

Prisoner resettlement services and the third sector: lessons from the North East

Resettlement is the process of helping prisoners who are reaching the end of a custodial sentence to manage some of the practical challenges they are likely to face on their release. These range from finding somewhere to live and adjusting to being with family and friends again, to finding a job, managing money and staying healthy.

Since the publication of the Home Office's *Reducing Reoffending National Action Plan* in 2004, the third sector in England has played an increasingly important role in the provision of resettlement services. Between 2004 and 2007, Northern Rock Foundation supported two experimental resettlement projects. Pyramid was a partnership between Depaul Trust and the crime reduction charity, Nacro. ROTA (Reducing Offending Through Advice) involved Citizens Advice North Region, the Legal Services Commission (LSC) and HM Prison Service.

The Foundation commissioned Anthea Hucklesby and Emma Wincup at the Centre for Criminal Justice Studies, University of Leeds, to evaluate the two projects and to draw out lessons that might be of interest to other third sector organisations involved in delivering resettlement services. This edition of *Insight* reflects the evaluators' findings, the experience of the partner organisations and the Foundation's own learning from the two projects.

In brief

- Northern Rock Foundation has supported two experimental resettlement projects (Pyramid and ROTA) each delivered by a partnership.
- Pyramid's success with its community-based resettlement services led to one prison deciding to fund community-based advisers for the first time.
- ROTA found that by integrating their advisers into prisons' in-house resettlement teams, they had more information and more freedom of movement than peripatetic colleagues.
- Partnership projects are likely to be more effective if they employ a dedicated project manager.
- The project aims and the roles of project staff need to be clearly explained to colleagues in the partner organisations.

Lessons learned

Other challenges

Although both of these experimental resettlement projects were given names, they were rarely used. Prisoners and prison staff were much more likely to refer to the organisation delivering the advice (for example, Citizens Advice or Depaul Trust) than to Pyramid or ROTA. While it makes sense for a service run by a partnership to have its own name, its clients will only recognise that name and attribute positive results to it if the name is appropriate, memorable and consistently used by those delivering the service.

The involvement of Northern Rock Foundation as a funder with a tightly defined geographical remit (the North East and Cumbria) was problematic in those prisons where it was felt that all prisoners should have access to the advisory services, wherever they were to be resettled. One prison overcame this by

employing an additional worker to support prisoners from other areas.

The extent to which the services provided by ROTA and Pyramid increased the capacity of former prisoners to resettle in the community and reduced the likelihood that they would reoffend was outside the scope of the evaluators from the Centre for Criminal Justice Studies and will not be known for some time to come. We do know that the demand on the services provided was much greater than anticipated and that it clearly demonstrated the type and level of unmet need.

The Foundation funded these two experimental, partnership projects to promote the involvement of the third sector in the provision of resettlement services in the North East. We are grateful to the partner organisations for allowing us to share their experience with others.

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The two projects

Pyramid

As two independent charities already working with prisoners in the North East, Depaul Trust and Nacro coincidentally chose the same moment to apply to Northern Rock Foundation to support the expansion of their resettlement services. The Foundation suggested they make a joint application to pilot a jointly managed service and Pyramid was the result.

Depaul Trust, which specialises in working with young people, needed funding for its services for young men at HMYOI Deerbolt on Tyneside, while Nacro worked with HMP Holme House and HMP and YOI Low Newton on Teesside. Two project managers were employed (one by each charity) and an additional 12 full-time and part-time workers were assigned to the project, some in the prisons and some in the community. During the initial three-year period of the Pyramid project, paid staff and volunteers worked with 2,820 people.

Main achievements

Pyramid increased the capacity of both organisations to provide resettlement services in the community, enabling them to support newly released prisoners when they are most in need of support. Both had considerable experience of working in prisons in the region and were keen to add value to what they could achieve in prison, through accessible, community-based services. Through Pyramid, Depaul Trust and Nacro were both able to recruit and train more volunteer mentors and to consolidate their relationship with other local providers.

While former prisoners had always made use of Nacro's training centre in Stockton, they now also had access to trained, volunteer mentors. A mentor's role ranges from meeting former prisoners the moment they are released, to helping them to find housing and employment, to negotiating with members of the family.

As a result of the Pyramid project, HMP Deerbolt was able to see the value of community-based resettlement services and is now helping to fund posts, in the community, for the first time. The partnership between Depaul Trust and Nacro continues, with the exchange of expertise, contacts and ideas.

ROTA

(Reducing Offending Through Advice)

ROTA was launched in 2004, with a three-year grant from the Government's Invest to Save programme. In 2006, Citizens Advice North Region, the Legal Services Commission (LSC) and HM Prison Service applied to Northern Rock Foundation for funding to continue the service for a further three years.

ROTA operates in four prisons: HMYOIs Deerbolt and Castington and HMPs Holme House and Acklington. It has three dedicated advisers (one each at Deerbolt and Holme House and one shared by Castington and Acklington) managed by Citizens Advice Bureaux local to the prisons in Castle Morpeth, Stockton and Teesdale.

Over three years, ROTA staff and volunteers worked with 2,818 people, many of whom were experiencing prison for the first time. ROTA also worked with a significant number of sex offenders, who face particular challenges when trying to resettle into the community.

Main achievements

Typically, the visits of resettlement advisers to prisons are time-limited and tightly organised. ROTA's ambition (in which it succeeded) was to integrate its advisers into the prisons' in-house resettlement teams. This created more regular and effective opportunities for prisoners to seek advice on the questions that were most important to them. Publicity posters quickly gave way to word of mouth recommendation and the take-up of the service in all four prisons was much greater than anticipated.

For the first time, in English prisons, ROTA set up video links to enable advisers to talk to colleagues at the Citizens Advice Bureau and prisoners to talk to solicitors and other advisers. The demand for ROTA's face-to-face services limited its capacity to exploit this new technology, but the principle of using video to enhance the quality of communication between those in the prison and those outside was firmly established.

Lessons learned

Partnership working

While Depaul Trust and Nacro became a partnership at Northern Rock Foundation's suggestion, the two organisations benefited from their interaction with each other and have subsequently exchanged expertise and ideas in other contexts.

Both Pyramid and ROTA enjoyed good working relationships with in-house prison services, such as Jobcentre Plus and the drugs service CARAT (Counselling, Assessment, Referral, Advice and Throughcare), but links with other key players in resettlement, including the National Probation Service and the Leaving Care teams in Social Services, were less well developed.

HM Prison Service's role as a founding partner of ROTA helped to promote a positive attitude to the new service in the four institutions in which ROTA operated. As integrated members of the prisons' resettlement teams, ROTA staff had access to equipment and data and a freedom of movement that is rarely possible for peripatetic advisers.

Agreed and achievable aims

Third sector organisations hoping to work in partnership with the Prison Service need to be clear about the strategic priorities of the Prison Service and the needs of individual prisons. They also need to be realistic about their capacity to meet the demand for services.

Both Pyramid and ROTA worked with many more people than anticipated. There were different reasons for this. In one case, it was because the service was new and there had been no way to estimate the need. In another case, the prison's request that the service should be available to all prisoners who wanted it, whether or not they were going to resettle in the North East (Northern Rock Foundation's area of interest), created additional demand for the service, which was paid for by the prison.

The pressure on advisers' time meant that neither Pyramid nor ROTA were able to achieve all of their objectives. There were also some unrealistic expectations of the capacity of newly released prisoners to keep in touch with advisers, once living back in the community. ROTA, for example, assumed that former prisoners would know how to contact them through a local Citizens Advice Bureau, yet the evaluation found that one third of existing prisoners did not know how to do this.

Staffing

The evaluators concluded that partnership services involving staff seconded from different organisations are likely to be more effective if they have a dedicated and experienced project manager to support staff and to liaise with the prisons. The lack of such a post can result in miscommunication and a waste of resources.

ROTA could not afford to take on a dedicated project manager and only had sufficient funds to employ three advisers to cover four prisons. The fact that it worked with more than four times the number of people it had anticipated meant that the advisers were over-stretched and there was no provision for cover if one of them went on leave or was unwell.

Pyramid had many more staff, but they too were over-stretched at times. It was not always possible to move one member of staff to cover for another, because they did not all have the necessary security clearance. Both projects would have benefited from more detailed consideration of staff numbers and skills needed and of how workloads, in a predictably stressful situation, could best be managed.

The purpose and structure of partnership projects should always be explained to colleagues working in other roles in each of the partner organisations. This will help to reduce the risk that project staff, who may be new appointments or existing staff, will feel isolated from the main organisation.