



# Life in prison: Peer support

A findings paper

by HM Inspectorate of Prisons

**January 2016**

### **Glossary of terms**

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Printed and published by:  
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons  
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30–34 Kingsway  
London  
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## Introduction

- I.1** This findings paper is part of a series which focuses on daily life in prisons and young offender institutions (YOIs) holding young adults aged 18 to 21 years. The series explores particular topics that are regularly reported to us as an issue during our routine inspections. We hope these findings papers will give people an insight into the reality of life in prison and will be of interest to practitioners and encourage further discussion. We expect that our findings and the good practice detailed in this paper will support the development of prison services.
- I.2** This findings paper summarises literature surrounding peer support in prison. It draws on evidence from recent inspections of local prisons undertaken by HM Inspectorate of Prisons and survey data from inspection reports published between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015. This data is aggregated and overall responses for the year are presented. Comments from confidential prisoner surveys conducted as part of the inspection process are also included in this report; these quotes are not ascribed to individual prisons or inspection reports. The paper explores the range of peer support schemes we came across in our inspections, prisoners' experiences and access to support, and the potential benefits and issues we identified through inspections.

## Background

- I.3** Peer support refers to a wide range of activities where prisoners assist other prisoners. Examples of activities include: emotional support, mentoring, advising, facilitating self-help or learning, providing practical assistance and representation. Prisoners often support each other informally. However, this findings paper defines peer support as a *formal* system where prisoners provide support to other prisoners. Peer supporters should not be confused with prison orderlies. Prison orderlies take on work to provide services contributing to the running of the prison. For example, a library orderly will contribute to the running of the library by locating resources, and administering the loan and return of books.
- I.4** A wide variety of terms are used to describe peer supporters in adult and young adult prisons. Peer support is widespread in prisons, but some prisons make more extensive use of these schemes than others.
- I.5** We expect peer support schemes to have clearly defined roles in place for peer supporters, involving training, supervision and support for those who are involved. The table below provides examples of the many peer support schemes we encountered on our inspections.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that some of these terms refer to similar schemes in operation under alternative names in different prisons. This list is not exhaustive but provides a wide range of examples.

**Examples of peer support schemes**

- Listeners
- Insiders
- Peer mentors
- Peer advisers
- Advice and guidance workers
- Community help and advice team workers
- Housing peer workers
- Toe By Toe mentors
- Learning mentors
- Buddies
- First nighters
- Health champions
- Recovery champions
- Drug recovery mentors
- Carers
- Real voice
- Basic intervention group
- Wing representatives
- Lifer representatives
- Violence reduction representatives
- Anti-bullying representatives
- Equality representatives
- Disability representatives
- Foreign national representatives
- Black and minority ethnic representatives
- Gypsy, Romany, Traveller representatives
- Older/younger prisoner representatives
- Catering representatives
- Prisoner welfare representatives

**1.6** Peer support is often promoted as a source of support that may be preferred by prisoners over formal or professional support from, for example, prison staff, psychologists, counsellors, doctors, social services, or probation.<sup>2</sup> Shared experiences and perspectives might mean that peers can offer judgement-free support and understanding that is different to the support provided by professionals.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, peers are easier to access for prisoners than professionals, making them a more readily available source of support.<sup>4</sup> Literature suggests that there are many potential benefits to peer support including: adjusting to prison life, reducing isolation, positive role-modelling, promoting healthy lifestyles and a decrease in levels of drug use.<sup>5</sup>

**1.7** There is evidence that becoming a peer supporter can also have a positive effect on prisoners and offenders, for example, by enhancing confidence and self-esteem, improving communication/organisational skills and behaviour, generating a positive self-image, increasing levels of independence, and gaining trust.<sup>6</sup> Becoming a peer supporter is a way for prisoners to demonstrate active citizenship.<sup>7</sup> Prisoners are also encouraged to take on peer support roles to achieve enhanced status on the incentives and earned privileges (IEP) scheme.<sup>8</sup> Some peer supporters are paid, and for others it is a voluntary activity. When training to become a peer supporter, there are some opportunities for prisoners to gain an accredited qualification.

<sup>2</sup> Blair, J. (2006) 'Self-discovered learning – peer tutoring at Blundeston prison', *The Research and Development Bulletin*, 4 (2); Parkin, S. and McKeganey, N. (2000) 'The rise and rise of peer education approaches', *Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy* 7 (3).

<sup>3</sup> Farrant, F. and Levenson, J. (2002) *Barred citizens: Volunteering and Active Citizenship by Prisoners*. London: Prison Reform Trust; Devilly, G., Sorbello, L., Eccleston, L. and Ward, T. (2005) 'Prison-based peer education schemes', *Aggression and Violent Behaviour*, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Boudin, K. and Weinstein, C. (2011) 'Peer education in prison: A rights-based approach'. In Beracochea, E., Weinstein, C. and Evans, D.P. (Eds) *Rights-based approaches to public health*. London: Springer.

<sup>5</sup> For example see: Jaffe, M. (2012) *The Listener Scheme in Prisons: Final Report on the Research Findings*. Ewell: Samaritans; South, J., Bagnall, A.M., Hulme, C., Woodall, J., Longo, R., Dixey, R., Kinsella, K., Raine, G., Vinnall-Collier, K., Wright, J. (2014) 'A systematic review of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of peer-based interventions to maintain and improve offender health in prison settings', *Health Services and Development Research*, 2 (35).

<sup>6</sup> Selected examples: Collica-Cox, K. (2014) 'Counting down: HIV prison-based peer education programs and their connection to reduced disciplinary infractions', *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 58 (8); Hunter, G. and Boyce, I. (2009) 'Preparing for employment: prisoners' experience of participating in a prison training programme', *The Howard Journal*, 48 (2).

<sup>7</sup> Edgar, K., Jacobson, J. and Biggar, K. (2011) *Time Well Spent: A practical guide to active citizenship and volunteering in prison*. London: Prison Reform Trust.

<sup>8</sup> PSI 30/2013 *Incentives and Earned Privileges*.

- I.8** Peer support is seen by NOMS as a particularly important aspect of efforts to reduce reoffending, by providing adequate support systems and helping prisoners to develop an alternative to the ‘offender’ identity.<sup>9</sup>
- I.9** While peer support schemes can be beneficial to the peer supporters themselves and the prisoners they support, there are risks associated with peer support schemes. Peer supporters may operate informally with little staff oversight and could be over-burdened with work.<sup>10</sup> Peer supporters may also have access to confidential or sensitive information and could take advantage of the role to bully, exploit or abuse potentially vulnerable prisoners. Equally, peer supporters may be vulnerable themselves as a result of the privileges, access and information they have as part of their roles. Therefore selection, training, supervision and support are necessary to ensure the wellbeing of both the peer supporters and the prisoners they support.
- I.10** A new Prison Service Instruction (PSI 17/2015) outlines the principles that apply to all formal arrangements for prisoners to provide assistance, including meeting certain needs for care and support, to other prisoners. The PSI requires that all prisons have the ability to mobilise assistance from other prisoners should it be needed for a prisoner who has a care and support plan or is awaiting a care and support needs assessment. The guidance emphasises the need for appropriate selection, risk assessment, training, support and supervision of prisoners providing care to prisoners with disabilities or additional needs.
- I.11** The findings presented in this paper include inspections in adult prisons. Inspections of establishments detaining children and young people have not been included.

## Our expectations

- I.12** We inspect against criteria known as *Expectations*.<sup>11</sup> Expectations describe the standards of treatment and conditions we expect an establishment to achieve. Each expectation is underpinned by ‘indicators’ which suggest evidence that may indicate whether the expectations have been achieved. The list of indicators is not exhaustive and these do not exclude an establishment demonstrating the expectation has been met in other ways. Peer support is assessed under the healthy prison areas of ‘safety’ and ‘respect’. However we also commonly report on peer support schemes that are relevant to ‘purposeful activity’ and ‘resettlement’.

### Safety

- Prisoners are provided with information on what to expect at the prison and are given information about sources of help available, including the chaplaincy team, Listeners or Insiders and the Samaritans, in appropriate formats and languages.
- All prisoners are explicitly offered the chance to speak to a member of the chaplaincy team, or a Listener or Insider, on their first night and the following morning.
- Prisoners have access to counsellors, the chaplaincy team, Listeners, the Samaritans and the consistent support of their named officer/key worker.
- There is a peer support/befriending scheme in place to support prisoners new to custody.
- A care suite is available to support the work of Samaritan-trained Listeners.
- Prisoners can gain additional support through peer mentoring schemes and self-help groups.

<sup>9</sup> NOMS (2014) *Evidence and Segmentation Companion document to NOMS Commissioning Intentions*.

<sup>10</sup> Jaffe, M. (2012) *The Listener Scheme in Prisons: Final report on the Research Findings*. Ewell: Samaritans.

<sup>11</sup> HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2012) *Expectations: Criteria for assessing the treatment of prisoners in prisons*. London: HMIP.

## Respect

- Prisoner equality representatives have appropriate job descriptions and meet regularly, both with equality staff and as part of a wide forum including managers, staff and prisoners.
- Through regular consultation meetings and surveys, prisoners are able to raise issues on any aspect of equality.
- Equality representatives are able to develop their roles to support other prisoners.
- Where possible, a recognised peer support scheme is in place for prisoners with a range of diverse needs.
- Prisoners with disabilities are identified systematically on arrival, given (where appropriate) a multidisciplinary care plan which is kept up to date and, where necessary, have access to social care through an organised peer support scheme.
- Staff systematically consult with prisoner representatives about what items they would like to see on the purchases list or available through alternative means.

**1.13** The new women's *Expectations*<sup>12</sup> expect that women also have opportunities to help other women in prison as a form of purposeful activity.

- Women are given opportunities to use their skills for the benefit of other women (for example in peer mentoring and support roles).

## Our findings

**1.14** We came into contact with a wide variety of peer support schemes in the prisons we visited. These have been grouped under three broad areas based on prisoners' journeys through prison from arrival to release:

- peer support during early days in custody
- peer support in day to day prison life
- peer support for learning, skills and release planning support.

### Peer support during early days in custody

**1.15** The first few days in custody, in particular the first 24 hours, can be particularly stressful and daunting for prisoners.<sup>13</sup> There is an elevated risk of suicide and self-harm: almost 20% of self-inflicted deaths and 10% of all incidents of self-harm in custody in 2014 occurred within the first seven days in a prison.<sup>14</sup> Peer supporters can play an important role as a source of information, reassurance and support for prisoners, to assist them in adapting to prison life.

**1.16** Peer support is now an integrated part of the majority of prisons' reception and induction processes.<sup>15</sup> We saw the use of peer supporters in the majority of the prisons we inspected.<sup>16</sup> We often found peer supporters whose main role was to introduce new prisoners to prison life, providing information, advice and assistance to prisoners during the early days in custody. Some of these peer supporters were known as Insiders<sup>17</sup> or buddies.

<sup>12</sup> HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2014) *Expectations: Criteria for assessing the treatment of and conditions for women in prisons*. London: HMIP.

<sup>13</sup> See HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2015) *Findings paper: Life in prison – The first 24 hours in prison*. London: HMIP.

<sup>14</sup> NOMS Safety in Custody Statistics Quarterly Update to March 2015: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/safety-in-custody-quarterly-update-to-march-2015>.

<sup>15</sup> PSI 74/2011.

<sup>16</sup> This findings paper includes all adult and young adult inspections that were published between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Insider schemes are led by individual prisons and operate according to local arrangements.

Peer supporters provided a range of support, information and practical guidance such as prison tours, presentations, handing out reception packs and explaining how the prison operated.

- I.17** Peer supporters often talked to prisoners who were waiting for long periods of time in reception holding rooms, offering hot drinks, providing prisoners with bedding, clothing or toiletries and answering their questions. They were often a source of reassurance and assistance to prisoners but also carried out additional tasks, such as induction screening to identify prisoners with additional needs – such as those with a disability or foreign national status. For example, at HMP Thameside (2015) newly arrived prisoners were offered a hot drink and a biscuit by peer supporters who made efforts to put them at ease on their first night and explained how to use the in-cell technology. Peer supporters known as ‘first nighters’ at HMP Foston Hall (2015), met with newly arrived women before they were locked up for the night to answer any questions. The following morning, they subsequently checked on the women to see how they were after their first night. This support was valued by the women there. We found examples of peer supporters providing tours of prisons for newly arrived prisoners, introducing them to the prison routine and acting as guides in a number of prisons we inspected:

*‘A buddy showed me around the establishment and I was informed of everything I needed to know before I started my induction.’<sup>18</sup>*

- I.18** The support offered was valued by prisoners who could often find the reception and induction process overwhelming, as one prisoner explained:

*‘It is very overwhelming to have so much information within the first few days, but people like safer custody [staff], Insiders and peer mentors are a great resource to have.’*

- I.19** The access to peer supporters for newly arrived prisoners varied within some establishments. For example, at HMP Dartmoor (2014) we found that vulnerable prisoners received a useful and informative presentation by Insiders in addition to immediate support from well-trained Listeners. However, this was not the case for mainstream prisoners entering the establishment.

- I.20** In some prisons, peer supporters did not have a clear role with appropriate boundaries, nor did they have adequate supervision. In some of the prisons we inspected we were concerned that peer supporters had inappropriate access to confidential information about newly arrived prisoners or were conducting risk assessments (about cell-sharing, mental health and resettlement, for example). This concern was raised during our inspection and by prisoners themselves:

*‘People with mental health issues need to be assessed by mental health staff not handed over to an inmate Listener, as most of the time they have no satisfying feedback or answers.’*

- I.21** It is not the role of peer supporters to complete the work of paid staff.<sup>19</sup> While peer support was valued by prisoners in the prisons we inspected, the offer of staff support was also necessary. Clear mechanisms should be in place for peer supporters to pass on information of concern to staff.

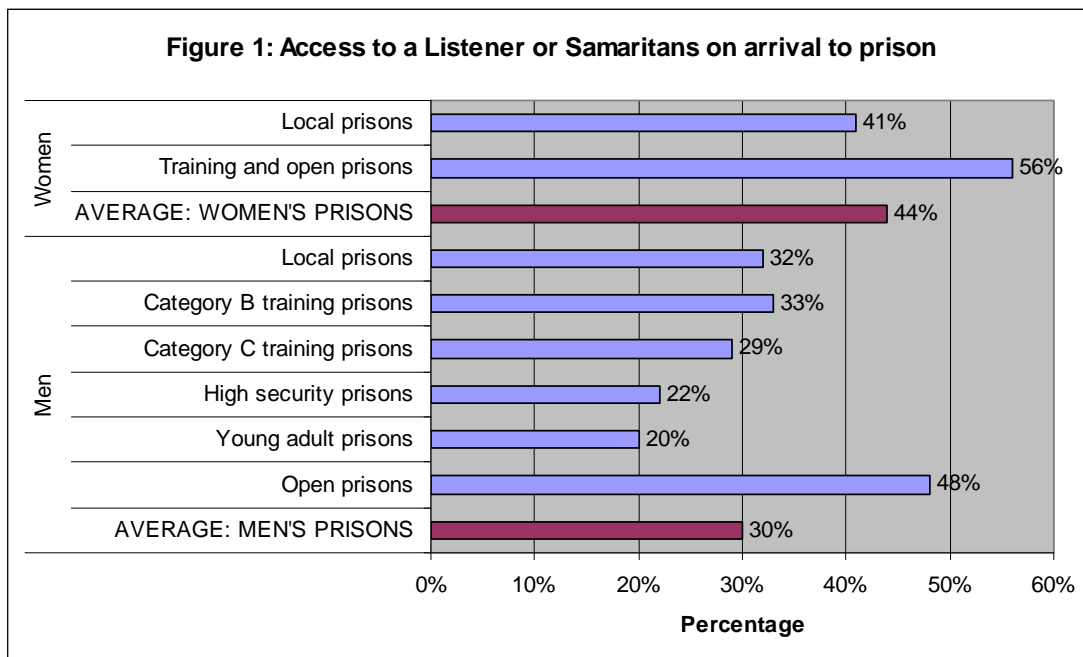
<sup>18</sup> Comment from confidential prisoner survey conducted as part of the inspection process.

<sup>19</sup> See Schinkel, M. and Whyte, B. (2012) ‘Routes out of prison using life coaches to assist resettlement’, *The Howard Journal*, 51 (4).

### The Listener peer support scheme

The Listener scheme is another source of peer support that is commonly available to prisoners on their arrival to prison. Listeners are prisoners who are trained by Samaritans to provide emotional support to fellow prisoners. More details about the Listener scheme can be found in the section about day to day prison life.

- I.22** Our prisoner survey asks prisoners about their access to a Listener or Samaritans on arrival to prison. Overall, 30% of the adult male prisoners we surveyed across all functional types reported that they had access to a Listener or Samaritans on their arrival to prison, which seems low. However, it is often difficult for a prisoner to recall who they had seen in reception, and inspectors found that Listeners were available for newly arrived prisoners in many of the prisons we inspected. We found that a significantly higher percentage of women surveyed reported that they had access to a Listener or Samaritan on arrival (44%). The evidence from our inspections indicated that Listeners were more likely to be part of the induction process for women's prisons.



- I.23** Figure 1 shows that adult male prisoners in open prisons were most likely to report having access to a Listener or Samaritans on arrival, followed by adult men in category B training prisons, local prisons and category C training prisons. However, adult men in high security prisons and young adults were less likely to report having access to Listeners or Samaritans on arrival. In a small number of establishments Listeners did not see all new arrivals or were not easily identifiable in reception.

- I.24** Two-fifths (41%) of women in local prisons reported having access to a Listener or Samaritans on arrival. In women's training and open prisons, this figure was 56%. Access to Listeners is especially important for prisoners who may not yet be sentenced who are arriving at local prisons; these prisoners may be extremely distressed at having been sent to custody, particularly if this is a long distance away from family and friends.

- I.25** Despite the varied access to Listeners in different types of establishments reported by prisoners in our surveys, we did observe that some form of peer support was available to prisoners new to establishments in many of the prisons we inspected.



## Peer support in day to day prison life

- I.26** Inspectors found a range of peer support designed to assist prisoners in their day to day lives in the prisons we inspected. These included Listeners, peer representatives, and health champions or mentors. We also found one example of a peer representative scheme for veterans at HMP North Sea Camp (2014).
- I.27** In the small number of prisons we inspected where no peer support was in place, some prisoners acted as an informal source of support to other prisoners. This posed a potential risk, as prisoners providing support were potentially operating without any formal training, supervision or support.

### Listeners

- I.28** As well as the role Listeners have in the reception and induction process, Listeners can also provide support to prisoners at any point during their time in custody.

#### Listener schemes

Listener schemes are supported in the majority of adult and young adult prisons across England and Wales and it is Prison Service policy to work with Samaritans to support Listener schemes where possible.<sup>20</sup> The Listener scheme was introduced in 1991 when there had been a significant rise in the number of suicides in prisons.<sup>21</sup> The Listener scheme was in operation in almost every adult prison we inspected.

The aim of the Listener scheme is to contribute to the alleviation of feelings of distress among prisoners<sup>22</sup> and to assist in reducing the number of incidents of self-harm and suicide among prisoners. The emotional support is confidential, non-judgemental, non-directive and is provided face-to-face. Listeners may live in close proximity to the people they support. This is in contrast to the support provided by the Samaritans, where much of it is via telephone or email and therefore anonymous.

#### Listener selection and training

Listeners are selected and trained by Samaritans. The training involves role play to simulate the type of scenarios Listeners may come across. Listeners are trained to adhere to Samaritans' guidelines and approach to emotional support. A key principle is confidentiality; in practice this means that Listeners should not disclose any information a prisoner tells them, including thoughts of suicide and self-harm. Samaritans hold regular meetings with Listeners to debrief about the support they have provided to prisoners and to deliver ongoing training.

- I.29** Listeners were regularly trained and supported by Samaritans in many of the prisons we visited. In some establishments an event was held to mark the completion of a training course and the family members of newly trained Listeners were invited to attend. In many of the prisons we inspected, Listeners reported that they felt well supported by Samaritans and also felt supported and valued by prison staff. We found that it was more difficult to maintain a Listener group where prisoner turnover was higher. This was particularly the case in local prisons, but also in some training prisons where prisoners regularly moved on to open conditions as they progressed in their sentence.

<sup>20</sup> PSO 2700

<sup>21</sup> For an overview of the history and development of the Listener scheme see:  
<http://www.samaritans.org/sites/default/files/kcfinder/files/The%20development%20of%20Samaritans%20listener%20scheme.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.samaritans.org/your-community/our-work-prisons/listener-scheme>

**Listener rotas**

Ideally, Listeners operate a rota system to enable them to provide support to prisoners 24 hours a day. This is particularly important for prisoners who may be feeling suicidal at night when they are locked in their cells. At these times, prisoners can use the cell call bell to draw the attention of a member of staff who would then be responsible for getting the Listener who is on call. The Listener may be located in another part of the prison and will therefore have to be unlocked and escorted by staff to the prisoner. Once a Listener has finished supporting a prisoner, a member of staff must once again be called via the cell call bell so that the Listener can return to their cell. This can result in delays while waiting for staff to respond.

**I.30** Inspectors were pleased to see a comprehensive Listener service in place at HMP/YOI Chelmsford (2014); prisoners could speak to Listeners privately, young adults had full access to Listeners and individual Listener rotas had been established for each wing. However, at several inspections we found that there were common issues reported about the Listener scheme, regarding access for prisoners who had requested support, particularly at night, during periods of lock up or in segregation units. Comments added by prisoners in our surveys also suggested that some prisoners were concerned about the ability to access Listeners at any time:

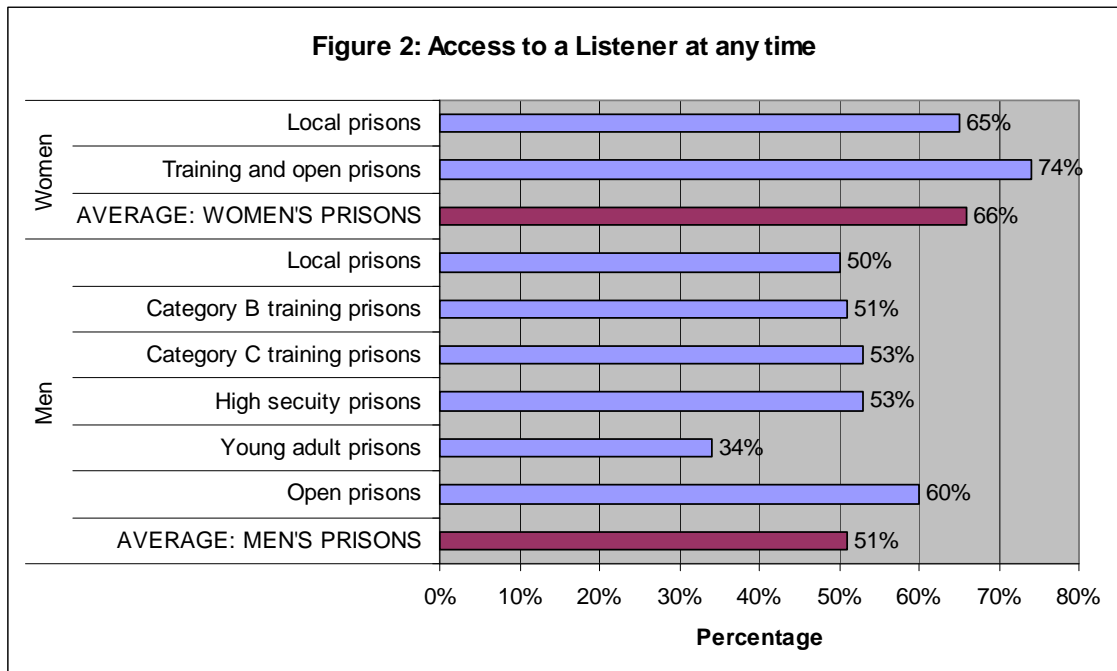
*‘Staff try to avoid getting Listeners to see inmates outside of the core day.’*

*‘I was refused a Listener once (the only time I asked) as staff were “too busy”’.*

**I.31** Another comment from a prisoner suggests that perceived access to Listeners is reduced when they are not visible on all wings.

*‘The prison has ignored requests from prisoners to have Listeners walking around each wing once or twice a week. Now half of the eight wings have no Listener presence at all.’*

**I.32** Our survey findings indicated that prisoners’ experiences of being able to access a Listener at any time varied between types of establishment.



- I.33** A significantly higher percentage of women prisoners (66%) reported being able to speak to a Listener at any time compared with men (51%). More men in open prisons reported having access to a Listener at any time than in the other adult men's functional types. This difference can also be seen in women's prisons, where slightly fewer women (65%) in local prisons reported being able to speak to a Listener at any time than women in training and open prisons (74%). Access to Listeners or Samaritans may be easier to facilitate in training and open prisons where there are fewer restrictions of movement. Only 34% of young adults surveyed reported having access to a Listener at any time. In one establishment it was clear that this was linked to the Listener service not being promoted to prisoners and Listeners not being unlocked at nights to speak to prisoners.
- I.34** The finding that Listeners were more likely to be part of the induction process for women's prisons (see paragraph I.22) may mean that subsequent perceived access to Listeners among women is greater. Baroness Corston<sup>23</sup> and others have identified fundamental differences between the needs of men and women prisoners and their experience of prisons. Levels of distress in women's prisons, as indicated for example by proportionately much greater levels of self-harm, mean that access to Listeners is particularly important.

#### **Good practice**

At HMP and YOI Styal (2015), the safer custody hub (a drop-in centre) was accessible to all women and offered a wide range of both peer and specialist staff input to those feeling vulnerable, isolated or otherwise in need of support on a drop-in basis.

- I.35** In adult male local prisons, first time prisoners and prisoners on remand are particularly vulnerable and may need additional support. First time prisoners will be adapting to life in prison and finding out how to access support in the establishment. Prisoners who are on remand and have not yet been sentenced may feel uncertain about their future and may not yet have the same level of access to facilities as sentenced prisoners. Our surveys of prisoners highlighted that:
- first time prisoners were significantly less likely to report having access to a Listener at any time (45% compared with 52% of prisoners who had been in prison before);
  - first time prisoners may not remember all the information provided to them on arrival and may be less aware than other prisoners about the support available to them;
  - significantly more sentenced prisoners (55%) indicated that they could access a Listener at any time compared with prisoners who were not sentenced (43%).
- I.36** Prisoners should be able to request a Listener and speak to them discretely and confidentially to avoid other prisoners overhearing or observing. However at a number of inspections, we discovered that when Listeners went to see prisoners they had to talk through locked cell doors; this meant that conversations could be overheard and were therefore not confidential.

#### **Good practice**

At HMP Send (2014) the use of pre-printed Listener request cards meant women did not have to make a verbal request to see a Listener, which could have been overheard by other prisoners.

<sup>23</sup> Corston, J. (2007) *A Report by Baroness Jean Corston of a Review of Women with Particular Vulnerabilities in the Criminal Justice System*. London: Home Office.

- I.37** The setting in which they talk is also important. Confidential settings where prisoners feel comfortable are more conducive to support. A Listener suite is normally a double cell that has been converted to provide a comfortable setting where a prisoner can talk confidentially to a Listener, and if necessary spend the night. One Listener in our survey expressed concern that there were no Listener suites available at the establishment:

*'Listener suites should be made available. Sometimes it is difficult doing a listen in a prisoner's cell, especially in daytime.'*

- I.38** Listener suites were in use at some of the prisons we inspected. However, not all of them were appropriate settings for support to take place in; some lacked suitable furnishings and appliances, some were in a poor condition, dirty, or damaged and some were stark and unwelcoming. Inspectors found that the Listener suite in one prison was blood-spattered.

### Peer representatives

- I.39** Another form of peer support involves prisoners becoming representatives for other prisoners. There are many different areas covered by peer representatives including, for example, equality and diversity, violence reduction, disability, foreign nationals and older prisoners. Representatives can signpost and advise prisoners, monitor practice to ensure the appropriate channels are being followed, take prisoners' concerns to consultation meetings with prison staff, resolve issues and influence changes in practice. Where effective, this form of peer support can give prisoners a voice and provide opportunities for the experiences of prisoners to be shared with prison staff, and be used to have a positive impact on prison life.
- I.40** Peer representatives should have a clear job description and receive training to ensure they fully understand their role. We found a small number of prisons where peer representatives received an accredited qualification for taking part in training, for example, a National Certificate for Further Education (NCFE) in equality and diversity which is a welcome practice. We found good examples of effective peer representative schemes at many prisons. For example, at HMP Leicester (2014) each prisoner representative took the lead on a protected characteristic and completed equality and diversity training provided by Milton Keynes College. The representatives were promoted on notice boards. All representatives attended the prisoner equality action team meetings which were chaired by the deputy governor. Prisoner representative schemes were most effective when all prisoners had good levels of access to peer representatives and knowledge about the support available.
- I.41** We found that not all prisons with prisoner representatives had sufficiently developed the role for them to be effective. In these establishments, although many equality and diversity representatives were positive about their role, some had only been provided with role descriptions and had not received any formal training. In other prisons it was evident that prisoners had a lack of understanding and knowledge about who the prisoner representatives were and what they did.
- I.42** Having a referral system in place that was supported by strong links between prison staff and representatives meant that prisoners could be directed to services and support. At HMP Wakefield (2014) anti-bullying representatives referred prisoners to the safer custody team. The success of peer representation schemes, in part, depended on prison staff being able to respond to the issues raised and make changes. This sometimes occurred at a slow pace. Progress was also hindered where the diversity representatives did not meet regularly with one another or with staff to pursue issues that were raised and monitor the response.

## Violence reduction and anti-bullying representatives

- I.43** Some prisons will use violence-reduction or anti-bullying representatives to help resolve disputes between prisoners and address poor behaviour. These can be useful roles but there is a clear risk that prisoners can abuse these positions or be encouraged by staff to act as informal discipline enforcers. Careful selection and supervision of prisoners in these roles is essential. At HMP Elmley (2014) for instance, prisoner violence reduction representatives played a high profile role; they helped maintain order by filling the gaps left by the inconsistent staff presence on the wings and attended meetings with managers to discuss their work. However, they were given too much power and we were not assured that they were always exercising it responsibly.

### Good practice

At HMP Oakwood (2014) the 'Basic Intervention Group' (BIG) comprised a group of carefully selected prisoners who worked with prisoners on the basic level of the Incentives and Earned Privileges scheme with their consent to help them improve their behaviour and relationships with staff and other prisoners. The 'Cordial Group' provided support to victims of violence and other isolated prisoners.

## Peer-led self-help, health champions and carers

- I.44** Peer support is also used in prisons to support: physical health needs through therapeutic self-help groups; 'health champions' who refer prisoners to relevant services, promote healthy behaviour, and support prisoners to change their lifestyles; or prisoner carers who assist prisoners with additional needs.

### Self-help groups

Self-help groups are most commonly used to assist prisoners with drugs or alcohol recovery, for example Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA). In some prisons, self-help groups may be accessed via the Drugs and Alcohol Recovery Teams (DARTs).

### RAPt peer supporters

The substance dependence treatment programme led by the Rehabilitation for Addicted Prisoners Trust (RAPt)<sup>24</sup> is based on the AA and NA models. Prisoners who graduate from the 22-week recovery programme can become peer supporters who assist prisoners joining the programme. The support provided includes leading self-help groups, one-to-one support and signposting.

- I.45** We observed that many of the prisons we visited, in particular adult male Category B local prisons, had well developed and effective peer support for substance misuse schemes in place. These self-help groups are led by individuals who have personal experience of substance misuse and recovery, and provide support to others going through the same issues. At HMP Wormwood Scrubs (2014) there was good use of peer supporters, including four peer supporters who worked in the detoxification unit for prisoners who were receiving interventions from RAPt.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.rapt.org.uk/>

- I.46** Peer supporters, sometimes known as drug recovery mentors or recovery champions, were often resident on drug recovery wings/substance misuse units in the prisons we inspected, which meant that prisoners had good access to support. At HMP Leicester (2014) there was a high ratio of peer supporters to prisoners on the substance misuse unit which meant that they were making a significant contribution to the progress that prisoners made through the delivery of relaxation sessions, one-to-one support and facilitating groups.

#### **Good practice**

At HMP Isis (2014) the substance misuse team had developed interactive methods of working and innovative interventions, such as mentoring gang members.

The excellent peer supporter programme and the recovery unit at HMP Springhill (2014) promoted positive outcomes for prisoners with substance misuse issues at both Springhill and Aylesbury.

#### **Health peer supporters**

Peer support is less well developed in the area of health. However, local schemes may be developed where NHS England area teams commission them. Schemes may be provided under a service level agreement formed with a partner organisation that provides its own training scheme. Other in-house schemes may be formed using prisoners who have obtained qualifications in customer service or peer support. Not all schemes have an adequate training system in place. Service user feedback would normally be used to inform the development of services.

- I.47** We found some excellent examples of prisons using 'health champions' and 'recovery champions', for example, at HMP Eastwood Park (2014). We also found evidence of some peer supporters taking on a particularly proactive role.
- I.48** In HMP Lincoln (2014) we found that health champions were proactive in promoting personal fitness and healthy lifestyles to prisoners. The health champions at HMP Long Lartin (2015) distributed information to prisoners about health services and led improvements. We also observed health champions assisting prisoners with other health issues such as smoking cessation, weight loss and the identification of cancer.

#### **Good practice**

At HMP North Sea Camp (2014), early presentation of cancer (EPOC) ambassadors educated other prisoners to identify early signs of cancer and other major illnesses and to seek assistance. The ambassadors created a cancer awareness DVD together with a volunteer from Lincoln University. The DVD was shown as part of the induction for new prisoners in conjunction with a presentation by EPOC ambassadors about the information and support service they offered.

The new health care representatives' meeting was a positive development at HMP Foston Hall (2015). It prompted cooperation between women and health care staff and was run in a flexible but structured way.

### Carer schemes

Carer schemes have been developed to assist older prisoners and prisoners with disabilities or additional needs. Paid prisoner carers can help prisoners with daily tasks such as putting toothpaste on toothbrushes, making hot drinks, collecting and cutting up food, providing reminders or mental stimuli. Carers can also support movement or transportation, such as pushing wheelchairs to ensure that prisoners have equitable access to education, offending behaviour programmes or other events. The assistance provided by prisoners should not involve any aspect of personal care such as washing intimate areas or organising medication. In some prisons, screening checks are carried out on prospective carers (including considering previous convictions, current offence and behaviour record) to assess their suitability for the role. The training provided to prisoners providing care should outline the boundaries of the support that can be offered; these have been recently outlined in PSI 17/2015.<sup>25</sup>

- I.49** Very few prisons we inspected operated formal carer schemes. This meant that some prisoners' needs were not met:

*'It's difficult to get to church as I'd need someone to take me in my wheelchair.'*

- I.50** Where we found carer schemes in operation, we found some inconsistency in practice. For example, some carer schemes were available only on particular wings and were not prison-wide. Some carers had been required to sign a compact setting out guidelines for conduct but had not received any formal training. Not all carers were being paid in the prisons we inspected. We found examples where prisoners with disabilities relied on other prisoners for informal, voluntary help; these prisoners were not formally trained, risk assessed or monitored by staff. This put the recipients of the voluntary care at risk of abuse, neglect, bullying and intimidation and put carers at risk of injury through no formal training.
- I.51** Older prisoners are the fastest growing group in the prison population<sup>26</sup> and this will inevitably mean that the number of those who need care will increase. The 2014 Care Act, which came into effect from April 2015, places responsibility for assessment and social care support with the local authority. It is not yet known if this will impact on the care that prisoners receive from their peers, although it is clear that there will continue to be a need for support with daily tasks by other prisoners and that this will form a part of some prisoners' care and support plans.

### Peer support for learning, skills and release support

- I.52** This final section outlines our findings with respect to peer support for learning, the development of skills and support for release and resettlement. There were two main types of peer supporters: learning mentors, and advice and guidance workers.

#### Learning mentors

- I.53** Many prisons have established peer support schemes where prisoners become learning mentors and support other prisoners in education and training.

<sup>25</sup> See also PSI 15/2015 *Adult Social Care* and PSI 16/2015 *Adult Safeguarding*.

<sup>26</sup> Prison Reform Trust (2015) *Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile Autumn 2015*.

### Learning peer supporters

Peer supporters, often called learning mentors, help less able prisoners with additional needs to develop their knowledge, ability and skills. One of the most widely known peer support schemes in this area is Turning Pages (formerly known as Toe by Toe), a peer mentoring scheme supported by the Shannon Trust which helps prisoners learn to read. In some prisons screening tools are used during induction to identify the level of need among prisoners supported by assigned mentors for prisoners; however many prisons have extremely ineffective systems for identifying prisoners who have learning disabilities.<sup>27</sup>

- I.54** During our inspections we found evidence for effective 'Turning Pages schemes in the majority of prisons. These schemes were well integrated with prison libraries. They were also well supported by the Shannon Trust which ensured that there were a high number of suitably managed and trained Toe by Toe mentors providing beneficial support to prisoners. In some prisons we found that restrictions of movement within prisons restricted opportunities for prisoners to become mentors.
- I.55** We found several good examples of prisons using other types of learning mentors. Inspectors were impressed with the peer mentoring scheme at HMP/YOI Parc (2014) where around 50 trained peer mentors provided excellent support to individual prisoners and groups, and provided one-to-one support for prisoners with additional learning needs. At HMP Altcourse (2014) peer mentors were well trained and acted as role models, encouraging prisoners to develop employability skills. At HMP Bristol (2015) the trained and accredited peer mentors acted as a conduit between education providers and prisoners. They promoted peer learning and provided individual support to prisoners. Inspectors were pleased to see presentations, that peer mentors had developed themselves, delivered to prisoners on residential units. Inspectors felt that these efforts were improving participation rates among prisoners.
- I.56** Becoming a mentor was often described as a positive experience by prisoners in our survey and in our discussions with prisoners during our inspections. Learning mentors at HMP Isis (2014) reported increased confidence and self-esteem. A mentor completing our survey noted:
- 'My job as a peer mentor helps me to feel less inhuman, as I can help others.'*
- I.57** Inspectors frequently found that learning mentors were also well respected by prisoners.
- I.58** As with all forms of peer support in prison, it is important that learning mentors are appropriately supervised. The supervision of learning mentors was not consistent in all of the establishments we visited. While some peer mentors were well trained and gained qualifications, not all received adequate staff supervision.

### Peer advice and guidance

- I.59** In the prisons we inspected, the provision of advice, guidance and mentoring by peers for prisoners' resettlement needs was not as well established as learning support for prisoners.

<sup>27</sup> HMI Probation and HMI Prisons (2015) *A joint inspection of the treatment of offenders with learning disabilities within the criminal justice system – phase 2 in custody and the community*. Manchester: HMI Probation.



However in some inspections we found that peers were being used extensively for this purpose.

### Peer advisers

The St Giles Trust lead a peer advice scheme in prisons. Prisoners obtain a formal qualification in advice and guidance (NVQ) and support the resettlement of prisoners in areas such as housing, employment and training. There are other examples of peer advice schemes led by other organisations, for example, concerning legal or financial matters, including the Prisoners' Advice Service and Citizen's Advice Bureau.

- I.60** We found examples where prisoners were trained to answer questions, make referrals, complete routine notifications to agencies regarding tenancies or benefits, and signpost prisoners who needed help with offender management, housing and finance. Some prisons had drop-in centres or telephone helplines. Where a scheme was not fully established, many prisons were planning to train, or had recently trained prisoners, who would go on to offer support in the future.
- I.61** The St Giles Trust trained prisoners to achieve NVQ qualifications in advice and guidance in some of the prisons we inspected. Trained prisoners provided support with accommodation, debt and benefit advice and support for financial issues. We found that there was the possibility of employment on release for some qualified mentors. In a small number of prisons Shelter also trained prisoners to give housing advice to other prisoners.
- I.62** Inspectors were pleased to see that some peer advice and guidance workers were involved in screening prisoners during induction to identify needs and ensure support was in place in preparation for release. This was particularly evident in the women's prisons we inspected. 'Peer connections' at HMP Peterborough (Women) (2014) assessed prisoners during induction to identify their needs and made appropriate referrals to the resettlement team. This meant that needs could be addressed promptly and were identified early on.

### Good practice

At HMP Eastwood Park (2014) the extension of the peer mentor scheme to the community provided women with informed and experienced support when they might need it most.

The resettlement coordinator prisoners were trained and supervised to a good level in HMP Oakwood (2015). The support and advice they provided to prisoners, including through the resettlement advice line and prisoner helpline (RALPH), was helpful across a range of areas.

At HMP Northumberland (2015) the Gateway addiction rehabilitation programme was successful in changing prisoners' attitudes and behaviour and demonstrated the effective use of peer mentors in rehabilitation.

- I.63** At HMP Wakefield (2014), the Wayfinder peer support project was an encouraging initiative. Selected prisoners who had completed interventions were trained by the assessment and interventions centre (AIC) staff to support their peers, including those who were in denial of some or all aspects of their offending behaviour.
- I.64** Many peer advice and guidance workers we spoke to were enthusiastic about their role and carried it out in an organised way. However, some peer advice and guidance workers had

access to personal information about other prisoners which was not appropriate and was of particular concern in the prisons where they received little supervision.

## Conclusion

- I.65** Peer support is used widely in prisons and its importance is recognised in many of the prisons we inspected. It can be an effective and readily available source of support for prisoners for a variety of issues, and can also be a beneficial activity for the prisoner peer supporters themselves.
- I.66** Some peer support schemes were more well-established than others. We saw more widespread effective use of Listener schemes and Turning Pages schemes. Diversity representatives were widespread but practice and oversight varied and so did the effectiveness of the schemes.
- I.67** In our inspections we found that successful peer support schemes had many of the following features:
- appropriate screening and selection processes for peer supporters
  - accredited training
  - an appropriately defined role and use of a job description
  - information provided to prisoners about available peer support at reception, induction and on residential units, including the use of presentations and other advertising materials
  - risk assessments taking into account both peer supporters and the prisoners they support
  - appropriate freedom of movement for peer supporters to be available to prisoners
  - supervision by staff and/or a supporting organisation
  - opportunities for peer supporters to feed back to prison staff.
- I.68** With appropriate safeguards, prisoners could play an essential role as carers for the increasing number of elderly and other prisoners who are unable to adequately look after themselves. Despite the clear growing need, the requirement under the Care Act 2014 for that need to be met and the potential of prisoner carers to have an important part in doing so, we have found surprisingly few effective prisoner carer schemes.
- I.69** Peer supporters have proved their worth in prisons. It is important that the potential for prisoners to provide care should be carefully thought about; in particular, how prisoners can be a resource given the 2014 Care Act.

## Acknowledgements

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