

Christian Perrin

**Coping with incarceration: The emerging case for the utility of peer-
support programs in prisons**

Department of Sociology, Social Policy & Criminology
School of Law & Social Justice
The University of Liverpool
Eleanor Rathbone Building
Bedford Street South
Liverpool
Merseyside
L69 7ZA, UK

Email: christian.perrin@liverpool.ac.uk

Abstract

Although peer-support programs have a long history in UK prisons, only recently have they garnered attention from researchers wishing to explore their potential utility. Such programs are built upon principles of mutual reciprocity, empathy, and emotional support. Growing research on these programs suggests a number of ways in which they can help prisoners maintain positive mental health. Furthermore, recent research studies have suggested that peer-led programs can help the providers of support as much as the recipients. It has been claimed that upholding a supportive role enables prisoners to develop meaning and purpose, garner a sense of control over their own problems, and in-turn contribute to a heightened sense of wellbeing. This chapter discusses some of the emerging research relating to the potential impact of peer-support schemes in prisons. In doing so, it provides a consolidated review of the thinking surrounding the potential application and trajectory of such schemes throughout the prison estate. A theoretical foundation on which this application might be based is offered. It is hoped that this chapter will highlight some of the ways in which peer-support schemes can assist the prison system in addressing the issues related to mental health and wellbeing that most prisoners will face whilst serving time. Implications regarding this type of provision in terms of the efficacy of imprisonment and life beyond the gates are explored.

Introduction

It is now widely acknowledged that punitive prison environments are detrimental to the wellbeing and mental health of prisoners, and consequently not conducive for constructive rehabilitative work. Indeed, far from reducing recidivism, a body of evidence suggests some prison environments may actually increase risk of reoffending for some individuals (Cid, 2009; Cullen et al., 2011; Gendreau et al., 2014). Such research points to the need to better understand what prisons can do to elicit positive change within offenders. Much of the research conducted

in this area has investigated opportunities inmates have for personal development and growth (Liebling and Arnold, 2004; Reuss, 1999). This relatively new strand of investigation has likely been encouraged by the growing reliance on strengths-based approaches such as the Good Lives Model of Offender Rehabilitation (Ward and Brown, 2004). It will also have been energised by what now appears to be accepted conventional wisdom – that desistance from crime is a personal and subjective process that offenders themselves should have control over (Maruna, 2001; McNeill, 2006). Many findings within this ever-emerging field of inquiry point to the importance of reimagining prisons as places for wellbeing (Helliwell, 2011). This shift is supported by the growing optimism surrounding therapeutic communities and rehabilitative climate prisons (see for example, Blagden et al., 2017; Ware et al. 2010).

As this contextual shift has gathered pace, more and more peer-led programmes in prisons have emerged (Devilly et al., 2005). This has been a response from primarily Western justice systems acknowledging that prison should afford inmates opportunities to source meaning and purpose while serving time. In a UK Prison Reform Trust report, Edgar et al. (2011) emphasise the contribution of ‘active citizenship’ roles and suggest peer-support offers opportunities for prisoners to prosocially interact with others and engage in personally meaningful activity. Coates (2016) has also emphasised the importance of individualised and person-centred activity in prison, and asserts that prison-based interventions are more successful when they address inmates’ personal goals and ambitions. Along these lines, recent research suggests that peer-support programs in prison allow inmates to build personally meaningful structures around themselves which rest on mutual helping. This has been the primary source of optimism for peer-led schemes in carceral settings; that they may represent a source of mutually trusted and entirely offender-led support.

Peer-led programmes focus on a variety of issues in prisons, such as health education, drug and alcohol abuse, anxiety about participating in sexual offender treatment, prison

orientation, anti-bullying and anti-racism, and suicide prevention. In general, peer support in prison is characterised by reciprocal helping (Parkin and McKeganey, 2000). Some research has argued that prisoners who uphold such roles experience profound internal changes and develop a range of skills and attributes that could energise subjective wellbeing and potentially desistance (Foster and Magee, 2011; Boothby, 2011; Perrin and Blagden, 2014). In what follows, this chapter reviews some of the qualitative data that has contributed to these claims, and makes the argument that peer-led programs in prisons represent opportunities for prisoners to accumulate meaning and personal agency while serving time. Three mechanisms relating to how inmates are able to cultivate these ‘gains’ from peer-support are discussed. This discussion is informed by recent research from the author of this chapter and a range of others who have explored the utility of peer-support in prison.

Defining peer-support

A review of the literature most commonly depicts peer-support as a variation of social and emotional support that rests on the core tenets of mutual reciprocity, shared problem solving, and empathy (Dennis, 2003; Solomon, 2004; DeVilly et al., 2005). Some scholars have attempted to embed expectations of support into definitions, with the aim of clarifying what constitutes ‘mutuality’ and ‘sharing’ for the parties involved in peer-support. Consequently, perhaps the most pragmatic yet wholesome conceptualisation is one offered by Mead et al. (2001), who have delineated peer-support as “a system of giving and receiving help founded on key principles of respect, shared responsibility, and mutual agreement of what is helpful” (p135). This definition emphasises the importance of balance and equality in peer-support oriented relationships, and highlights that there should be some awareness of directionality in terms of the support given and received. The assumption here is that support is shared, mutually agreed upon, and not unidirectional. Because of this emphasis on shared and mutually-useful

modes of support, it is broadly accepted that peer-supporters must have some joint interest, investment, or prior experience in whatever the context is that enwraps the support being provided (Solomon, 2004).

This perhaps presents a need to extend accepted definitions of support, so as to include the notion that peer-supporters should be matched in some way in relation to their experiences of personal challenges. So far, this has only been alluded to in descriptions of the core features of peer-support, but not interweaved into the boundaries of what constitutes it. For example, Gartner and Riessman (1982) have aligned peer-support with “instrumental support”, which they describe as a form of support that requires mutual support of those sharing a similar [mental health] condition. It is argued that the mutual closeness to the personal challenge being faced is what makes peer-support especially unique and useful for both parties, and is the feature most likely to bring about desired social or personal change (Gartner and Riessman, 1982). Although the literature diverges in the factors it includes as paramount to peer-support, it converges on several themes. A review of the literature reveals that peer-support should be characterised by equality and bidirectionality in support, recurrent sharing of extant and emerging problems, empathising over a mutually-experienced challenge or condition, and agreement over and respect for the support that is offered and received (Mead et al., 2001; Parkin and McKeganey, 2000; Solomon, 2004). These characteristics comprise a novel and uniquely beneficial level of support, illuminate why peer-support has been increasingly called upon in health contexts in recent years, and why it may have somewhat of a magnified effect in the prison context.

The preliminary case for peer-support in carceral settings

Peer-led programmes in prisons focus on a variety of issues. However, the larger scale peer-support programs in operation in prisons across the UK focus primarily on the areas of

HIV/AIDS and health education, drug and alcohol abuse, sexual assault/offending, prison orientation, anti-bullying and anti-racism, and suicide/violence prevention (Devilley et al., 2005). In general, peer-support in prison envelopes a range of different structures and approaches including peer training, peer facilitation, peer counselling, peer modelling, or peer helping (Parkin and McKeganey, 2000). Within prison settings, peer programs have been described as ‘Listener’, ‘befriender’, or ‘mentor’ schemes. A breakdown of the most common prison-based schemes that operate within these broad categories is provided in table 1.

Table 1: Peer-support scheme details

Scheme title	Nature of support	Description
Listeners	Emotional	Volunteer Listeners who are trained by the external charity Samaritans provide face to face emotional support to prisoners who request help (see Samaritans, 2016, for further information).
Buddies	Emotional & practical	Buddies can be paired with new prisoners who may require emotional support and also practical assistance when first adjusting to life in [a new] prison.
Helping Hands	Personal care	Helping Hands volunteers care for those less able to do so for themselves. This role can involve personal care duties as well as emotional and practical support.
Shannon Trust Mentors	Educational	The Shannon Trust is a UK charity that regulates a scheme within which fluent readers are paired with those less able. Through this set up,

		Shannon Trust mentors help students through a reading program often over a period of several months (see Shannon Trust, 2005, for further information).
--	--	---

The common theme across such schemes is that they are principally founded upon the core tenets of mutual reciprocity, shared problem solving, empathy, and experiential exchanges. There is evidence to suggest that the presence of these dynamics in prisons may have somewhat of a magnified impact for both the recipients and the providers of peer-support. Regarding the former, findings are encouraging and many studies have concluded that peer-support schemes are indeed effective in reducing stress and anxiety in prisoners. In an investigation into the Listener scheme, Jaffe (2012) concludes that prisoners who talk to Listeners are able to counter, to some degree, a negative build-up of feelings, heightened by confinement in a cell. Jaffe provides evidence of a cathartic effect resulting from talking to Listeners, as a consequence of the release of burdensome feelings. Prisoners feeling less consumed by their problems as a result of speaking to Listeners are consequently more able to focus on their options in terms of personal growth. Findings from Boothby (2011) endorse the Insiders scheme in the same way. Boothby reports that prisoners who can moderate the stress and anxiety of initially entering the prison system are better prepared to cope with prison. Research exploring other types of peer-support programmes remain consistent in terms of positive findings. For example, Sirdifield's (2006) research into prison health trainers suggests that receiving health-related education in prison may contribute towards removing some of the barriers associated with offending, such as health problems, low self-esteem and self-confidence, low self-worth and a lack of prosocial

interests. More recently though, research has focused on the potential benefits of being a peer-supporter on the supporters themselves.

Research from Foster and Magee (2011), Boothby (2011), and Perrin et al. (2017) has argued that prisoners who uphold peer-support roles internalise them and identify with 'being' a 'supporter'. Consequently, findings have been reported of peer-support volunteers experiencing profound internal changes and attitude shifts, and also developing a range of skills and attributes while incarcerated (Perrin & Blagden, 2014; Perrin et al., 2017). Other findings have suggested that prisoners find perspective through supporting others who experience despair, and accordingly utilise their work as a coping strategy (Perrin and Blagden, 2014).

Some have argued that simple altruism may explain why peer-support may provide such internal satisfaction. Proponents of this argument posit that acting out of concern for others can strengthen an individual's social ties and contribute to the fulfilment of basic human needs (Ryan and Deci, 2000). This sits in line with some of the early research on peer-support in prisons and perspective making, which will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter. Perrin and Blagden (2014), for example, found that prison peer-support volunteers were able to re-story their own worries and concerns and take stock of them, as a consequence of gaining perspective from listening to others. These findings are positive and ultimately indicate that 'doing good' through an active citizenship role in prison might represent a pathway to building subjective wellbeing in prison. Indicators of subjective wellbeing have been repeatedly connected to better reintegration outcomes for offenders (Aresti et al., 2010) and on these grounds, criminologists should be optimistic about the utility of peer-support in prison. In the interests of encouraging this optimism, and perhaps further research, what follows is a literature review of three clear ways in which peer-support appears to benefit the prisoners who uphold roles.

Three ways that peer-support can contribute to the wellbeing of peer supporters

1. Countering boredom

Prison is synonymous with both physical and mental punishment, and has been well-known to impart significant psychological damage onto those who serve time. Some researchers have argued that the biggest threat to a prisoner's wellbeing is mundane boredom (Steinmetz et al., 2016). Denborough (1996; 2002) has described the pervasive silence, monolithic lifestyle, and totalised identities that are closely associated with the imprisonment's twin dimensions of control and subjugation. In a semi-ethnographic study of a medium-security men's prison in the UK and based on inmate testimony, Crewe (2007) seeks to both "document the nature and experience of power in the late-modern prison, and to detail the various ways that prisoners adapt to these mechanisms of control and compliance" (p.256). Using this data, he illustrates how various aspects of social order in prison are expressed through a range of adaptations, but also how "prisoners experience, manage and counteract power in various ways" (p.273). Many such adaptations appear to revolve around countering purposelessness and the boredom of routine prison life. In the face of prison hegemony, one class of response noted by Crewe is what he refers to as "'dull compulsion' ...in which the rules and rituals of prison life generate a pragmatic or fatalistic acceptance of its inalterability" (Crewe, 2007, p.258). Ultimately, prisoners who fail to instil in themselves a sense of personal meaning are forced to accept rituals of 'sameness' and can become overwhelmed by boredom. One prisoner in a study conducted by Steinmetz et al., (2016, p350) articulated this grim reality: "*Well, the hardest thing about being here, to me, is the walk and get my chow. Walkin' to the chow hall, yeah. Anything else, ain't nothing. Bored. Real bored. I mean, there just ain't no activity. I go to yard, work out, I mean, get out of the yard, come on back in to the same thing I seen when I went out in the yard. Ain't nothin' changed*".

As this participant expressed, boredom appears to be innately woven into prison life. In Steinmetz et al.'s (2016) findings, another participant typified the prison experience as “*about control. It’s monotonous, tedious, structured, and full of pettiness—in other words, a constant routine.*” Furthermore, words such as “lonely”, “isolated”, and “depressing” were amongst those frequently used by participants, and boredom was commonly cited as the most difficult aspect of imprisonment. The authors argue that time, for the majority of prisoners, is either spent dwelling on personal problems, becoming involved in illegitimate activity, or escaping into their own insular routines of purposelessness. These destructive states can be detrimental to prisoners’ mental health, and consequently their ability to focus on potentially constructive aspects of a prison sentence (such as education or treatment) (Steinmetz et al., 2016). Perrin and Blagden (2014) argued that this constitutes a major blockade in the quest to undertake constructive work with offenders, and called for prisons to afford inmates opportunities to forge meaning and purpose while serving time. Early research suggests that peer-support roles constitute such opportunities. Boothby (2011), for example, found that ‘rep jobs’ in therapeutic community (TC) prisons (where prisoners adopt roles as policy representatives and speak on behalf of prisoners) afforded inmates opportunities to invest in something meaningful and legitimate. In turn, this enabled basic needs such as autonomy and connectedness (Ward and Brown, 2004) to be fulfilled, and ultimately for imprisonment to become more psychologically manageable.

Only recently has research explored this claimed link between enacting peer-led roles in prison and enhanced subjective wellbeing. Perrin (in press) interviewed 15 prisoners serving medium-term (average 6 years) sentences for violent offences. All prisoners held a position in one of the peer-support roles listed in Table 1 and the interviews explored what having such a purpose meant to the participants and whether or not it influenced their experience of prison. With striking resemblance, participants recounted how their roles allowed them to discover a

sense of purpose and direction as they served their time. Most commonly however, participants expressed the importance of simply having something mindfully taxing to do in a context of sheer pointlessness. One participant's account represented the theme of countering boredom well: *"While you're in prison, there are other things that punish you at the same time, and the first thing is mental pressure...you've got to keep yourself occupied or do something. There are times when you don't just wanna watch TV, don't wanna play a video game, don't wanna read a book...so what do you do with yourself? And that's why I decided it's important to try and find something to occupy my mind. Men need purpose. My roles as an advisory sort of person in prison is that – I just try and pass things on to others"* (Perrin, in press). The data from this study comprised of statements suggesting that peer-support plays an important role in keeping prisoners occupied and engaged in something constructive and legitimate.

This is not an entirely new finding, in an earlier study solely exploring the roles of prison Listeners, Perrin and Blagden (2014) found that most of the participants described the lure of getting involved in negative or illegal activity in the prison. However, they articulated being able to counter these temptations because they had a rewarding role and purpose to focus on. Indeed, the prison environment has been known for increased drug usage (Carpentier et al., 2012), a high presence of violent gangs (Fleisher and Decker, 2001; Griffin, 2007) and a variety of other antagonistic conditions (Dye, 2010). Combined with the pressure to conform to prison 'norms' and achieve social identity, the prison environment can encourage destructive behaviours (Haslam and Reicher, 2007). Much of this has been attributed to boredom and a desire to belong to some notion of a network (Ibid, 2007). However, peer-supporters appear able to resist illegitimate and harmful responses to prison boredom. One participant (Perrin and Blagden, 2014, p914) seemed to suggest that this was mainly a consequence of becoming bonded to something prosocial and internally satisfying: *"[my time] would've been harder and I would've obviously learned less and, I don't know what my attention would have gone on to*

then... so it kind of taught me to just be content with what I've got, and like I said again just be patient, behave myself...it's not about letting down the (Listener) team". This notion of maintaining purpose and 'having something to lose' was recurrent across the data presented by Perrin and Blagden (2014), but has also been alluded to in research from Foster and Magee (2011), Boothby (2011), Sirdifield (2006), and recently Perrin et al. (2017). Peer-support at the very least appears to alleviate boredom and the ritualistic mundane reality of prison life for inmates who adopt roles. Moreover, the challenge of 'keeping sane' throughout incarceration appears to be heavily influenced by having a meaningful role. When reviewing the qualitative data available, peer-support schemes appear to provide such roles, and may therefore unearth important implications for wellbeing in prison, and potentially for within- and post-prison outcomes.

2. Shielding from deprivation

While Sykes (1958) originally detected five core deprivations of prison (loss of: freedom, autonomy, security, goods and services, and heterosexual relationships), scholars have since expanded the model to include a broader spectrum of adverse constructs that fundamentally attack wellbeing (see for e.g. Irwin, 2006; Johnson and McGunigall-Smith, 2008; Maitland and Sluder, 1998). Wright et al., (2017), for example, recently discussed 'entry shock', 'temporal vertigo' (a state of physical or mental anxiety in response to the feeling of time vanishing) and 'intrusive recollections' (repeated and vivid flash-backs and unwanted thoughts about a traumatic event). The authors discuss how prisoners develop defence mechanisms (suppression, denial, and sublimation) in response to these destructive states, which also have implications in terms of the trajectories of prisoners' mental health. In terms of what prisoners themselves report, the consequences of not overcoming prison deprivations have been spoken about in terms such as "losing your mind", "going mad", being consumed with "negative

thoughts”, and so on (Blagden and Perrin, 2016; Kerley and Copes, 2009; Perrin et al., 2017). There is now a broad body of research supporting the detrimental impact of the ‘pains of imprisonment’ (Sykes, 1958), and thus it is crucial to identify ways in which prisoners can maintain better mental health while inside.

In a study by Rocheleau (2013) exploring a number of factors potentially affecting prison misconduct, removal of autonomy and the consequent purposelessness of prison life were amongst those most strongly correlated to increased conflicts with staff and serious misconduct and violence. In contrast, Steiner and Wooldredge (2008) found that prisoners who underwent programs and who upheld prison jobs were less likely to be involved in prison assaults, substance abuse, and other types of prison misconduct. Furthermore, the likelihood of misconduct decreased as employment hours increased. These findings testify to the importance of prisoners being able to source meaning and purpose not just for their own wellbeing, but for the encouragement of behaviours that are socially acceptable. The types of ‘purpose’ that prisoners are able to cultivate also appears to be important, with Duggleby (2016) identifying that roles characterised by caring for others can be especially meaningful. This is consistent with emerging research exploring peer-support; those who uphold peer-led roles reportedly express how they are able to shield themselves from the deprivations of incarceration through focusing on purposive objective to help others.

In describing self-determination theory, Ryan and Deci (2000) have argued that humans not only need to establish a sense of autonomy and purpose in their lives, but need to feel needed by others and by their surrounding environment. Fulfilling this basic need is one of many factors that can enhance an individual’s human and social capital and thus their connectivity to the prosocial bonds around them (Lochner, 2004; Wolff and Draine, 2004). Researchers have argued that enabling prisoners to secure states and traits that attach them to socially constructive outlets is the key to enhanced subjective wellbeing but also effective

reintegration (Mills and Codd, 2008; Rose and Clear, 2003). Research from Foster and Magee (2011) on the prison Listener scheme found that participants felt needed and developed a sense of liberty as a consequence of their helping roles. Perrin and Blagden (2014) delved deeper into this notion, uncovering that ‘being a Listener’ in prison enabled participants to consider themselves as ‘better selves’ (of increased self-worth and more at peace with their present self-concepts). Such self-perceptions are not common amongst prisoners, with research consistently noting that prison populations are typically highly anxious, long-term depressed, depleted of hope and subjective well-being, and low in self-esteem (Beijersbergen et al., 2014; Castellano and Soderstrom, 1997; Fichtler et al., 1973; Fazel and Danesh, 2002). These states and traits are commonly associated with failed reintegration attempts and increased (re)offending (Beech et al., 2002; Gendreau, et al., 1996; McLaren, 1992). However, instead of becoming consumed with the shock and despair of having found themselves in prison, succumbing to the pains of imprisonment (Crewe, 2011), and allowing their perceptions of hope, self-worth, and personal value to plummet, peer-supporters appear to fuel a positive forward momentum that keeps them optimistic and from feeling that they are doomed to deviance (McCulloch and McNeill, 2008).

While this apparent protective element of being a peer-supporter could in fact be undermined by reverse causality / selection bias mechanics (the prisoners that opt to become peer-supporters might already be ‘well’), many participants have reported that their roles had a direct influence on how they experienced prison and themselves. Perrin et al. (2017, p14), for example, noted recurrent extracts affirming how peer-supporters felt more like humans, and less like simply prisoners: *“it just brings it back to normality that, you’re not a prisoner in a sense, although you are a prisoner, to be able to have that trust, it’s something that can only be earned, you don’t just get it...but it kinda just makes you feel, ‘OK, I’m not as much of a prisoner”*’. One participant described earning something of an elevated status within the prison, as a result of enacting a helpful role, earning trust, and consequently forging a more

normative work and social life in prison: *“the other Insiders¹, I wouldn’t have known them like I do, the safer custody department...I wouldn’t have known them, as well as kind of higher ranking governors and that, when I go to the meetings...I know all the governors and they kind of know me and, whenever I see them in the corridor they’ll ask me how I am...so to have that kind of rapport in the place.../[I can] kind of be proud that I’m, in that kind of position”* (Perrin et al., 2017, p11). Ultimately, peer-support role holders in prison speak of the protective elements their work affords them; it keeps them focused on something constructive, and provides a sense of autonomy, mastery, and connectedness. These constructive outputs appeared to better equip prisoners to maintain more positive mental health. While these findings are in their infancy and require further exploration, the available qualitative data in this emerging field recurrently points to a number of significant benefits that peer-support appears to offer.

3. Finding perspective

Along with enabling prisoners to instil a sense of meaning, counter boredom, and garner more constructive inputs from incarceration, another consistent finding amongst research on prison peer-support relates to perspective finding. It is well known that the strain of complete institutionalisation brings about despair, suicidal feelings, self-injurious behaviours, prison misconduct, and a loss of hope amongst those incarcerated (Sykes, 1958; Dye, 2010; Morris et al., 2012). In Perrin and Blagden’s (2014) study, prison Listener participants expressed how they were able to counter this level of strain to a degree, through enacting their roles as ‘active citizens’. Participants expressed that through supporting others, they came to realise their own situations were not uniquely traumatic, but that others were also going through great personal

¹ Insiders are prisoners who are also peer-support mentors for fellow prisoners. They assist their peers in dealing with bullying issues and provide emotional support for other issues such as entry shock.

struggles. The realisation that others were suffering appeared to counter feelings of extreme loneliness and isolation and enabled participants the ‘headspace’ to take stock of their position. One participant recounted *“because I’m serving an IPP sentence²...I don’t know when I’m gonna get out. The system was so messed up, everybody was struggling, and I remember I said to myself ‘boy how am I gonna cope with this?’ So when I started listening to other people’s prison problems, I thought my problem was nothing...as I started listening to their problems I thought ‘wow, I thought I was the only one”*. Becoming a Listener for many participants seemed to allow for continual perspective making, which in-turn contributed to better adaptation to the realities of imprisonment (Dye, 2010). This finding was recently supported in a repeat study from Perrin et al. (2017) which explored the impact of a wider range of peer-support roles with a sample of sexual offenders. As with the earlier study, participants spoke about how helping others acted as a buffer for their own stressors.

These consistent findings sit in line with theories of generative helping and altruism. Indeed, a broad range of research has found that behaving selflessly and carrying out ‘acts of kindness’ for others enhances self-esteem, lowers morbidity, increases perceptions of social support, produces better health and mental health outcomes, and extends people’s social networks (Schwartz et al., 2003; Brown et al., 2005; Post, 2005). In exploring why altruistic acts bring such benefits to those who carry them out, Erikson’s (1950s) notion of generativity has been applied (Schwartz et al., 2003); it has been argued that acting on concern for those other than the self brings about internal satisfaction, a feeling of autonomy, and an assurance that the individual is making a difference in the world (Schwartz et al., 2003). Conversely, those who fail to contribute in generative ways are more prone to ‘stagnation’, which is

² Indeterminate sentence for public protection. This category of sentence was introduced in England and Wales via the 2003 Criminal Justice Act. It meant that courts could sentence individuals considered high risk to indeterminate prison terms. Individuals sentenced indeterminately needed to demonstrate reduced risk to psychology staff before being considered for parole. IPP sentences were abolished in 2012 following human rights concerns.

characterised by feelings of low self-worth and social disconnect (Slater, 2003). In essence then, those who behave altruistically and out of concern for others strengthen their bond to the society around them, and in doing so satisfy an array of basic human needs such as commitment to other people, maintenance of intimate and familial relationships, and a sense of social belonging and high self-worth (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

Additionally, scholars have argued that simply the act of giving, and thereby focusing on something external, enables people to counter the anxiety and depression associated with obsessing over the self (Schwartz and Sendor, 1999). This phenomenon is said to stem from a process of ‘response shift’, whereby intrapersonal values, beliefs, and perspectives of life are disempowered and become more flexible due to the adoption of a more outer-directed stance (Visser et al., 2013). In this respect, by adopting a volunteer position such as those akin to peer-support roles, individuals may be empowered reorganise and reconceptualise their viewpoints regarding life stressors and what is truly important (Sprangers and Schwartz, 1999). This could be crucial for mental wellbeing, but also for the recovery and reintegration of offenders. Indeed, Dhimi et al. (2007) have proposed that in order for prisoners to adjust to imprisonment and serve out sentences constructively, they need to be afforded some sense of personal agency and counter feelings of hopelessness. Peer-support seems to offer this to those who volunteer, and this seems largely attributable to meaning making, purpose building, perspective finding, and the enhanced adaptability to prison life that these gains afford.

Concluding comments

Peer-support schemes have existed in prisons for decades, yet have only recently garnered attention from investigators seeking answers regarding how prisons can better-support their inhabitants. This chapter has reviewed a body of qualitative data recently made available within this emerging and promising topic of research. Encouragingly, participants across recent

research studies have spoken about their peer-support work very constructively, and alluded to cultivating indicators of subjective wellbeing. Through upholding personally meaningful roles, prison peer-supporters inject a sense of meaning and purpose into their prison lives. In turn, this enables them to counter boredom and to resist becoming consumed by the deprivations of imprisonment. There is some evidence to suggest that these dynamics may afford prisoners the headspace and personal agency to take stock of their own circumstances and begin to build personal resilience. This is also supported by the perspective finding that peer-supporters have articulated across recent qualitative studies. Considering these early themes, while it is too early to depict peer-support as a “this works” level of resource across the prison estate, there should be optimism and interest from policy makers and researchers regarding its potential influence.

References

- Aresti, A., Eatough, V. and Brooks-Gordon, B. (2010) ‘Doing time after time: an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of reformed ex-prisoners' experiences of self-change, identity and career opportunities’. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 16(3), pp.169-190.
- Beijersbergen, K.A., Dirkzwager, A.J., Eichelsheim, V.I., Laan, P.H. and Nieuwbeerta, P., (2014). ‘Procedural justice and prisoners' mental health problems: a longitudinal study’. *Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health*, 24(2), pp.100-112.
- Blagden, N., Perrin, C., Smith, S., Gleeson, F. and Gillies, L., (2017). “‘A different world” exploring and understanding the climate of a recently re-rolled sexual offender prison’. *Journal of Sexual Aggression*, pp.1-16.
- Boothby, M.R., (2011). ‘Insiders' views of their role: Toward their training’. *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 53(4), pp.424-448.

- Brown, W.M., Consedine, N.S. and Magai, C., (2005). 'Altruism relates to health in an ethnically diverse sample of older adults'. *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 60(3), pp.P143-P152.
- Cid, J., (2009). 'Is imprisonment criminogenic? A comparative study of recidivism rates between prison and suspended prison sanctions'. *European Journal of Criminology*, 6(6), pp.459-480.
- Coates, S., (2016). *Unlocking potential: a review of education in prison*. Ministry of Justice. Available at: <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/26435/1/education-review-report.pdf> (Accessed 8 July 2016).
- Crewe, B., (2007). 'Power, adaptation and resistance in a late-modern men's prison'. *British Journal of Criminology*, 47(2), pp.256-275.
- Cullen, F.T., Jonson, C.L. and Nagin, D.S., (2011). 'Prisons do not reduce recidivism: The high cost of ignoring science'. *The Prison Journal*, 91(3_suppl), pp.48S-65S.
- Denborough, D. (Ed.), (1996). *Beyond the prison: Gathering dreams of freedom*. Adelaide: Australia: Dulwich Publications.
- Denborough, D., (2002). 'Prisons and the question of forgiveness'. *The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 2002(1), pp.75.
- Dennis, C.L., (2003). 'Peer support within a health care context: a concept analysis'. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 40(3), pp.321-332.
- Devilley, G.J., Sorbello, L., Eccleston, L. and Ward, T., (2005). 'Prison-based peer-education schemes'. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 10(2), pp.219-240.
- Dye, M.H., (2010). 'Deprivation, importation, and prison suicide: Combined effects of institutional conditions and inmate composition'. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 38(4), pp.796-806.

- Edgar, K., Jacobson, J., and Biggar, K., (2011). Time well spent: A practical guide to active citizenship and volunteering in prison. Prison Reform Trust. Available at: www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Time%20Well%20Spent%20report%20lo.pdf (Accessed 21 July 2017).
- Fazel, S. and Danesh, J., (2002). 'Serious mental disorder in 23 000 prisoners: a systematic review of 62 surveys'. *The Lancet*, 359(9306), pp.545-550.
- Foster, J. and Magee, H., (2011). Peer support in prison health care: an investigation into the Listener Scheme in one adult male prison. Samaritans. Available at: http://gala.gre.ac.uk/7767/1/helenDraft_Listener_report_27_091_doc-finalversion2.pdf (Accessed 12 July 2017).
- Gartner, A.J. and Riessman, F., (1982). 'Self-help and mental health'. *Psychiatric Services*, 33(8), pp.631-635.
- Gendreau, P., Listwan, S.J., Kuhns, J.B. and Exum, M.L., (2014). 'Making Prisoners accountable: are contingency Management Programs the answer?'. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 41(9), pp.1079-1102.
- Griffin, M., (2007). 'Prison gang policy and recidivism: Short-term management benefits, long-term consequences'. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 6(2), pp.223-230.
- Helliwell, J.F., (2011). 'Institutions as enablers of wellbeing: The Singapore prison case study'. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 1(2).
- Jaffe, M. (2011). A Listener Lives Here: The Development of Samaritans' Prison Listener Scheme. Samaritans. Available at: http://www.samaritans.org/pdf/listener_scheme_12pp_web.pdf (Accessed 23 November 2017).
- Kerley, K.R. and Copes, H., (2009). "'Keepin' My Mind Right" Identity Maintenance and Religious Social Support in the Prison Context'. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 53(2), pp.228-244.

- Liebling, A., and Arnold, H., (2004). *Prisons and their moral performance: A study of values, quality and prison life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Losel, F., (2007). 'The prison overcrowding crisis and some constructive perspectives for crime policy'. *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 46, pp.512–519.
- Maruna, S., (2001). *Making good: How ex-convicts reform and rebuild their lives*. American Psychological Association.
- McNeill, F., (2006). 'A desistance paradigm for offender management'. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 6(1), pp.39-62.
- Mead, S., Hilton, D. and Curtis, L., (2001). 'Peer support: a theoretical perspective'. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 25(2), p.134.
- Morris, R.G., Carriaga, M.L., Diamond, B., Piquero, N.L. and Piquero, A.R., (2012). 'Does prison strain lead to prison misbehavior? An application of general strain theory to inmate misconduct'. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 40(3), pp.194-201.
- Parkin, S., and McKeganey, N., (2000). 'The rise and rise of peer education approaches'. *Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy*, 7(3), pp.293-310.
- Perrin, C., (In Press). 'Doing good, being good: How incarcerated peer-supporters begin to actualise possible selves'. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, In Press.
- Perrin, C. and Blagden, N., (2014). 'Accumulating meaning, purpose and opportunities to change 'drip by drip': the impact of being a listener in prison'. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 20(9), pp.902-920.
- Perrin, C., Blagden, N., Winder, B. and Dillon, G., (2017). "'It's Sort of Reaffirmed to Me That I'm Not a Monster, I'm Not a Terrible Person" Sex Offenders' Movements Toward Desistance via Peer-Support Roles in Prison'. *Sexual Abuse*, pp.1-22.
- Reuss, A., (1999). 'Prison (er) education'. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, 38(2), pp.113-127.

- Ryan, R.M. and Deci, E.L., (2000). 'Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being'. *American psychologist*, 55(1), p.68.
- Samaritans. (2016). The Listener Scheme. Samaritans. Available at: <https://www.samaritans.org/your-community/our-work-prisons/listener-scheme> (Accessed 18 August 2017).
- Schwartz, C.E. and Sendor, R.M., (1999). 'Helping others helps oneself: response shift effects in peer support'. *Social Science & Medicine*, 48(11), pp.1563-1575.
- Shannon Trust. (2005). For Mentors. Shannon Trust. Available at: <http://www.shannontrust.org.uk/our-work/for-mentors> (Accessed 14 July 2017).
- Sirdifield, C., (2006). 'Piloting a new role in mental health-prison based health trainers'. *The Journal of Mental Health Training, Education and Practice*, 1(4), pp.15-22.
- Solomon, P., (2004). 'Peer support/peer provided services underlying processes, benefits, and critical ingredients'. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 27(4), p.392.
- Sprangers, M.A. and Schwartz, C.E., (1999). 'Integrating response shift into health-related quality of life research: a theoretical model'. *Social Science & Medicine*, 48(11), pp.1507-1515.
- Steinmetz, K.F., Schaefer, B.P. and Green, E.L., (2016). 'Anything but boring: A cultural criminological exploration of boredom'. *Theoretical Criminology*, 21(3), pp.342-360.
- Visser, M.R., Oort, F.J., Lanschot, J.J.B., Velden, J., Kloek, J.J., Gouma, D.J., Schwartz, C.E. and Sprangers, M.A., (2013). 'The role of recalibration response shift in explaining bodily pain in cancer patients undergoing invasive surgery: an empirical investigation of the Sprangers and Schwartz model'. *Psycho-Oncology*, 22(3), pp.515-522.
- Ward, T. and Brown, M., (2004). 'The good lives model and conceptual issues in offender rehabilitation'. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 10(3), pp.243-257.

Ware, J., Frost, A. and Hoy, A., (2010). 'A review of the use of therapeutic communities with sexual offenders'. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 54(5), pp.721-742.

Wright, S., Crewe, B. and Hulley, S., (2017). 'Suppression, denial, sublimation: Defending against the initial pains of very long life sentences'. *Theoretical Criminology*, 21(2), pp.225-246.