilitation?*
 - Supplementing the work of prison staff or contracted providers (i.e. doing similar tasks and helping with existing programmes)?
 - Complementing the work of prison staff by running separate programmes?
 - Types of activity (e.g. educational, social, mentoring, counselling, artistic, motivational?)
2. *In what parts of the prison system are volunteers used?*
 - Pre-trial/sentencing remand units?
 - High/medium/low security prisons?
 - Specialist units (e.g. youth, sex-offenders, immigrants/non-residents)?
 - Post-release, parole or transition to the community?
 - Non-custodial sentences or programmes for preventing reoffending (e.g. ongoing supervision of sex-offenders)?
3. *What, if any, role do volunteers or the organisations that recruit and train them have in:*
 - Experimental or innovative programmes or pilots?
 - Evaluative research?
 - Regular structured feedback to prison governors on policy issues, programme design or prisoner welfare?
 - Input into national justice sector policy conversations or reviews?
4. *Where do volunteer-agencies acquire funding for their administration and operating costs?*
 - The prison service?
 - Other government sources?
 - Charitable donations/fundraising?
5. *What are the major benefits of having volunteers involved in prisoner rehabilitation?*
 - Enlarging the overall prison “workforce”?
 - Positive role-models for prisoners?
 - Prisoners respond better to volunteers as opposed to paid staff?
 - Normalising the atmosphere and culture of prison units and encouraging pro-social behaviour (e.g. treating female volunteers with respect)?
 - Coordination with community agencies after release?
 - An alternative (more trusted?) channel for prisoners to voice concerns/complaints?