



“Transforming Rehabilitation”
The operational model from the service
user’s perspective

2015

A report to the National Audit Office

1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

We would like to thank the community rehabilitation companies (CRCs) who supported us in this piece of work and all the service users who took part in this study.

2. ABOUT USER VOICE.

We believe that the fundamental issue that causes the stubbornly high rates of re-offending and all the other associated problems is the 'us vs. them' culture.

Society feels frustrated with those who re-offend, repeating cycles of behaviour and not engaging with rehabilitation services. Yet people with convictions feel marginalised by society, with rehabilitation services which are often inaccessible and unhelpful and a system that does not value their input.

Whatever the truth, we will not reduce crime unless we deal with this division. User Voice's core belief is that rehabilitation only happens when everyone in the criminal justice system shares responsibility for transforming the 'us vs. them' division into real collaboration.

Our role is to improve rehabilitation through collaboration.

At User Voice we know that the criminal justice system needs to be improved. It is not delivering what it can deliver. We are optimistic that change is possible and we know that we have the experience and insight to contribute to making it better. We know that rehabilitation is possible and people with convictions can turn their lives into an active force for good in society. Rehabilitation is the goal of all our work, a process which goes deeper than reducing offending, although that is an outcome.

User Voice build the structures that enable productive collaboration between service users and service providers. We are able to do this because our work is led and delivered by ex-offenders. This gives us the special ability to gain the trust of, access to, and insight from people within the criminal justice system.

The entrenched exclusion of some of the people we work with can be a huge obstacle to service providers. The involvement of ex-offenders has many benefits, not least of which is the power of a narrative of success; working with ex-offenders can be a powerful way of motivating people who often have little self-belief that they can overcome the barriers they face. User Voice understands that offenders want to talk to people who have 'walked in their shoes' and experienced similar life events.

3. SUMMARY.

User Voice undertook a distinctly peer-led consultation across England to explore how current service users who are in receipt of community supervision understand the changes brought about by the Transforming Rehabilitation agenda and what this has meant for them personally. We used both qualitative and quantitative methods of investigation, by way of five focus groups and peer-distributed surveys. A total of 251 surveys were conducted across four CRCs, with two in the North of England, one in the Midlands and one in the South.

Our results were as diverse as our sample. Many service users were happy with the way probation was running, while others felt it was not meeting their needs. Many did not know whether they were managed by the National Probation Service (NPS) or the CRC, and most of our sample had not noticed a change as a consequence of Transforming Rehabilitation. Where changes had been noticed, this was positive in terms of the provision of education, offender behaviour work and substance misuse, but some negative changes were discussed in relation to housing and employment.

Service users in our sample valued relationships with staff very highly and felt this was the cornerstone of a successful probation period. Relationships, however, had to be consistent, fair and accountable for them to be respected. Some relationships had suffered because of Transforming Rehabilitation, with some service users experiencing multiple changes in officer or officers internalising the stress of the change.

Ultimately, service users recognised that they have complex needs and that in order to exit the cycle of crime, they would need support and signposting to other services beyond probation. It appeared that probation could improve in its links with other organisations, although some felt they had progressed sufficiently well to not re-offend again.

4. PARTICIPANTS.

Four CRCs, and one women-only service within one of these CRCs, were contacted and asked if they were willing to be involved in this audit. The sites were selected on their geographic spread across England as opposed to any operational variations. All gave consent to be involved, as long as anonymity could be assured.

In total, 45 service users took part in five initial focus groups held by User Voice engagement team members looking at the Transforming Rehabilitation agenda. The smallest focus group had five participants (Midlands) and the largest had 13 (North). In total, there were 26 males, and 19 females in these groups, with all (except the women-only group) having a mix of male and female participants. After the focus groups, willing participants were provided with some training in basic research methods and asked to speak with wider service users and to administer a short survey about Transforming Rehabilitation. This ensured that the consultation was distinctly peer-led and that a wide range of service users was targeted, including those who are typically hard to reach by other professionals.

A total of 251 surveys were conducted across the four CRCs: North (n = 52 and 64), Midlands (n = 63) and South (n = 72). Given the samples in each region are fairly small, we have not attempted to split results by region. Instead we present aggregated results throughout the findings section, in order to provide a snapshot of what service users feel about Transforming Rehabilitation at the current time.

The majority of survey participants were on licence (n = 84), a suspended sentence (n = 65) or a community order (n = 61), although other and multiple supervision types were present. Most respondents had been with their probation office between one and six months (36.4%), 25.1% had been engaging between six and twelve months, 22.6% between a year and two years, 9.2% had been engaging for more than two years, and 6.7% had been engaging for less than a month.

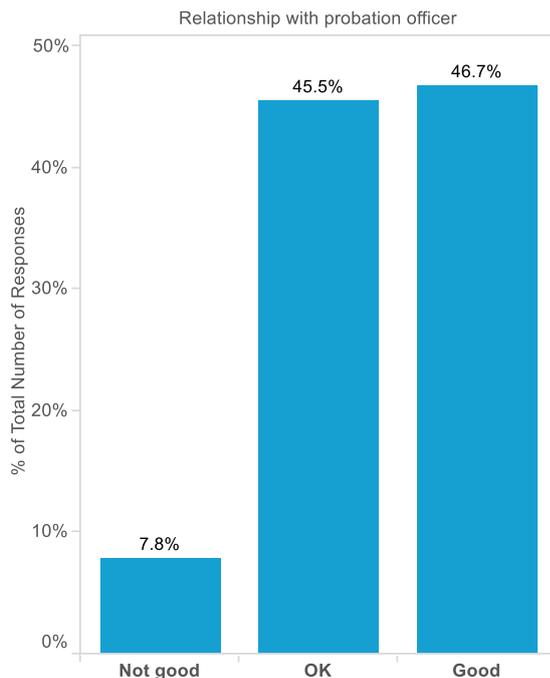
All participants were asked whether they were supervised by the NPS or CRCs. It was surprising that over one-third (n = 105) were unsure of, or did not provide data on, who managed their order, which would consequently mean they would not know what service they should be receiving and who to direct any concerns to. It is worth mentioning that 100% of respondents from one of the two CRCs in the North responded confidently about who they were supervised by. Again, because there were only 34 participants knowingly managed by NPS, across all regions, we have not separated these results.

5. FINDINGS.

Throughout the remainder of this report, verbatim excerpts from focus groups are provided wherever relevant, along with quantitative data from the surveys to illustrate key findings. We offer no interpretation of the results, but simply present the findings.

5.1 Relationships with probation officers

Generally, relationships seemed to be quite positive in both focus group and survey respondents, with less than 10% of survey respondents feeling that their relationships were not good.



Within focus groups, service users were keen to highlight how central the relationship was to the success of the supervision period.

“It should all be about that relationship though shouldn’t it? They should facilitate it, even nurture a prosocial and proactive relationship with the offender.” (Male)

“It makes a difference: your probation worker, if you’ve got a nice probation worker you cooperate.” (Female)

“If you get on with them there’s nothing wrong. If you’ve got a little grievance with one, everything’s wrong. Nothing’s gonna go. It all depends on that relationship.” (Male)

Comments within focus groups pertained to difficulties with attending appointments, asking for support or being honest in meetings, all due to the quality of the relationship.

One service user in a focus group stated that he would rather be sent to prison because he was uncomfortable with the type of relationships he has had in the past on community sentences.

*“They were all negative so I just hit the f***** bottom all the time to avoid probation. Getting at court I would say to the judges ‘I don’t want that, send me jail, send me jail’.” (Male)*

However, it was stressed by many that it takes time to build the relationships, given the complexity of some of the cases, and some service users’ past experiences of both probation and broken trust.

“My probation officer is fine, at the moment. It started off a bit rocky, ‘cos I’ve come out all angry and hot headed, so I didn’t really want to build a relationship, ‘cos I felt like I was being betrayed by my last probation officer. So I didn’t really want to build a relationship with them, kind of saw them as my enemy, in fact. But now, as time has gone on, my relationship is alright.” (Male)

“What I found was that I reckon that I had about 2 empathetic probation officers. They are in it for the money. They just need to be more caring, you know a lot of people on probation come from very broken backgrounds.” (Female)

“...and if I am going to connect and be able to feel safe to talk and ask, you know, I need to feel that it’s going to be ok and safe and secure to do that.” (Male)

Following on from this, transparency was an important theme in regard to relationship building. Several service users were unsure about why they were being asked questions which they did not feel were relevant.

“Mine was dead nosey, wanting to know things they shouldn’t know.” (Male)

In a similar vein, a key theme across all five focus groups was the inequality, or one-sidedness, of the relationship, regardless of whether they felt supported or not. The inequality relates to a number of factors, including poor communication, attitude and attendance. Further, seven out of ten participants in one focus group felt as though they had been deliberately provoked as a ‘test’ of their ability to stay calm in a situation.

“They will stimulate a conversation with, with negative comments. Where if you bite, you end up in a situation whereby you’re apologising when that was instigated by a member of staff.” (Male)

“What I’ve found, as being the offender, is if there is any fault at all it’s mine.” (Male)

“A lot of the problems I had, I had to sort out on my own, but it would have been nice to have one officer. I felt like I made my commitment so they should make theirs too.” (Male)

“There is no accountability. It seems to me that you sort of get to that point where you’re observing your own behaviour and you’re having this and that ‘I’ll accept that’ or whatever ok ‘I’ve done that’ or ‘I’ve said this’ but then when it comes to them, there’s no accountability of their part, their behaviour. Like nothing ever happens to them, do you know what I mean? They are strategically moved out of the way or out of your sight for a while, you know, so you don’t press those issues and I know

because I've experienced a few and that's facilitated by probation officers isn't it, it's all probation staff".(Male)

Key to the quality of the relationship appears to be a willingness to understand the service users and in two focus groups the recruitment of ex-service users into the profession was advocated.

"They need ex-offenders. To do something properly, you have to have experience. If I'm going to work with offenders, then I need this street, background experience. I can't come from the royalty and don't know nothing about you. It's like politicians. Politicians make choices for the people they govern but they don't know anything about people, they've been to Eton. If they went to prison, if they had to spend time in custody, then everything changes. There is so many politicians who got locked up and then started doing nice things for the prisoners." (Male)

Without this understanding or empathy from probation staff (including reception), some service users spoke of feeling a distance between them and the service they were supposed to engage with; an 'us and them' divide which is not conducive to relationship-building.

"I felt that even if you've done something wrong and you went to prison and what not... When you come out, you're supposed to be rehabilitated in the community. And then the offender label is supposed to drop. But what I didn't like is, I called people up to the office clients but then they were saying: "What time is my offender coming in?" and "Can you get my offender file?". I felt that was wrong, because you guys coming out, you're seen as an ex-offender and want to start again. But what I see is that you aren't allowed to start again because the label never drops." (Female)

"I've still got contact with people who are on the inside, and every time they see a probation officer, they're like a case to them. It's a 9 – 5 job, so they don't really give a damn about what you want, what your needs are. You're inside and they're outside, so they don't really want to know. People got their RDR's and their day releases and they're waiting but they can't cos the officers are not doing the paperwork. They tell their families that they're coming home and they're not because their paperwork is not done." (Female)

For females, gender was a consideration in terms of trust built and the quality of the relationships. And for some, gender *and* lived experience were needed to form the relationship. There was no mention of gender by any male participant in terms of preference or variations in service.

“I have been on probation this year and have a male officer. I found him useless, erm hardly see him. Had to do a restorative justice thing for about 4 months, didn’t see him at all when I was doing that. I finished doing that about 3 months ago and have only seen him once since then, so I found him not to be useful at all.” (Female)

“Very loyal, everything, like even now I know that I could go and speak to her if I need to.” (Female)

“You gotta have life skills, especially for women, you know what I am saying. It’s hard to understand a mother who’s being, you know, is suffering from domestic violence and, you know, is then trying to cope with an addiction. You understand, you know what I’m saying. You go to these people and they don’t understand.” (Female)

One further quote is relevant here, taken from a conversation about receiving support. Due to the way his risk was calculated, he believes he receives less support from the CRC than he would have done from the NPS. He discusses how he would have appreciated more time and more of a relationship with his officer.

“There is this system, where they would rather spend money on the people who are high risk, with more problems. OK, we might be lower risk, we might be living with our families and we might be getting the family support but sometimes we can’t discuss certain things with the family. We would rather get the probation to help but we don’t ask for it.” (Male)

5.2 Perceived role of probation

The changing role of probation and the uncertainty this has led to in both service users and staff appears to have had an effect on the strength of relationships. Predominantly, in both focus groups and in the survey, most people commented that they felt the role of probation was to reduce re-offending, but there was little common ground in their experiences of how this was happening in practice.

Questionnaire respondents were asked what they felt that the role of probation ought to be, and what it actually was. The results are shown the table below. The majority (54%) felt that probation *should* be a supportive agency, but less than a quarter (23%) of respondents thought that this was what happened in practice. Two illustrative comments from survey respondents have been included immediately after.

Actual role of probation	Expected role of probation			Total
	Law enforcement agency	Bit of both	Supportive agency	
Law enforcement agency	3	26	40	69
Bit of both	2	66	47	115
Supportive agency	1	13	43	57
Total	6	105	130	241

“It would be a lot better if they were on your side to positively give encouragement instead of using threats of recall. Sometimes I feel that I am not being listened to, being told what to do doesn’t help. I done a whole sentence and wasn’t contacted once by probation.”

“Stop controlling people, example: missing an appointment for a valid reason, need to work with people not make you want to run away, should work together rather than use authority as power.”

Only 2% of the survey sample felt probation *should* be a law enforcement agency, but as many as 29% felt this was the case in practice. Almost half felt that, in reality, probation was a ‘bit of both’, which was also the main finding within the focus groups.

“From the client’s point of view, the probation officer is there to sort out my money, sort out a job. What they’re supposed to do, technically, is monitor you. But what they are supposed to do as well is signpost you for services.” (Female)

Some were positive about the supportive element of the role, though these were almost all female.

“From day one when they saw me, all of them, they referred me to different parts. I didn’t have anything like income or anything, they arranged everything for me, to the benefits, to everything: Christmas period, presents from Next, gift vouchers, all these kind of things, they were like a family to me.” (Female)

“Like I couldn’t believe like how much they actually wanted to rehabilitate you up rather than just seeing it as a ‘in the door, out the door.’” (Female)

*“To help you get back into society. To help you get a job. If people have difficulty in writing or if they have alcohol or drug problems to put them in the right direction.”
(Female)*

“I actually enjoy the working together environment - it keeps me busy while am out of work and stops me reoffending (shoplifting). I think there are lots of opportunities available if you ask and the workers are fair and a great bunch of people. Always willing to help you in any way they can, I personally much appreciate it, especially with the help I received over being evicted.” (Female)

“My probation officer has helped me a great deal. Offending behaviour programmes have helped me, think first, anger management, alcohol awareness.” (Male)

Whereas others felt less supported and more punished by probation.

“I challenged them about ‘what are you enforcing?’. They’re not officers of the law. Do you know what I mean? They are probation officers, they are to see you facilitate your recovery through their help and support and that’s often not happening.” (Male)

“You know the probation are like old-school where they think that it’s not punishment. Whereas, far as I’m concerned you don’t need to punish people, you need to work with people so they don’t re-offend and some of them don’t see that.” (Female)

“Punishment not enforcement, probation is about punishment. You have been punished and you are going to stay punished right? Even when you have finished you are still going to be punished.” (Male)

A few commented on a more bureaucratic nature of the service, which has been enhanced in recent years and since privatisation following Transforming Rehabilitation.

“Yeah, it’s always got to be about the relationship between the offender and the PO [probation officer], right, it can’t be nothing else and it’s gotta be about individuals, it’s gotta be about an individual plan. Do you know what I mean? At the moment it’s numbers, it’s statistics.” (Male)

5.3 Number of probation officers

Over half of questionnaire respondents had worked with just one probation officer on their order, but over 40% had experienced more than two, and approximately 5% (n = 13) had experienced five or more probation officers on one order.



The survey asked service users to comment on how this affects the serving of their sentence. The main themes that came from the written answers were negative and are listed below with an illustrative answer taken from the surveys.

- Trust (n = 18)

“I have had officer swaps in past, I breached on most occasions, I found or thought that o/m [offender managers] didn’t care, or was getting rid as I was lost cause.”

- Repetition of information (n = 17)

“I’m lucky I got my old O/M [offender manager] back so I don’t have to explain again. I’ve had more in past though, during order, and the confusion was horrendous.”

- Shared understanding (n = 16)

“They know me and know when something is not right.”

This topic stimulated extensive discussion in focus groups as, again, many of the service users have had many probation officers over the course of a sentence. This, they said, affects relationships, which in turn affects the quality and success of the supervision.

“In the last 5 years I’ve had 6 probation officers, so I haven’t had a chance to really get to know any of them because before ones that try to get to know me, I’m getting passed about to another one. So I’ve never really built a relationship up.” (Male)

“But I think, with having different officers each month, that’s hard. So I’d go in there and I’d wanna talk about certain things I wouldn’t feel comfortable.” (Male)

“I’ve had the same answers off all of them, which is ‘we are not going to be prepared to release me’ and then I’m getting passed to another one who was in exactly the same position as the one before them, they don’t know me.” (Male)

“Now I have been out of prison for 3 months, on my third probation officer in 3 months right...I am seeing this third probation officer, now next week and I am just going to say read up the notes from your predecessor, you know, cos I’m not going to repeat myself again. And, do you know what, this has deteriorated how I want to relate to probation, I don’t feel like I really want to try and give it my all with them.” (Male)

*“So I got to know her and it was going really good, was really nice and then she said ‘oh it’s going to be someone else’, you know, and at first (laughs, inaudible) I was quite p***** off about it, really, cos you kinda get a consistency and understanding and get that rapport with them which has took me years and years to break or to kinda grow and sow, and obviously in the same breath I couldn’t say no, I couldn’t not turn up cos obviously I would have been taken back to prison.” (Male)*

“It can break you down as well cos having to repeat everything is not nice, having to go over and over everything, and can be very upsetting you know what I mean, it’s like reliving the situation over and over again, you know what I am saying, it’s not nice. If they did their job properly then they would know all about you. It’s lack of communication between them.” (Female)

5.4 Level of contact and barriers to contact

A large proportion of survey respondents have weekly contact with probation (n = 109), although a wide range of answers were given, from daily (n = 1) to just once (n = 1) or even never (n = 2). In these last couple of cases, participants were new to the service.

Survey participants were then asked whether they were satisfied with this level of contact. As can be seen in the table below, the majority (71.7%) thought their level of contact was ‘about right’, and 18.3% felt they saw probation too much.

Perception of contact

Regularity of contact with probation	Perception of contact				Total
	Not enough	About right	Too much	No response	
Daily		1			1
Twice a week		1		1	2
Weekly	3	78	25	3	109
Fortnightly		29	6		35
Monthly		31	8	1	40
Every 3 months			1		1
Inconsistently	1	1			2
Once				1	1
Never	1	1			2
No response	10	38	6	4	58
Total	15	180	46	10	251

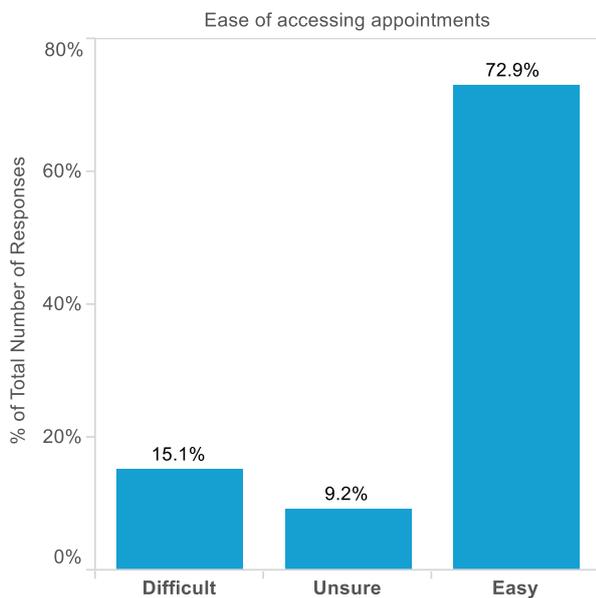
The following quotes illustrate the different sides of this argument. The first is taken from one of the survey respondents who was looking to reduce contact with probation, while the second is from a focus group participant who had had his contact reduced. The third was in response to the question about level of contact, but the participant feels that this can be irrelevant.

“After 14 months of an 18-month order, I believe I should not have to attend weekly. I was a PPO in past, so I appreciate level of risk but I’m off PPO, working. We have good chats but there’s nothing left to say.”

“Then when I did have that kinda moment of change of where I was like, ok, I can get something out of this when I engage with it, I found it frustrating then because by that point I was seeing my probation officer over like a month.” (Male)

“It’s not the fact if you see them enough. It’s just when you do see them, you sit down with a book and work down through all the negative stories. Like, they will ask ‘Do you feel down?’. Everybody feels down sometimes, but they’re quick to note that down. But when it comes to the good side of it, you know...” (Female)

The majority found that it was easy to attend appointments. They were asked why they found it easy or difficult and the barriers to attendance can be seen in the graph below. The main reasons for finding it difficult to attend appointments are categorised in the adjacent table, with the main reason being related to distance and transport issues.



Difficulty	Frequency
Distance and transport issues	16
Work commitments	8
Expense	6
Other	3
Physical and mental health	3
Safety	2
Exclusion zones	1
No flexibility from probation	1
Children	1
Lack of communication	1

The barriers given were not mutually exclusive and ten respondents gave more than one answer. Indeed, one survey respondent wrote the following answer, which encompasses a number of problems:

“Travelling up from Cambridge with a friend who drives. This is costing a fortune in petrol which I can’t afford. Also my mother is sick with cancer and it is near on impossible to get back on time for the school run.”

Focus group participants gave further comments about accessing appointments. Discussions centred around the location of the offices and poor communication in booking appointments.

“One guy, before they sent him here, they sent him there and... he has to catch 2 buses to get there because the office was in the area where he committed the offence. That’s still not logical, because he still lives there. So, if that’s an issue, why is he allowed to live in the same area?” (Female)

“Obviously I was involved in gangs myself and where the probation was situated it wasn’t a welcomed area for myself and then when you are trying to explain to them

that I can't go into that area, well they say there is no other probation office so obviously you have to do it." (Male)

"Having to call up them up all the time, no matter how many messages you leave no-one gets back to you." (Female)

"It was ridiculous trying to get an appointment or let them know I was on probation or let them know if I had a problem, but they were very quick to send out a warning letter." (Female)

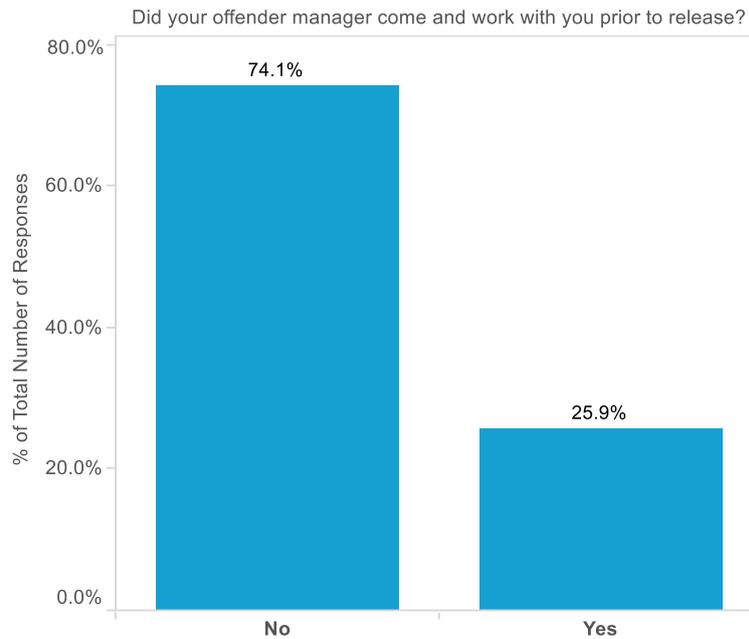
Survey respondents who responded that they had found it easy to attend appointments were also asked why. The vast majority referred to travelling (87.2%), with a much smaller number (5.5%) stating it was related to the flexibility of probation staff, and another 5.5% stating it was due to the availability of a specific women's hub.

"My probation officer is pretty flexible, if I've got a lot on that week she'll say 'oh that's alright, this week phone me' and then leave me that week. She's flexible that way, yeah. In the past I've had ones where I say I'm working 3 times a week and working my arse off, doing my college, doing everything, and they were just like, like how can I explain it, like they didn't trust me, they didn't ease off on the appointments." (Male)

"I think they work with you for whatever is best for you, sometimes you know what I mean, and if they can fit you in that time scale, I think they work with you and not against you." (Male)

"And it's helpful sometimes that he is prepared to come to my house, you know, home visits and that." (Male)

Survey participants who had been in prison were asked whether they had been visited prior to their release from custody, as outlined in the Transforming Rehabilitation guidelines. Almost three-quarters had not been. Further, of those who were visited by probation in prison, 61% thought this was useful, whereas 39% did not.



This subject inspired much conversation within focus groups. Predominantly, there had been a lack of contact from inside prison and poor communication during that critical period at release. The focus group participants were generally supportive of the importance of this element of Transforming Rehabilitation, as can be seen below, but not positive about the way it has been implemented.

“They should come in before you’re released and meet you and get to know you themselves, and that way they will get to know you for who you are and not by what your offender manager reports sending out to you.” (Female)

“When you are in prison, you need all this set up before you get released. That was half the problem with my re-offending because nothing was set up for me ready for my release, no support, nothing, you know what I’m saying?” (Female)

“Normally you have a probation officer in prison and on the outside as well and your case gets transferred. To me, you should be able to meet them before you come out of prison. I know that when the CRC and NPS split, it was just madness.” (Male)

“I got nothing until 12 weeks of getting released. I never had the letter, the pack. Within a couple of weeks I just got a letter and that was it.” (Male)

“My offender manager just told me who will be my probation officer so I contacted her. I rang her up and introduced myself and that was it.” (Female)

“I was trying a good 12-18 months before my release to facilitate my release. It’s like hitting my head against a brick wall.” (Male)

*“Then we had his OMU officer keep contacting his probation officer asking for his probation officer who was never in, because he needed to have his OASys updated. And because of that he couldn’t get any ROTL and he kept being knocked back.”
(Female)*

“I had a visit before I left jail with a PO [probation officer] and the Offender Manager in jail and then when I got out of jail I had a different one.” (Male)

“Well, when I got out, I got out on a tag ... I knew I was supposed to be on probation but probation didn’t know that I was on probation. I had to get in touch with them and this was like 6 months down the line.” (Male)

One service user did comment that he needed help but stated that for him, this could be later in the supervision period than on release from custody. While this was not a common theme, indeed he was the only respondent to give this answer, it is relevant as it shows that need presents itself throughout an individuals’ supervision period.

“Probation need to be more available towards the end of your licence, as in this is what we need to do in the way of helping to find employment, you know, with this kind of stuff. I don’t know how to go to job centre.” (Male)

5.5 Throughcare provision

The range of supporting services needed by some service users on release from prison is substantial, ranging from emotional support through to help with housing and employment. Although the focus groups tended to focus on more negative experiences of probation, some were extremely vocal and grateful about the level of support they had had in order to turn their lives around.

“But through probation in the prison I was introduced to ‘Through the gate’ and so many other agencies. I really did get a lot of help and was found accommodation, you know what I’m saying, so probation in prison really, really helped me.” (Female)

However, the clear theme from all five focus groups was that there was a disconnection between the services available to service users in the community and the information provided by probation staff. In every group, comments were made about the need for probation to improve their signposting to other services, as there was recognition that they could not provide every service internally, but that some service users relied on them for suggestions.

“It seems to me also that they don’t appear to listen, you get through the service and, yeah, they are good at listening but they don’t appear to do anything else with it, it’s like lip service, you know, I can tell them all my problems and they are really good at listening and they write it all down but they don’t actually do anything with it.” (Male)

“Yeah, I think so cos from my experience I was trying to get help in terms of whether it was employment or education. I would go into the meetings and they were like, oh we will get back to you with a list, you know, with a list of organisations, but would never get them.” (Male)

“What it should be is to be able to give us an easier access to resources that we know are going to help us, housing, benefits, employment, mental health help. They need to be kind of in touch with other agencies.” (Female)

“That’s what probation should be about, it’s providing support and help and for it to be actual help, not verbal stuff cause you have been told verbal all our lives - well all my life - from professionals but if they could actually do something.” (Male)

“I was really surprised at how little information was actually given to me even about self-help groups like 12 steps fellowships. I would have thought, I don’t know what’s wrong with these places, you know.” (Male)

“There are so many services out there outside from probation officers that a lot of probation officers don’t seem to know they exist.” (Male)

“Especially the kind of things I was asking for, I felt as if probation should have had like a database that they could just print it off there and then and then say like, these are all the organisations you can chase up....”(Male)

5.6 Changes since Transforming Rehabilitation

Service users were asked whether they felt there had been any changes since the Transforming Rehabilitation agenda had been operationalised. More than three-quarters (77%) said they had not noticed any change in the overall service they personally received and this was also the case in the focus groups, where the general feeling was that there is going to be change, but it’s not happened yet:

“I’ve been the longest one here out of the service users, you know what I mean, and none of it has improved I’d say, it stays stagnant, you know what I mean?” (Male)

“It’s just I have been doing this for so long, as you know, and nothing seems to have changed.” (Male)

“I’ve been told that changes will be happening but it’s not changed yet. Think the last time I went I was told that I would get a new probation officer because I am waiting on a female probation officer but not got her yet. Not sure when I will.” (Female)

The following table outlines questionnaire respondents' views of whether specific aspects of probation have changed since Transforming Rehabilitation. Most respondents answered that they had seen no change in nine out of ten areas, although there were some clear differences, particularly with ‘help with housing’, which appeared to have deteriorated for many of those in our sample.

Changes in probation	It has got worse	It is the same	It has got better
Amount of paperwork	17.8%	62.5%	19.7%
Help with offending behaviour work	14.6%	59.1%	26.2%
Repeating the same information to different people	30.5%	57.9%	11.6%
Help with relationships	21.1%	56.9%	22.0%
Help with addiction	16.8%	56.3%	26.9%
Offending behaviour programmes available	17.3%	56.0%	26.7%
Level of support on offer	24.9%	54.3%	20.8%
Help with employment	27.2%	53.7%	19.1%
Help with education and training	22.3%	50.4%	27.3%
Help with housing	42.4%	34.1%	23.5%

The table suggests that more resource has been provided to help service users work on the internal causes of crime, including work around addiction and offence-focused work. There is less positivity regarding the more external causes, such as housing and employment.

Focus group participants also discussed housing needs and the limited options available, which leads to some being offered accommodation that they feel is detrimental to their progress.

“Helping someone get a flat, not just banging them in a hostel. More than likely you’re gonna fail at because, like, you were saying before, you go in them places, I haven’t been in one, but I know people who have and they say it’s a test.” (Male)

“I’ve been struggling ‘cos I’m at home and I need a place on my own. They don’t give you that support. They could put you up in a hostel if you are that desperate, but... I ain’t going to live in a hostel. So you’re effectively left to yourself, because you’re not on drugs or alcohol.” (Female)

“But people who have nowhere to live, they live in a hostel. Hostel is no place to live if you’ve got alcohol or drug problems, you just can’t live there. There is so many people with other kinds of issues and it’s just going to mess with your head.”(Male)

It is worth noting that a greater percentage of NPS participants ticked “it has got worse” for all but one (‘amount of paperwork’) of the listed changes in the table above than those who ticked “it has got better”. But this was only the case for CRC participants in three of the areas: *help with housing, level of support on offer and repeating the same information*. However, with only 34 participants from NPS, it is impossible to generalise, although this may be an area for future exploration.

Survey respondents were given the space to freely record what they thought the impact of Transforming Rehabilitation had been, without any predetermined answers. The most popular answer echoed a key theme already discussed in this report, with almost a third commenting on the negative impact of changing their probation officer. However, the next most popular answer (29%) was related to the impact of the change on staff, with respondents using terms such as “*more stressed*”, “*miserable*”, “*deflated*” to describe their probation officers.

“I felt like an agony aunt to my PO [probation officer] as she may lose her job with the changes.”

“The uncertainty of staffing has given a lack of morale amongst staff. This has affected their work and service users have suffered as a result.”

“Seen a change in last 12 months and staff are going so will see another change.”

“Seen more and more being sentenced to probation from courts ... not enough staff to compensate.”

Focus groups also focused on how the change is more widespread than just for the service users but ultimately affects them.

“I think it’s got worse cause they don’t know where they are at. They don’t know where they are at, so how can they put clients where they are at?” (Male)

“In probation the changes were swift. There was a leaflet saying that the probation service is changing. Behind the counter the changes were swift. Officers got moved to different offices. Some officers didn’t like it so they resigned and took early retirement. Things were changing around and then you’d get clients coming in that the probation officers hadn’t seen for months and for the duration of their life they’d have the same probation officer and they has to start to build that kind of good relationship again.” (Female)

“Everything has slowed down for us as well, hasn’t it? Like cos nobody knows who’s going to be there in the next few months or what.” (Female)

“Years ago probation was like keep the criminals away from society and there is still some of them there that don’t wanna get us involved. The times are changing, the world is changing.” (Female)

6. CONCLUSIONS.

The service users who took part in this consultation have provided feedback on the differences they have experienced as a consequence of the Transforming Rehabilitation agenda. A range of topics were covered regarding their experience of working with probation at the moment and any changes they had noticed in the last 12 months.

- For most, there had been very few noticeable changes, if any.
- For some, there were positive changes, mainly in relation to offending behaviour work and education.
- For others, relationships with probation had felt the effects of the changes, in terms of confused job roles and having multiple officers in a short space of time.

Service users responded openly and honestly about their experiences. Most enjoyed being given the opportunity to have their voices heard on a subject that they have a wealth of personal insight, and contributing to a piece of work which may benefit service users in the future.

For more information please contact:

User Voice

20 Newburn Street

London SE11 5PJ

Tel: 020 3137 7471

Email: info@uservoice.org

Website: www.uservoice.org

© User Voice 2016