



Review of Offenders Sentenced to Life in the North East of England

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1. Background

The overall aim of the National Offender Management Service Co-financing Organisation (NOMS CFO) programme is to improve offender education, training & employment opportunities and increase access to existing resettlement provision. Rather than deliver education and training programmes directly, the NOMS CFO Programme is designed to motivate participants and remove barriers that prevent them from progressing into mainstream provision delivered by other agencies such as Jobcentre Plus employment services, Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) funded provision or further education/training. Not all these services are directed specifically at offenders and NOMS CFO links into services in prison/community for offenders and those available to everyone. Effective engagement with offenders in custody or in the community will also more adequately prepare them for employment, training, education and other mainstream activities. The NOMS CFO provision enhances existing activity within prisons and the community by identifying the gaps in delivery for the harder to help groups, which includes prisoners serving short term sentences. NOMS CFO aims to complement existing delivery activity by bridging the service gaps experienced by offenders.

The purpose of the current report is to provide a follow up on the progress of the 'hard-to-help' sub-group project in the North East CFO region since a period of initial evaluative fieldwork was performed. The targeted 'hard-to-help' sub-group cohort for the North East is offenders sentenced to life. The original fieldwork was carried out in June 2013. This current report aims to give a written update on how that sub-group project has progressed since that work was carried out.

Originally conducted in June 2013 the initial fieldwork aimed to gain an understanding of the provision offered to participants on the "offenders sentenced to life" hard-to-help sub-group project (also referred to as the Lifer project) which is part of the wider CFO programme currently running in the North East of England. The Prime Provider for the North East is Pertemps People Development Group (PPDG). The sub-group project is designed to offer a warm, sympathetic and non-judgemental service to participants and to take measured steps to removing barriers so as not to overwhelm them; the participants on this project have been incarcerated for a number of years and have therefore spent a considerable proportion of their lives adhering to a strict regime so they are understandably vulnerable on release. PPDG understands the fact that, as a result, there are several additional barriers that lifers face, in addition to the standard resettlement needs for any offender, e.g. alcohol, drugs. The additional barriers identified were such things as isolation, mental health issues, low self-esteem and low self-belief. In order to provide services for the emotional barriers as well as the physical ones, PPDG set out very measured and purposeful interventions for the lifer



sub-group project; this means that participants have access to any support they may need but it is offered in such a way that it is understanding and sympathetic of their circumstances.

The fieldwork previously conducted aimed to explore the support that is offered to participants of the sub-group project and how it was developed. Firstly, it was discovered that the lifer project is incorporated in to the main programme so that participants have access to the exact same support as any other offender on the North East CFO programme. However, lifers do benefit from the addition of a more intensive level of provision, and the lifers who start in custody will also receive 'Through-the-Gate' support when they are released to community supervision. Participants are referred on to the sub-project in a number of ways, including voluntarily, through Probation or through sub-contractors and comprises both custody and community settings. Once they have agreed to be on the project they are assigned an "Employment Coach". The core delivery model is then a very simple barrier removal process; whatever resettlement need the participant presents with, the Employment Coach will offer the necessary support to address it, be it signposting to one of their many sub-contracted specialist organisations, enrolment on an employability or Information Technology (I.T.) course or motivational support or mentoring. PPDG have links with a number of specialist support organisations and charities such as Shelter for housing assistance and North East Council on Addiction for all addiction issues. PPDG and more specifically the Employment Coaches themselves are understanding and sympathetic of the circumstances of lifers; they strive to offer a non-judgemental service that takes slow, manageable steps to re-integrate participants back into society and then prepares them for employment after years of a strictly regimented life.

The previous fieldwork also examined the effectiveness and impact of the provision offered to the participants on the sub-project. During the initial fieldwork, people involved in the design, delivery and in receipt of the sub-group provision were spoken to and consulted for their views. A number of staff who were involved in either the design or delivery were interviewed for greater insight in to how the sub-project was implemented and what a participant's journey would entail. Also, a small number of participants on the project, from both custody and community settings, were spoken to in order to ascertain what experiences they had of the North East CFO programme. In order to acquire an idea of numbers and outcomes achieved, quantitative data from the Case Management and Tracking System (CATS) was used to generate sub-group statistics. The CATS application is used by Case Managers to monitor participants' progress and gives details on the number of participants on the project, what types of outcomes have been achieved and how many of each outcome has been claimed. The majority of outcomes claimed were soft outcomes surrounding improving employability but PPDG have also had a substantial number of hard outcomes for Education, Training and Employment.

The following bullet points summarise the conclusions drawn from the original fieldwork on the quality of the implementation and delivery of the sub-group project and the associated outcomes achieved:

- The original fieldwork praised PPDG for their caring and supportive service. The participants who were spoken to as part of the original fieldwork extolled the virtues of the support they had been offered whilst on the project. All participants interviewed were extremely pleased with the help that they had received. The sympathetic and



understanding nature of the project encourages lifers to engage further which improves motivation and emotional well-being.

- The original fieldwork also found that PPDG had efficient communication networks with prisons, Probation Trusts and support agencies to ensure maximum engagement of lifers. Such extensive communication with authorities also meant that the significant risk lifers pose is managed effectively. PPDG were also commended for their extensive number of sub-contracted organisations which are able to address a range of barriers.
- Concern was raised about the 'Through-the-Gate' service. It was highlighted that PPDG was disengaging with participants 'Through-the-Gate', although offenders on life sentences are monitored by Probation and therefore can be followed up in the community. It was also suggested that PPDG should utilise mentoring more especially as it can be used for 'Through-the-Gate' support.
- It was also suggested that PPDG needed to focus more on provision for alcohol addiction as it was identified to be a statistically significant need pertinent to lifers. However, PPDG themselves are not a specialised addiction service but they do have specialist agencies who they can signpost participants to for help with such matters. Also it can be argued that a focus should not be placed on a specific need as it could potentially divert resources away; another reason being that this pathway may not be prevalent in all lifer participants.

2. Context and Approach

The purpose of the current report is to provide an update on how the "offenders sentenced to life" sub-group project has developed since the preceding evaluative fieldwork was performed. The initial fieldwork was conducted in June 2013 therefore this report represents an overview of progress since then to the present day. This report adopts two methodologies similar to that utilised in the previous fieldwork; qualitative results supported by quantitative statistics. Qualitative data was sourced from communications with PPDG's Site Manager for the North East CFO Programme regarding the status and developments of the sub-project. Quantitative data was again taken from the CATS application in order to provide the latest statistics on participant numbers, their identified needs and the outcomes achieved. Data was split to gain an analysis for both custody and community settings. The figures were then assessed for statistical significance using Pearson's Chi-Squared with Yates' Correction for Continuity. By utilising these methods, it is anticipated that a comprehensive answer can be provided for each of the following research aims:

- i. How has the sub-group project progressed since the initial fieldwork was conducted - how has it developed, has it expanded, what has worked well and have there been any problems.
- ii. What are the current figures for the sub-project – how many starts, how many outcomes, what outcomes have been achieved and what are the implications.



3. Results

The following results described are written with the purpose of answering the first research aim: how has the sub-group project progressed since the initial fieldwork was conducted - how has it developed, has it expanded, what has worked well and have there been any problems.

Sub-group project status

The sub-group project has continued in the same manner since the original fieldwork was conducted. Participant uptake on the project has been slow but steady. Numbers on the project have not improved significantly but this is no fault of PPDG's; it is simply due to the small number of eligible lifers being released in to the North East CFO area. Those lifers that are released in to the area and, more importantly, who are eligible for the project are then targeted and an effort is made to sign them up. In terms of provision, the sub-project has continued in the same caring and understanding nature. Participants engage with an Employment Coach and whatever barriers they present with are approached in a carefully measured way. Participants can access a range of support including help with disclosure and C.V. creation, applying and enrolment on a course or training placement or help with addiction or mental health issues through signposting to sub-contracted organisations. Employment Coaches are always mindful of the offence and the risk that is posed so as not to place the public or the participant in any danger; but they ensure never to judge the participant because of it. Participants are worked with in a sympathetic way in order to bring them up to date on life as they have been imprisoned for such a long period of time; they are offered the necessary provision at a slow, easy manageable pace in order to give them time to adjust to not living to a regime. The help that PPDG provides is designed to supplement the process of adapting to life outside prison; this process entails encouraging participants to gradually become independent, dealing with any resettlement needs that arise and then bringing them to a point where they are confident enough to enter stable, full-time employment.

Developments

Since the original fieldwork was performed, PPDG have made some developments that have impacted upon the sub-group project. It was identified that improvements were required with regard to 'Through-the-Gate' provision. PPDG therefore decided to increase engagement 'Through-the-Gate' by placing staff in the prisons PPDG operate in with a view to engaging with offenders within the last three months before they are released. Those members of staff then go 'Through-the-Gate' with participants; meaning they will then meet that exact same person and work with them in the community, they may meet up with them on the day of release or they may arrange and book meetings for when they are released. For lifer participants, this means some familiarity from custody to community ensuring that they are not entering a completely new environment with new people. Having a familiar face to meet them in the community brings comfort to lifers and reassures them that they are not alone. That member of staff can then introduce them to PPDG in the community and, slowly and gradually, support can then be transferred to an Employment Coach. This is yet another example of PPDG's understanding of the circumstances of lifers and the potential fear associated with being released in to the community after years spent in prison.



What has worked well

The success of the current lifer sub-group project is due to a number of factors. Firstly, the quality of communication between PPDG and its partner organisations, sub-contracted agencies and charities means that there are various referral routes on to the project. PPDG have stated that, due to these referral routes, the majority of lifers in the region who are eligible have been brought on to the sub-group project. Then, when engaging on the project, the obvious and genuine sympathetic nature of staff further facilitates this success. The sheer warmth and understanding exhibited by staff on the sub-group project is central to how they effectively aid this offender group. This approach encourages participants to slowly open up more and this in turn will improve their confidence and allow them to become more settled. Finally, the provision offered to participants as part of the lifer project is wholly applicable to their needs. Not only do PPDG offer courses in employability and I.T but they also have modules in courses that cover basic life skills. Courses are designed with the purpose of encouraging participants to become independent and to introduce them to aspects of modern day life. PPDG are also aware that participants should not be rushed into any of these courses and they are mindful to offer them when the participant themselves feels ready.

The next set of results are written with the purpose of answering the second research aim: what are the current figures for the sub-project – how many starts, how many outcomes, what outcomes have been achieved and what are the implications.

Identified needs and implications

The following table highlights the prevalence of resettlement needs for offenders sentenced to life compared to the main cohort on the North East CFO programme. The following figures and statistics are accurate as of June 2014.

Table 1 - A table to show the resettlement needs of Lifers participants compared to Main Cohort participants on the NOMS CFO North East programme

Resettlement Need	Lifers (n = 148)			Main Cohort (n = 6948)		
	Has Need	No Need	Percentage with Need	Has Need	No Need	Percentage with Need
Alcohol	64	84	43%	2126	4822	31%
Attitude & Life Skills	123	25	83%	5279	1669	76%
Drugs	75	73	51%	2374	4574	34%
Education	142	6	96%	6189	759	89%
Employment & Training	148	0	100%	6948	0	100%
Financial Status	19	126	13%	2717	4231	39%
Health	22	126	15%	1598	5350	23%
Housing	54	94	37%	1799	5149	26%
Relationships	15	133	10%	1156	5792	17%



As the above table demonstrates, lifers have quite a varying degree of resettlement needs with a focus on some in particular. The disparity of needs demonstrates the necessity for having a range of specialist services for this group. Using Pearson's Chi-Square with Yates' Correction for Continuity significant differences were found for the majority of the resettlement pathways; all except attitude and life skills. It was found that lifers are significantly more likely to have the resettlement needs alcohol, drugs, education and housing but were significantly less likely to have a financial status, health or relationship need. PPDG offer the same services to lifer participants as they do to the main cohort and it should remain this way; meaning that provision should not favour certain needs which could mean sacrificing the quality of others.

Breaking down the data further, significant differences were also found for the resettlement needs between lifers who started in custody compared to those that started in the community. The table below shows the differences in numbers between custody and community with regard to resettlement needs and whether or not the findings were significant.

Table 2 - A table to show the significance of resettlement needs of Lifer participants in custody compared to Lifer participants in the community

Resettlement Pathway	Lifers in Custody (n = 94)			Lifers in Community (n = 54)			Significance
	With Need	No Need	% With Need	With Need	No Need	% With Need	
Alcohol	44	50	47%	20	34	37%	N
Attitude and Life Skills	90	4	96%	33	21	61%	Y
Drugs	60	34	64%	15	39	28%	Y
Education	92	2	98%	50	4	93%	N
Financial Status	7	87	7%	12	42	22%	Y
Health	11	83	12%	11	43	20%	N
Housing	46	48	49%	8	46	15%	Y
Relationships	9	85	10%	6	48	11%	N

As demonstrated in the table, there are some noticeable differences between resettlement needs for custody and community. Lifers that started in custody were more likely to have the attitude and life skills, drugs and housing resettlement needs. According to the sample in the current report, those lifers that started in custody had a far greater need of these resettlement pathways compared to their community counterparts. Addictions to either alcohol or drugs could be due to a myriad of reasons; coping mechanism, boredom, self-medication. With reference to housing, many lifers do not know where they will be living on release; if they did own private housing they are likely to have lost it during the long period in



prison. Many of them are released to Approved Premises, hostels or family but are unlikely to be certain of which until just before they are released. PPDG have a number of sub-contractors/partner agencies across the entire North East CFO area, for all needs including the noted ones, which participants can be signposted to for specialist support. Compared to custody, those who started in the community were more likely to have an issue relating to their financial status. With little way of supporting themselves combined with trying to restore what they lost, lifers can easily get in to financial difficulty and debt. PPDG offer modules on their courses that focus specifically on managing money and issues around finance; it is very detailed in that it also offers advice on such things as loan sharks and payday loans. PPDG ensure that there is a range of provision to assist with all needs spread across the region to offer the best possible support for participants.

Outcomes

The majority of outcomes claimed were similar to those found in the original fieldwork; the most common were soft outcomes for either improving employability, mentoring or motivational work. The results of the current report suggest a similar pattern with the bulk of the outcomes claimed being the same as those noted in the original fieldwork. However, it should also be stated that there are a substantial number of hard outcomes for employment, education or training; the sheer number of hard outcomes is symbolic of the dedication of PPDG staff and the overall quality of the sub-group project.

Soft outcomes

The most common soft outcome claimed was pre-employment interviews, CV's and disclosure at 68%. Disclosure is a key aspect of any provision for offenders and possibly more so for lifers as the offence tends to be very serious; in that respect, disclosure advice should be a compulsory part of any provision for lifers. With regard to C.V development and pre-employment interviews, some lifer participants may not have had the opportunity to do either depending on how long they were in prison for. By offering help with this, PPDG can show participants the experience they have to improve their confidence and instil a sense of self-belief. Another soft outcome that was particularly prevalent was mentoring. 41% of total participants received an outcome for mentoring. Mentoring can be particularly helpful for lifers as it gives them someone familiar to talk to about any problems they are experiencing. Especially for lifers who do not have support from family or friends, a mentor can be highly influential; they can help boost their confidence, maintain motivation and may be the participant's only source of help. To a lifer with no other support networks and who may be completely isolated, the help of a mentor can be invaluable. Mentoring outcomes have increased massively since the original fieldwork; up 17% from a year ago. Broadly, the other types of soft outcomes claimed ranged from 5% to 21%.

Hard outcomes

PPDG have achieved a substantial number of hard outcomes for their lifer sub-group project. Over the duration of the sub-group project, 34% of total participants received a hard outcome for accessing education or training. 18% of total participants had an outcome claimed for a type of employment; either full-time or part-time. It must be remembered that lifer participants present with a number of complex barriers in addition to the ones typically thought to be



pertinent to every offender. Although, it was stated that lifers are usually very compliant, eager to receive help and very committed, to achieve such a high number of hard outcomes is testament to the support that PPDG offer. There is a great deal of uncertainty and insecurity surrounding lifer participants, such things as issues with housing and potential isolation, which can easily destabilise a participant. However, by getting participants on education courses, training placements or into employment, they offer them the opportunity to return to a stable life; where a daily routine is made but is far away from the regime they experienced whilst in prison. Such a high percentage of hard outcomes achieved demonstrates that the provision offered by PPDG is working for the participants and they are receiving support that is suitable for their needs.

4. Conclusion

Since the original fieldwork was performed, the 'offenders sentenced to life' sub-group project in the North East CFO region has continued to provide a high quality service to the participants. The warm and non-judgemental nature of the project combined with the genuine enthusiasm and dedication exhibited by PPDG staff has shown significant results; this approach was core to the provision. The result of their provision was evident with over half of participants receiving an outcome for education, training or employment. When a gap in provision with 'Through-the-Gate' was identified, PPDG made moves to remedy it. The 'Through-the-Gate' process is now much improved, with a dedicated member of staff available to see participants in prison and in the community; promoting familiarity and a source of consistent support. Although this offender group is eager to engage, it does not mean that the barriers they exhibit are any less easy to overcome. PPDG should be praised for the quality of their provision and the effort they make to help participants. PPDG have delivered a service that is wholly suitable to the needs of their participants, is sympathetic and understanding of the emotional barriers as well as the physical ones and has given a large number of participants the opportunity to return to a stable life following a number of years of imprisonment.