

USER VOICE

ONLY OFFENDERS CAN STOP RE-OFFENDING

PRISONERS' VIEWS ON THE SHANNON TRUST READING PLAN

MAY 2018.

*“Something like just learning to read for the first time in
so many years, it’s an emotional experience”*

SUMMARY.

User Voice has been commissioned by the Shannon Trust to consult service users to better understand why individuals, who struggle with reading and writing, do not engage with the Shannon Trust Reading Plan. User Voice conducted surveys with residents across four prisons and also held a focus group at each site.

The findings from both the survey data and focus group contributions demonstrate that there is a clear need for literacy lessons within prison. The reasons provided by service users explaining why individuals did not join the Shannon Trust Reading Plan can be split into three themes.

- Personal reasons
- Prison regime
- Shannon Trust Reading Plan

Service users posited a number of personal reasons which prevented individuals from engaging with the service. Most notably, these included:

- Confidence issues
- Vulnerable mental state
- Embarrassment

Regarding the prison regime, participants again, provided a host of factors, which hindered the success of the Reading Plan. This included:

- Lack of private space
- Limited movement across wings
- Staff awareness and communication

Regarding the Reading Plan itself, residents were generally receptive towards its main features:

- One-to-one lessons
- Conducted in a private space
- At the learner's own pace

It was also clear that having a prior relationship with a mentor and a degree of trust were crucial in encouraging an individual to join the Reading Plan.

Residents did, however, raise a number of criticisms surrounding how the Shannon Trust promotes and leads its service. Criticisms included:

- Lack of awareness
- Male centric
- Old fashioned
- Lack of leadership

Several recommendations were also suggested by participants, which they felt would improve the Reading Plan, attract more service users and ultimately, lead to more people learning to read and write whilst in prison. Among the recommendations were:

- Lessons held during regime time
- Suitable private spaces provided
- Picture based posters
- Feedback mechanisms in place for mentors

CONTENTS.

ABOUT USER VOICE.....	2
1. INTRODUCTION.....	2
2. METHODOLOGY.....	2
3. KEY FINDINGS.....	3
THEME ONE: PERSONAL ISSUES.....	5
THEME TWO: PRISON REGIME.....	7
THEME THREE: SHANNON TRUST.....	12
5. RECOMMENDATIONS.....	17
6. CONCLUSION.....	22

ABOUT USER VOICE.

User Voice is an ex-offender led charity founded in 2009. We are experts at gaining honest, authentic insight into the lives and views of the most marginalised and vulnerable people in and around the Criminal Justice System (CJS). User Voice is uniquely able to do this because all our delivery work is led by ex-offenders and we understand that people with convictions want to talk to those who have 'walked in their shoes' and experienced similar life events. User Voice's core belief is that rehabilitation only happens when everyone in the CJS shares responsibility for transforming the 'us vs. them' division into real collaboration. Our role is to improve rehabilitation through collaboration. User Voice builds the structures that enable productive collaboration between service users and service providers.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Shannon Trust Reading Plan is an initiative aimed at improving the ability of individuals in prison who struggle to read and write. The Shannon Trust trains and supports prisoners to be reading mentors, who are then able to provide peer-to-peer learning to their fellow residents. Lessons take place on a one-to-one basis, with sessions taking place daily and lasting for roughly 20 minutes. Learners develop at their own pace and do not sit exams.

A recent study, which analysed literacy and numeracy levels within English prisons, concluded that 50% of prisoners possess a reading ability at or below Entry Level 3 (that expected of a primary school leaver). 20% of prisoners were found to be at Entry Level 2 or lower. From these figures it is clear that there are many individuals in prison who have difficulties reading and writing who are not engaging with the Shannon Trust Reading Plan.

User Voice has been commissioned by the Shannon Trust to consult service users to understand why individuals do not engage with the Reading Plan. The first part of this consultation involved User Voice conducting surveys in four secure estates across England (HMP Downview, HMP Featherstone, HMP Northumberland, HMP Swaleside). Following this, one focus group was held in each site. The findings from both the survey results and focus group contributions provide the basis for this report.

User Voice does not offer any interpretation or hypotheses based on service user opinion. We have themed what service users have shared, allowing their voices to tell the story.

2. METHODOLOGY.

User Voice carried out 262 peer-led surveys with residents across the four sites. Within the survey, respondents were asked whether they would like to take part in a focus group to further discuss the topic of reading in more detail and to provide suggestions on how to better improve reading services within the prison. Focus group participants were selected based on their survey

responses, reading ability, and were representative of different demographics. The prisons themselves represented a broad cross section of the secure estates within England, ranging across gender, geographic location and security category.

3. KEY FINDINGS.

262 individuals completed the peer-led surveys. Of these respondents 85 (32.4%) were female and 177 (67.6%) were male. The demographic breakdown of respondents is the following; 151 identified as White (57.6%), 36 (13.7%) as Black, 25 (9.5%) as Asian, 17 (6.5%) as Dual Heritage, 18 (6.8%) as Other and 15 (5.8%) preferred not to say.

28 individuals participated in the four focus groups help by User Voice. Of the participants, 15 (53.6%) identified as White, 6 (21.4%) as Black, 3 (10.7%) as Asian, 2 (7.1%) as Dual Heritage, 1 (3.6%) as Other, and 1 (3.6%) individual preferred not to say. Participants ranged in age from 19-70. The participants selected also represented a broad range of reading abilities, including those who were learners on the Shannon Trust Reading Plan and others who were mentors.

From the responses of those who completed surveys and the contributions of focus group participants, residents provided a vivid picture of the state of literacy services within the prisons and recommendations as to what could be done to improve them.

Their contributions are themed below.

NEED

The findings from the surveys distributed to residents across the four sites and the comments of focus group participants, demonstrate a clear need for reading and writing programmes within prisons.

Approximately a quarter (24.3%) of survey respondents stated that they did not regularly understand everything which they read. Similarly, 24.4% of respondents to the question '*How confident are you in your reading ability?*' answered either 'A little confident' or 'Not confident'. Furthermore, 23.8% of respondents provided a positive answer to the question, '*Have you ever been frustrated by not being able to read something?*'.

In addition to this, 23.8% of individuals stated that they had asked somebody to help them read something which they did not understand. This theme of self-help was further expanded upon by focus group participants.

One individual explained how a fellow resident had developed their reading skills from reading the bible.

*"He learnt to read and write over the last year it was great actually reading from the bible."
(HMP Northumberland Resident)*

Another individual outlined how they had improved their reading ability, through a combination of a self-taught approach and the support of fellow prisoners.

"In my cell I write letters to myself, I write letters to my family and what I do when I write letters, I put the first letter, if I can't, I write my letters and stuff I can't spell I put the first letter but I carry on writing my letters and I go round to couple of the lads, like one of the lads that can read and just tell me what the, how to spell it really so, then I keep a little book in my pad with all the words I can't spell so when I write my letter again I can go back to that and say 'well I've got that in there so I can get it out and write it down."

(HMP Featherstone Resident)

It should be noted that it was only the desire to write letters to family members that had motivated this individual to ask fellow prisoners for help. Focus group participants made clear that asking other prisoners for assistance with reading and writing was not common throughout the prison.

*"We don't get a lot of them no."
(HMP Featherstone Resident)*

Focus group respondents were also unanimous in their appreciation of the importance of being able to read and write to lead successful lives.

"You need to read all the time... at work you need to read or you need to read to your kids or the bills; you need to read that. Just everything - it's important."

(HMP Downview Resident)

*"In this prison, everything is paper. You need to learn how to read and write."
(HMP Downview Resident)*

In addition to this, well over a third (39.0%) of respondents felt that they would benefit from improving their reading ability, whilst 29.5% stated that they would be interested in learning more about the Shannon Trust Reading Plan.

The rest of this report will outline why, in the views of service users, despite the obvious need within the prison estate for reading and writing programmes, individuals are choosing not to commit to the Shannon Trust Reading Plan.

THEME ONE: PERSONAL ISSUES.

A major issue for those individuals who struggled to read and write was having the confidence to admit this and then to actively seek out the support of others. One individual, who had recently joined the Reading Plan, explained why it had taken her a significant period of time in prison before engaging with the programme.

"I was never good at reading... It's just the confidence of trying to read when, in this place, it's hard." (HMP Downview Resident)

This outlook was shared by a fellow resident.

"It's more to do with, like, confidence, asking people if they can help them read or like, yeah basically confidence." (HMP Downview Resident)

The issue of confidence was further exacerbated by the prison environment, whereby admitting to reading difficulties could potentially be seen as a weakness which could be exploited.

"Yeah, it's seen as a weakness, innit." (HMP Downview Resident)

"They won't ask for help because they feel like they're getting judged." (HMP Downview Resident)

"See when in sort of environment, a lot of things people like to keep private and confident like, problem if you can't read and you've got to ask someone he go tell people your business 'oh X can't read'." (HMP Featherstone Resident)

Admitting to not being able to read was also seen by service users as something which could cause significant embarrassment to an individual and so many decide to not do so.

*“Embarrassment... I knew someone who for the entire time I knew them very clued up very smart person but could not read...did not learn to read because they were embarrassed. Could have learnt to but just didn't want to say I actually can't read, just would not do it.”
(HMP Northumberland Resident)*

Service users also explained that many individuals were not in the correct mental state to engage with such a challenging process. This was due to the impact of the prison environment upon an individual's mental wellbeing.

*“You have to have that motivation but let's also not forget that prison has a thing where it really breaks you down emotionally and psychologically. A lot of people walk around and no-one can ever tell that they have a lot of personal issues within their soul, that they're dealing with, that they don't ever open up to anyone. So you can be banged up behind your door, very quiet in there, but emotionally you are a wreck. So, there's a lot and there's a lack of that support in prison.”
(HMP Swaleside Resident)*

*“Down to motivation and encouragement mainly from prison.”
(HMP Northumberland Resident)*

One participant explained how their negative past experiences of learning to read and write had created a significant barrier which was difficult to overcome.

“Then the teachers just used to make me try to read and I hated class for that reason. I used to pretend I couldn't see and then the fact that I was dyslexic, words would jump around the page when I was under pressure, I would be chasing them around the page trying to read something. So it just got hard and the stress and then I wouldn't go to school, that was it. The whole class would be waiting for me to read, I'm not reading because I can't read.” (HMP Swaleside Resident)

It was also remarked upon by focus group participants that many individuals within prison had grown up in an environment where they had not previously engaged with education. This made it unlikely that they would then choose to learn to read and write whilst in prison.

*“Certain people from certain backgrounds and certain, you know, communities that weren't brought up reading or going to school, whatever. They find it hard.”
(HMP Downview Resident)*

*“If you are a 35-year-old man you have gotten to be a 35-year-old man so far in life without learning to read so what's the point in learning now?”
(HMP Swaleside Resident)*

THEME TWO: PRISON REGIME.

PRIVATE SPACE

A significant issue for residents was the lack of a private space to conduct the reading sessions. Due to the stigma, as previously discussed, of not being able to read, the need for a private space was seen as fundamentally important to the success of the Reading Plan.

“They need to cater to their confidentiality as well because in the prison, they don't. They don't have a space for them to be away from the others” (HMP Downview Resident)

“You can't take them to the library because it's where everyone comes” (HMP Downview Resident)

“If you think about it, if I was learning I wouldn't want people to know I couldn't read, do you know I mean? Not that there's anything wrong with it but, it's just for yourself, innit? It's like a personal thing” (HMP Downview Resident)

*“I was going to say there's another thing about that, a private place, you have no privacy in here. You know what I mean there's no real place unless you can find a classroom or an office somewhere where they let you go in there, there's no privacy”
(HMP Northumberland Resident)*

One resident commented that having a private space to go to could act as a source of motivation to leave their room and engage with the programme.

“Basically if I didn't leave my room today, the mood that I'm in I wouldn't have anyone coming to my room, to have this meeting, for example. So me coming out of my room has made this happen for myself because I was the type of person who would say, 'come another time.' I've done that before but because I made that effort to come here and the person who sees me makes an effort to see me.” (HMP Downview Resident)

From a mentor's perspective it was also felt that a private room would be more advantageous to work in than an individual's cell.

*“Why would we want to go in someone else's room? Just in case, for ourself, if they accuse, if the officers accuse us of doing something we're not doing or if they're saying 'you're not really doing anything, you're just sitting there' so it'd be better if we had a room.”
(HMP Downview Resident)*

Whilst many were critical of the lack of a designated private space to conduct lessons, it should be noted that one individual, who recently joined the Reading Plan, preferred lessons taking place in her room as opposed to an outside space.

*“I'd rather stay where I'm more comfortable.”
(HMP Downview Resident)*

The lack of viable private spaces to conduct reading lessons also had an impact on residents who suffered from physical disabilities.

*“We have a room on house block 14 upstairs on the 3's but it's no good for disabled people going up the stairs.”
(HMP Northumberland Resident)*

ASSOCIATION/MOVEMENT

The fact that lessons only take place during association time was a point raised by many residents, who felt that this made it less likely for learners and mentors to engage with the Reading Plan.

"It's done on association time so the Shannon Trust guys got to be willing to give up his own time and the guy that wants to read has got to be willing to give up his association time so that's two probably hindrances if you know what I mean?" (HMP Northumberland Resident)

Service user 1: "You have to prepare your food, you have to get your shower, have to get your phone call."

Service user 2: "Yup, yup, all the time you ain't got enough time." (HMP Featherstone Residents)

It was also commented that lessons being held in cells, during association time, led to a chaotic environment which was not conducive towards improving someone's reading ability.

"The reason why I say a classroom is better because if you go to classroom everybody willing to learn but if you're in a cell or in a wing maybe people laugh or doing the chaos or maybe people playing the pool or do the haircuts maybe phone to family." (HMP Northumberland Resident)

The restriction of movement placed on residents within the male estates was also perceived as hindering the number of people who could engage with the Shannon Trust Reading Plan.

"There's more people here that are willing and wanting to do something, you know what I'm saying so that's, then it comes down to staff and their regime, they're always changing it, the security they don't really like people moving about, so that's what's stopping success in this job, especially with Shannon Trust." (HMP Featherstone Resident)

One participant explained that not being able to teach individuals on different wings often meant that mentors and learners were split up during the process. This was particularly damaging as personal relationships and trust were seen as fundamentally important in encouraging people to engage with the Reading Plan.

"Because, the thing is yea a lot of people in this jail, you move from wing to wing sometimes and they don't allow you as a mentor to move about. So I'm mentoring this guy and also and he moves, that's it, he has to go and get a different mentor, in a different wing, which he might be started a little rapport with you and you gain a bit of trust from him, then he have to go somewhere to start over again, and it's not like you can follow." (HMP Featherstone Resident)

Residents were aware that this was due to security issues within the prison.

"They're doing wall to wall scans, there's a security issue, there's contraband issues and all sorts like that so there is a risk assessment." (HMP Northumberland Resident)

One individual, who had recently started the Reading Plan, explained how, due to the curtailed movements of prisoners, it was incredibly difficult to organise reading lessons with her mentor.

"I just want that one-to-one time with X so I can start going through my book and start actually progressing. But it's just ridiculous. Like, getting appointments and coinciding it with movement, trying to get someone to meet you at such and such is hard. It'd be handy to have a room to help the girls out." (HMP Downview Resident)

STAFF/PROCESS

Residents at one site remarked that there appeared to be a lack of awareness and communication among the prison staff, which meant that residents were receiving conflicting instructions from officers.

“Yeah, or they tell me, ‘ah, you can do it outside’ and then I’ll do it outside and then a CM will come and be like, ‘you’re not allowed to do it outside anymore.’” (HMP Downview Resident)

*“But the Governor told us we are so it’s like the CM’s are trying to go over Governors. Like, do you know what, you lot ain’t got a lot of sense between you because a higher grade is telling we can sit outside so we’re sitting outside with people and then the other one’s coming along saying, ‘you can’t sit out here’ because she’s in a bad mood.”
(HMP Downview Resident)*

Service users at another site, also felt that staff were not aware of the Shannon Trust.

“Officers don’t know what Shannon Trust is, confused, what is Shannon Trust?” (HMP Swaleside Resident)

Residents also explained that they constantly had to prove themselves to staff, to demonstrate that they were working productively for the Shannon Trust.

“Try and make them believe where we’re going and what we’re doing. Try and prove that we’re doing our job. Like, it was very hard, like, it was mad. It’s just mad.” (HMP Downview Resident)

Unfortunately, many staff appeared unaware of the work residents were doing for the Shannon Trust and thus treated volunteers suspiciously.

*“They’re just seeing you as walking around.”
(HMP Downview Resident)*

At one site, residents felt that the time it took for applications to be processed by the prison for the Shannon Trust and other services, had a significant impact on people’s motivation to learn and engage.

"It's not slow, it's no process - so then people feel like it's a false promise. They said something's going to happen, it doesn't happen so then people give up to ask. It's just a normal daily routine, they're just doing their jobs." (HMP Featherstone Resident)

"So a lot of people lack motivation." (HMP Featherstone Resident)

"Workshop applications, you can put in for anything, your orders they get mixed up, your canteens gets messed up, everything towards paperwork here." (HMP Featherstone Resident)

Residents commented that prisoners subsequently viewed the Shannon Trust within the context of other services provided by the prison and this again negatively impacted people's views towards the Shannon Trust.

"It revolves around the Shannon Trust, but it comes, it links in with every other thing, all the reputation in the jail at that time. If you're in another jail, a lot of things get done, they'll try it more, you know what I'm saying because there's not a lot going, there's stuff that's offered in this jail, don't work out so they think anything else you bring, it ain't going to work out." (HMP Featherstone Resident)

THEME THREE: SHANNON TRUST.

Regarding the Shannon Trust Reading Plan itself, service users were generally positive towards its main features.

81.1% of survey respondents stated that they would prefer to learn on a one-to-one basis as opposed to within a group. The predominant reason for this, was that it helped individuals overcome the potential embarrassment that was associated with not being able to read or write.

“One-to-one because the group thing that's more like an embarrassment like 'well I'm here because I can't read or write.’” (HMP Downview Resident)

“I just like it because of the one-on-one reading time and X helps me break it all down. That gives me a little bit of confidence back in myself because I suffer from a lot of mental health problems, so X has helped me with that too.” (HMP Downview Resident)

Residents also supported the use of private spaces to conduct the lessons but, as has been previously outlined, they felt these were not provided within the prison.

It was also felt that individuals developed reading skills at different speeds to one another and thus the Reading Plan's approach of learners developing at their own pace was correct.

“You can't have guidelines on it, everyone is going to learn at a different pace, some people might pick it up, I'm still 41 years old and it's not for the lack of trying I cannot pronounce the English alphabet or pronunciation of it and that's why I can't spell. And I can know the word and I can know what letters are in it, fucked if I know which order they're meant to go into.” (HMP Swaleside Resident)

It was suggested, however, by one service user that setting targets could encourage learners to better improve their reading ability.

“They're struggling they need the love and the support but they also need a bit of pushing and that's where I'm bringing in the pace and the time limit.” (HMP Swaleside Resident)

Roughly two thirds (62.7%) of survey respondents stated that they would prefer to be taught by a fellow prisoner as opposed to an outside professional.

Logistically, it was noted that a prisoner mentor would always be available to the learner, whereas an individual from outside the prison would only be accessible on certain occasions.

“Doesn't help the prisoner, because you've got to wait for that professional to come, you've got to wait for the meetings, if you've got peer, if you've got peer mentor on the wing that know what he's doing, he can go to that person, even if he's busy he can help you out some time. It's going to be quicker than the professional coming.” (HMP Featherstone Resident)

For many, preferring to be taught by a prisoner mentor was because they felt they would not be judged by a fellow prisoner.

“Especially as I want someone that I'm close to so they know that they won't judge me, I know them. Like, we have a good bond kind of thing. Someone that doesn't know me, I don't know if they're going to go home and chat about me and my reading, you know what I mean?” (HMP Downview Resident)

Having a prior relationship with a reading mentor and thus being comfortable with them, was seen as incredibly important in encouraging service users to commit to the Reading Plan.

“Yeah, she lived on my landing then she got moved up to the fourth... Just getting to know someone. Easier, because you know them, innit. So you find it easier.”(HMP Downview Resident)

Similarly, the importance of trust dominated the responses of those residents who preferred to be taught by an outside professional.

“Someone independent of the prison, not a prisoner or a prison officer. Someone from outside, to try and get past the embarrassment thing because if you got to live with someone and they know the secret then it's not good and then if someone who basically controls your life knows your secrets, you don't want to be around him. So someone independent who you only speak to about that and then they bugger off somewhere else, would probably be easier.”(HMP Swaleside Resident)

It was clear that regardless of whether an individual preferred to be taught by a prisoner mentor or professional, learners had to have a trusting relationship with their teacher and be assured that the sessions would be confidential.

*"If I trust them. In or out."
(HMP Swaleside Resident)*

*"As a Shannon Trust mentor, confidentiality is very important. Because when I get learners that come here, they want their confidentiality, they don't want you telling other guys "oh, that guy there can't read", that's embarrassing. Confidentiality is the most important thing when you're teaching someone."
(HMP Swaleside Resident)*

CRITICISMS

AWARENESS

Residents across all sites felt that the Shannon Trust Reading Plan was poorly advertised throughout the prisons and that many residents were not aware of the service.

*"It was three years before I even knew what Shannon Trust was. I knew of Shannon Trust but I didn't have a clue what they done. Not a clue."
(HMP Swaleside Resident)*

*"There's not enough awareness - that's the truth."
(HMP Featherstone Resident)*

Across all four focus groups, participants were critical of Shannon Trust posters and questioned their text-based nature.

“Especially if people can't read them. How can someone know what it says if they can't read the posters put up? They make it stick the poster up all over the prison, but what's the point? Is it for the Governor to make it look like we're doing something? (HMP Downview Resident)

*“It's no good having lots and lots of posters if people are still unable to read them.”
(HMP Northumberland Resident)*

*“There were posters but they were useless, there were Shannon Trust posters but they didn't explain nothing.”
(HMP Swaleside Resident)*

MALE CENTRIC

A resident at the female site remarked that Shannon Trust reading material was male dominated and thus not engaging for a female audience.

*“Even the pictures and all that, they're centred around men so even in the handbook given to the mentors and coordinators and that, it's all pictures of men teaching men in prisons so it needs to be like, with women in prison.”
(HMP Downview Resident)*

OLD FASHIONED

It was also suggested by one resident that the Shannon Trust adopted quite an old fashioned approach, which was not relatable for those involved.

*“It takes so long, people just lose interest. You need to, not like hype it a bit, but you need to be more relatable, like it's very stuck in the old age.”
(HMP Downview Resident)*

The resident also felt that the Shannon Trust did not promote the programme enough and this ultimately led to the prison not investing in the service either.

“And like, in Holloway, X used to come in - I haven't seen X since I've been in this prison for two years - he doesn't come here and he's the X of the Shannon Trust, so he obviously doesn't rate it. Like, they need to rate it a bit. If they backed it, the government would back it; it's like a thing, it'd roll on.”(HMP Downview Resident)

LEADERSHIP/TRAINING

For those residents who were mentors on the Shannon Trust Reading Plan, they felt they were not properly supported by the organisation.

“Support from the outside like Shannon Trust rep I didn't find very helpful because we haven't had no training.”(HMP Swaleside Resident)

One participant noted that they had received no advice on how to engage with potentially difficult individuals.

“And the hardest thing to do is actually to deal with prisoners, especially in this prison.”(HMP Swaleside Resident)

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

PRIVATE SPACE

Focus group participants across all four sites felt it was imperative that the Shannon Trust have its **own room**. This would be a **private space** where individuals would feel comfortable working in.

*“Get a room because that's the most important thing.”
(HMP Downview Resident)*

*“There's plenty of rooms in this prison that are not used all the time.”
(HMP Downview Resident)*

LESSON TIMES

Residents recommended that **lessons** take place during **regime hours** as opposed to during association. It was felt that the limited time and competing priorities of association meant that few could properly engage with the Reading Plan.

“Because of our regime change, there’s not enough time on social or weekends to actually teach people. Before there was enough time but now there plainly isn’t.” (HMP Swaleside Resident)

RAISE AWARENESS

Residents had a number of suggestions regarding raising the profile of the Shannon Trust Reading Plan within the prison.

It was felt that the **posters** should shift away from a text-based approach and instead be more **visually striking**.

“The poster needs to be set up with caricatures, with pictures.” (HMP Swaleside Resident)

“Like an infographic.” (HMP Swaleside Resident)

Awareness of the Shannon Trust also had to be spread through **word of mouth**. Residents suggested that individuals involved in the programme (mentors and, if willing, learners) be allowed to go onto each wing and **promote** the service. It was also stated that it would be beneficial if there was a mentor **positioned on each wing** of the prison.

“They should go round every wing and actually, like you said, someone that’s passionate, to actually speak to the lads and offer that support straight away and every word you say make sure it’s correct in the sense of, don’t make a promise if you can’t stick to it.” (HMP Featherstone Resident)

“Get the Learners that are actually on the course to go out there and promote it and help be peer mentors. Get people to go to doors and say, ‘right, this is what is happening at Shannon Trust, I’m on it, I’m progressing such and such.’ (HMP Downview Resident)

“Like he said, what you need is to get a person on all the wings. They have no person on the wings, people don’t know what Shannon Trust is.” (HMP Swaleside Resident)

It was also recommended that the Reading Plan should be incorporated within the **induction process**.

“No this is what I was saying, when you come to the induction, like if you're going to take this thing forward, that's the place where you need to start.” (HMP Featherstone Resident)

It was also felt that **promotion** should come from the **prisoners themselves**, as opposed to prison staff.

“Would go with the informal thing because ... I know a lot of people that if you're coming into prison... it could be the case that when you do the official thing just because it's official you don't want to do it. So the kind of informal I'll do it with you, I'll help you out rather than the establishment saying you've got to go to this class because lots of people will go, 'just because they've told me I've got to go to this class I will do my utmost, I will do my best to not do it just because the system's told me to do it'. Whereas if it's a fellow prisoner saying I will help you, a lot more people would, I believe, get a benefit from that.” (HMP Northumberland Resident)

DIRECTION

Service users felt that the programme needed **greater structure** to run successfully.

*“Service user 1: Structure.
Service user 2: Yeah, definitely.
Service user 1: Leadership.”
(HMP Downview Residents)*

Scheduling **designated slots** for learners in a private space, was viewed as a way to improve the structure of the course.

*“I'd be more motivated to read more stuff if I could go the library for an allocated slot, even if it's just for half an hour, someone else could then use it. It can work.”
(HMP Downview Resident)*

It was suggested that having a **Single Point of Contact** within the prison specifically designated with Shannon Trust duties would help to improve the operational capabilities of the Reading Plan.

*“If you got to a specific officer who's like you get there you got an officer that does like the transgender you know what I mean?”
(HMP Northumberland Resident)*

GROUP SESSIONS

As an **addition** to the regular one-to-one lessons, it was recommended that **group sessions** should be held as well. It was felt that the group environment, for those who wanted to participate, could act as a source of motivation.

“Having people in groups of similar capacity because I think kind of with the embarrassment thing, a lot of times if you don't you're having trouble with long words, if you know how to read to a certain level it would be nice to have people at a close enough level where you are so that you can feel like you're progressing with people because it's like going to the gym on your own, if you have a friend to go to the gym with it makes it nice and easier to kind of get motivated off each other” (HMP Northumberland Resident)

MENTORS

One focus group participant felt that it was important to **attract mentors** from as many **different cultural backgrounds** as possible. This would, potentially, allow learners to approach other individuals who they felt more comfortable talking to.

“Some of the Irish travellers only want to do it with myself, even though I’m not an Irish traveller but because I’m Irish will draw to that and we’ll get going from there... There’s no point just having one white guy and one black guy on there. You have to have all the characters, across all the different religions and ethnicities, all across the board. Because different people click different people. That’s just how it is, that’s how society is.”
(HMP Swaleside Resident)

Due to the security issues, in the male estates, which prevented residents from moving to different wings, it was felt that it was crucial to have **mentors on every wing** of the prison. This would ensure that all prisoners would have access to a reading mentor.

“At least a mentor on each wing, like you know what I mean? It would be nice.”
(HMP Featherstone Resident)

Mentors also felt that mechanisms needed to be put in place so that the mentors themselves could **receive feedback** on their **teaching style**. This would help improve the delivery quality of the Reading Plan and would improve the reputation of the Shannon Trust. It was suggested that feedback could take the form of group meetings where mentors could discuss their experiences.

“Feedback, how is the mentor doing as well? Not just the guy that’s learning how is the mentor putting it across. Who actually mentors the mentor?”
(HMP Northumberland Resident)

“I’d like meetings with the mentors, and get together all learn as mentors and bounce ideas of each other and say what we’re thinking.”
(HMP Downview Resident)

6. CONCLUSION

In summary, the service user recommendations for the Shannon Trust Reading Plan regarded:

- Private space
- Lesson times
- Raising awareness
- Direction
- Group sessions
- Mentors.

These recommendations are solely based on the service users' existing Reading Plan knowledge, or lack of it as the case may have been. Therefore the recommendations may not be completely relevant or applicable for the Shannon Trust. However, User Voice hopes that the insights gained through this prisoner-led review will help further develop the Reading Plan and assist the Shannon Trust in their work to support many more people in prison with improvements to their reading and writing abilities.

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