



JOIN THE DOTS

The Pilot Case Studies, July 2018

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Executive summary

These case studies give an insight into the experiences of a small number of participants involved in the Join the Dots project over the pilot period. Twelve people were invited to take part in the research, with each participant engaged in an in-depth, face to face interview with the project researcher. The majority of the interviewees had experienced the criminal justice system and/or recently engaged with addiction services. All participants had met with the researcher during the pilot sessions. This research relationship was helpful as the participant and researcher were able to reflect on their time with the project and discuss the successes and challenges of the sessions they attended. Each participant was encouraged to speak about their time in the pilot and asked to speculate on the future direction of the project. This report highlights the ways in which the participants engaged with the programme, people's motivations for attending, their reported support needs and how services could be provided to help rebuild people's lives following imprisonment and addiction.

A total of nine case studies are presented here. These have been selected to illustrate the range of people accessing the project. To protect the anonymity of the participants, all names have been changed and any personal details which may identify an individual have been omitted. These are the key themes which emerged from the interviews:

Need for agency support, at the right level, at the right time:

- The men and women involved in the research had sought help or assistance from agencies in the past. Many had not received the support they required.
- Some felt that they had been failed by staff who showed no interest in meeting with them and/or were unable to help them, leaving them feeling cynical and disinterested in accessing official routes to support.
- Many in the sample all spoke of the need to be 'ready for change' and to have a proactive role in rebuilding their lives.
- The young males in the sample who had been involved in the criminal justice system often felt that they were 'on the scrap heap' and unlikely to be able to gain employment or shake the stigma of holding a criminal record.
- There was a belief that things could get better, often by the development of trusting and respectful relationships with staff members.
- The premise of the pilot, providing a central location or 'one stop shop' was felt to be useful, particularly for individuals with poor mental health or who struggled to get to appointments unaided.
- The staff at the Join the Dots project were widely praised for their positive and welcoming attitude. The participants stated that they felt at ease and able to relax when accessing the pilot project.

Need for activities which encourage group working, enhance employability skills and allow opportunities for learning, all provided in a safe and non-judgmental environment:

- People who had struggled with addictions and poor mental health valued the opportunity to have a safe and welcoming venue where they could 'rebuild their lives' at a pace which was appropriate to them.

- The development of skills which could help towards employability was recognised as important, but not the driving force for engagement in a project like Join the Dots.
- Building confidence and getting used to interacting with groups of new people was seen as enormous steps forward by many of the respondents in this study.
- A number of people stated that they struggled with forms and felt intimidated by official documentation. By offering support for people to fill in forms and access the information they needed.
- Participants who had experienced prison said that many of the offerings in the pilot were available in prison but were not easily accessible in the community following release. The concept was therefore thought to be a good one, as people involved in the criminal justice system often need further support and guidance on release.

Excessive alcohol and drug taking often linked to criminal behaviour:

- Alcohol and drug abuse was often linked and given as the reason why people become engaged in past criminal behaviour. The young men interviewed all spoke of excessive drinking as causes of the violent or 'stupid' crimes they committed.
- The difficulty in escaping the culture of drinking and gang fighting on estates was spoken of by the young men involved in the Join the Dots pilot. For many, it was seen as an inevitable part of living on a scheme.
- A number of young men in interview identified the need for positive people in their lives, mentors or peer mediators to show them the best ways to navigate their environments and avoid conflict.
- The older males involved in the study spoke of witnessing their parent's (usually the fathers) alcoholism and spoke of the impact that had on them as a child. Every participant who reflected on this stated they wanted better for their own children and would work not to repeat the pattern of abuse in their own families.

Art and drama activities welcomed by the majority of the participants:

- The majority of the respondents stated that through engagement with the art activities they were able to express themselves, have 'a laugh' with each other and develop skills in visual art and drama.
- The young men claimed it was 'embarrassing' at first doing some of the drama activities, but then were 'pure buzzing' from the process when they left the project.
- Many spoke about looking forward to the day they came to the project and woke up excited and ready to try new things. For many, it gave them a new-found energy and gave their week structure.
- The art activities were also seen as a welcome release from some of the more 'serious stuff' such as the talks from outside speakers.

Outside speakers were generally well received and gave another layer of support to the project:

- The young men in the study were very impressed by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) staff who came in and spoke to them about the benefits they were able to access and schemes available to encourage them back into work.
- They were however unlikely to follow the advice to disclose their convictions to future employers, as the majority said they would not do so as they believed they would not be considered for employment.

- The females in the sample found that the sessions which considered the impacts of trauma, and the ways in which this can affect behaviour, as particularly insightful and interesting. They asked for more sessions like this and saw it as key to their personal development and recovery.
- The speaker from the violence reduction unit was considered very powerful. Some of the sample stated how useful it was to speak to somebody who 'had been there too'.
- The balance between the art, drama and the speakers was thought to be a successful one and the majority of the participants praised the design of the pilot activities.

Case Study 1: 'Stuart'

Male, 37, on Community Payback Order (and previous prison experience)

Stuart has served a number of short prison sentences in the last 10 years. He came to the Join the Dots project whilst completing a Community Payback Order. Stuart has had problems with alcohol throughout his life but is now being supported by the AA and addiction services to control his alcohol consumption:

'I've gone back to AA now and done as many sessions as I could. My life has been going round in circles. The drink, alcohol... I'm 5 months sober today. Got 2 shifts left of community service. I'm on they anti-abuse tablets. They make you violently sick. Been on it 5 weeks; I've put a lot of hard work in to get sobriety.'

Stuart described the difficulties he has encountered in the past when trying to get help for his addiction following a prison term. He spoke of 'being passed from pillar to post' by the CAT team. He argued that having no allocated person to work with often resulted in relapse. However, he had one worker who believed in his ability to quit the drink and stick to the AA programme. Through this relationship, Stuart has been able to begin his recovery journey:

'My life has changed because the services out there, for me, the AA is the best. If you give it a chance. Other services coming out of prison is a name and address for the CAT team, and you get passed from pillar to post. More effort is needed from the CAT team. When you come out of prison you want to see your person, you get told speak to Nick and you're told to call back in a week as they're on annual leave. Then you phone back a week later pissed and can't get Nick again cos he's on holiday. Then you get allocated a new worker and she's Sharon, but then you meet her and she's on annual leave. It's constant. That's why so many of the boys come out of prison and get into substance abuse, alcohol abuse, whatever.'

'Seems if you're constantly phoning to get someone. I met a guy in social services when I was in prison. He was a really nice man. He said I can see it in you, you can stay sober. I kept in touch with him and by passed the CAT team and he knew I could become better. He came and visited me in prison. He came outside his work hours and visited me. It was touching. Somebody cares.'

Stuart spoke of how his past involvement with the police was caused by excessive drinking, in which he found himself in situations which were violent and 'stupid'. Stuart believes that this, twinned his own turbulent upbringing, led him to commit crime. Stuart spoke of the impact of witnessing his own parents' alcohol-fueled fights as a child and how this trauma led to what he described as a 'fear' inside, He has felt this fear throughout his adult life and has always used alcohol to mask that fear:

'I want to tell you the reason why I was in prison. I'm a scaffolder, right? And I had alcohol problems since I was 16. It got really bad in late 20s. Eventually it led to trouble, a lot of trouble. I thought I was invincible.'

'My mum and dad are alcoholics. My mum doesn't drink anymore. They used to argue. There was constant shouting and screaming. I picked up on that and I took it out on the street with me... This wee guy who was always scared. And I'd use it; I'd use my voice to intimidate people. But deep down I'm a nice, quiet wee guy.'

'There's a lot of fear inside you. Eventually you get lifted on a Friday night and you need to spend the night in the cells, and it's like serving your apprenticeship. Going to the cells, the challenges get bigger, the crimes get worse and you get into other stuff... The jail over the weekend, you get up and you get the fear. Yeah, I've always had the fear since I was young.'

Stuart believes that the 'fear' he felt is also experienced by the men who come to the Join the Dots project through the criminal justice system:

'Behind the young boys they've got loads of fears. It's the act. They put a front on. The big I am. Inside they're hurting. The reason why most of the boys are here is because they get in trouble, they've got something to prove. They have a lot of fear. They think they're full of anger but that's the fear.'

Stuart is now working to rebuild his life and the relationships with his family following his most recent time in prison. He is trying to use this time to 'better' himself and become a good role model and father to his young son. He does not want to pass on the traumas he experienced in his own childhood:

'Now in my house I don't shout. I do my best to speak.'

'I don't want my kids to grow up like me. I'd like them to make choices. Decisions for themselves. I felt when I was growing up my mum always bullied me, told me not to work, just go on the social 'cos you get more money. I thought no, I want to work... I want to be an easy-going dad but if they have problems then (they can) come and speak to me.'

Stuart was involved in the initial conversation café event at GESH and then attended a number of the Join the Dots sessions before his Community Payback Order came to an end. Stuart brought a positive and mature attitude to the activities, he was always willing to take part and encouraged the younger members of the group to participate. Stuart spoke in the sessions about how the art and drama activities helped him process and understand his own experiences of the criminal justice system. He understood the role art involvement had in building group cohesion and allowing people to express themselves:

'When I first came along (to Join the Dots), I was like why art? Then after a couple of hours I saw why. I felt like every one of us got to express ourselves a bit better and they got to know us. Yeah, art activities help.'

Finally, Stuart described how he took his learnings from the session home with him and spoke to his family about the art activities at the Join the Dots project. This led to him engaging in art with his young son, something he would not have considered doing before his engagement with the sessions:

'I left that door at the back of 2 and I went home and told my wife and the wee man. My wee son he's 4-year-old, I said 'Daddy was drawing pictures today' and he went 'You draw pictures with me?' And I said 'Of course I will'. So I took that home with me and I did the pictures with him... The doodling (group mural activity) took me to spending time with my four-year-old.'

Comment

Stuart is an interesting case study because he understands how his own early adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) have shaped his addiction and his criminal past. He has witnessed violence, aggression and excessive alcohol consumption in his parents and as an adult, he adopted the same health-harming behaviours. He is being supported to overcome these early traumas and subsequent addiction by the AA and by a worker whom he can trust. By having that key support, he believes he can overcome his addiction, his early ACEs and hopefully, reduce his offending behaviour.

Case Study 2: 'Sam'

Male, 20, on Community Payback Order.

Sam attended the conversation cafes and a number of the early sessions of the Join the Dots project, however he stopped attending once his Community Payback Order was complete. Sam was very quiet in the sessions and initially struggled with the group tasks, not volunteering or actively contributing to the activities. However, in time he became more vocal, confident and seemed to enjoy the sessions. He was particularly skilled at the visual art activities and spent time producing a number of well-considered pieces. His interview was short, as he said 'he wasn't good with words' and was uncomfortable speaking into the tape recorder and with the researcher's note taking. He spoke about his unknown future following his community payback order. Sam has been previously employed as a sign maker, but feared his criminal record would mean he would no longer be able to work in his chosen field:

'I finish tomorrow. I'll need help getting a job again. You get a criminal record doing a community payback order. So I'm not sure... No assistance will be offered tomorrow. They don't really care, they have to look at the bigger picture. Once you're in the community service you're not important. They look at you as a criminal... Yeah, that makes you feel a bit bad, kinda.'

Sam stated that now he had a criminal record he had 'no hope' of getting employment and knew of no other forms of support available to him. Sadly he was no longer with the project when the DWP came in and spoke to the young men, which may have been useful as many participants said in interview that this had really helped them understand what could be accessed. In interview, Sam spoke of the stigma which would result from his receiving a Community Payback Order. He said he would like to have greater support and access to a mentor to advise him on other issues outside of employment, but did not know where to find any pastoral support. If he did get such a worker, he stressed it would be important to develop a trusting and respectful relationship:

'It's good to have someone close to you who you can trust. (They) need to always be honest... both ways, with respect, both ways.'

Sam alluded to his own struggles with drug taking and struggling with feelings of heightened anxiety. He spoke of mental ill health, alcohol abuse and 'things he wished he hadn't seen' happening in his own family. He believes many people involved in the criminal justice system share these experiences and that these traumas affect their behaviours:

'A lot of people that have committed crimes have got trauma, and they've no-one to speak to afterwards. I'm a bit traumatised, I've seen a lot of stuff I didn't want to see... it imprints in your brain. It taints it.'

Sam spoke of his own experiences of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), with his mother being hospitalised for her mental poor health and alcoholism. He believes that in Glasgow there are many families who struggle with these issues, particularly when born into poverty:

'My ma was an alcoholic. She was in mental hospitals a lot when I was growing up. That left an imprint.'

‘My Ma has manic depression and bi-polar so I’ve been brought up with mental health issues.... Glasgow is bad with poverty and (drug and alcohol) is the solution for most people. If you’re an alcoholic you’d spend your last penny on that. You go into a dark hole and that leads to mental health issues, and mental health issues and drink are a bad combination.’

Sam was encouraged to continue his involvement in the Join the Dots project once his community payback was complete, but elected not to do so. However, he did communicate the many positives he had during this time with the project, including having the opportunity to express himself and the positives that had on his mental health.

‘They say doing art is a good way to take your mind off stuff, it’s like meditation, it puts you at ease. Like that drumming... Expression of yourself.’

Sam also praised the friendly and kind staff members he had worked with through the project. He believed if others got the opportunity to attend such a programme they would feel similar benefits:

‘I think you get revolving door criminals, it’s just what they’re used to. If people actually opened their eyes and went to this (Join the Dots) but they’re just in their wee bubble.’

When asked where such a project should be, for example in the East End of the city or in a more central location, Sam stressed the anonymity of a project like Join the Dots was integral to its success as some people do not like to be seen to need help:

‘Where would the centre be? I would say in town because people don’t want to be seen. It’s like a fat person goes to the gym, they’re trying to help themselves out, but you’d be on them. In the east end, people would be chatting behind their backs saying he needs help. That’s what people are like.’

Sam recognised the need for services like Join the Dots and stressed that many people had poor mental health in his own peer group. He had never sought help for his own mental health issues as he did not know where to go and he had not yet felt compelled to get help:

‘I’ve never really reached out. It’s the first step (but) I need something to get me there. I need the urge to say I need to go for help.’

Finally, Sam argued that he would not have come to a project like Join the Dots if he hadn’t been on community service and brought to the building. Even though it had been a positive experience, it was not one he felt was ‘his scene’ and would not look for groups like this in the future:

‘I never would have come to Theatre Nemo, not my scene. I wouldn’t have come here unless I was forced to... but you’re doing good.’

Comment

Sam’s case study gave some insight into how an individual can feel a sense of loss and abandonment following their involvement with the criminal justice system. He understands that he

and his immediate family members have experienced traumas in their lives and that this has impacted on their behaviours. His own parent's mental ill health has made what he called 'an imprint' on him and influenced his own decisions. The Join the Dots project could make a real difference to people like Sam and in the short time he worked with the staff team he reported a lift in his mood and genuine enjoyment of the day's activities. However, he also stressed he would never usually attend arts sessions or seek help for his problems. He is the kind of young person who may be invisible to services but in the greatest need of support and development.

Case Study 3: 'Roxy'

Female, 37. Accessed through addiction services.

Roxy joined Join the Dots at the beginning of the project and attended a large number of the sessions. She came to the project through a recommendation at a drug and alcohol support service which she accesses weekly. She was told it was an arts and crafts session, but knew very little else about the project. Roxy is in recovery from drug and alcohol abuse. She is rebuilding her life and keen to join activities to 'keep her busy' and 'distract' her in the daytime:

'I need structure, routine, something to keep me busy, something to focus on as well. I need something to do every day or every week. It keeps me on track, it's a distraction as well. Gives me a bit of purpose in life.'

Through her addictions, she 'lost' 10 years of her life and needs to begin again, re-educate herself, develop relationships with different people and stay clean. She sees the importance of attending sessions like those at Join the Dots in developing skills for employability:

'I'm trying to rebuild my life, start getting things I can put on my C.V. So I can get back into work and start living again basically. I can't remember the blank period in my life.... I need to learn new skills. I need to develop my skills again because I've been out of work for 10 years and a lot of that time I don't remember, so I'm having to re-educate myself.'

At the time of interview, Roxy had attended a just a handful of sessions and did not feel able to reflect on the successes/challenges of the Join the Dots pilot, apart from to stress she was enjoying the process and the staff were supportive. Roxy related the pilot to an organisation she accesses once weekly called the Sunday Social, which is a recovery café in the East End. By having the support of the Sunday Social, she has been supported to develop new relationships and try new activities. She has gained great confidence, new connections to people and accessed training opportunities:

'It's opened up so many doors for me, it's been a great thing. I'm a year sober and without the Sunday social I don't think I'd have made it. I've had to let go all of my old friends and rebuild relationships with people, so my social network is building up again.'

The Sunday Social model is similar to that proposed by the Join the Dots team, in that it is holistic support which considers an individual's many needs. It is also open to the wider community, not just people in recovery from drug addictions:

'It's one day a week, 11-3pm. In the Sunday Social there's Citizens Advice, yoga, aqua-detox therapy, massage, reiki, sometimes someone coming in to do talks. Also have someone in from Glasgow Kelvin college to teach computing modules. Someone came out and talked about the grants for your fuel in winter time. They've got an arts and crafts group too. Families and communities are allowed to go too, it's open to everyone. Quite a few go who aren't in recovery but are supporting someone.'

Roxy spoke extensively about the recovery café, saying it has 'saved her' from her past addictions. The provision of training, purpose, support, mentorship and opportunities to help others were all

highlighted as valuable building blocks provided by the recovery café. The end goal for Roxy, through accessing services like the recovery café and Join the Dots, was to become ready for employment:

‘I now volunteer at the Sunday social, a recovery cafe. I got taken by a peer mentor who got me through the door. That was important.’

‘I’m trying to get back to employment, not immediately but it’s definitely a goal.’

Comment

Roxy was a reliable and active member of the Tuesday Join the Dots pilot project. She was quiet and thoughtful, but highly engaged and seemed to take a lot from the art activities and the speakers who came to speak to the group. Her comments were interesting because she was seeking support from a number of organisations and recognised the need for peer support, mentorship, activities and a safe space to go. Most importantly, she stated she needed something to ‘fill her time’ and the opportunity to ‘rebuild’. Again, these chime with the vision of the Join the Dots pilot in which the holistic needs of a person are considered.

Case Study 4: 'Mike'

Male, 17, on Community Payback Order.

Mike is a young man who came to the pilot through a Community Payback Order. He was caught with a knife and involved in gang fighting. As part of his community service, Mike has to be in regular communication with a social worker. However, as with others in this research, his assigned social worker has not been available to date. This lack of continuity has meant he has not had the opportunity to access any form of support:

'I have been trying to get in contact with the social worker. I'm meant to see him every week, meant to have 2 social workers but at the moment I've got 3 or 4. It's all over the place. The one I was meant to have after jail wasn't well, the other one was on holiday, then I was given a different one, then he came back and since he came back I've not been able to speak to him. It's all over the place.'

Mike comes from on a housing estate or 'scheme' in the East End of Glasgow. He describes the area as a 'bad bit' and as he is soon going to be a father, he hopes to move away from the estate. He has been brought up in a culture of drinking and fighting, and feels there is little hope for the families and young people who live on the estate. Like the other young men interviewed in this research, he believes his criminal behavior is inextricably linked to the way he and his peers use alcohol and drugs:

'I wouldn't stay in my area when I get my house. I grew up here and know what it did to me! Everyone, we're not bad people, but see when we all get together we all want to drink and commit crimes or something. Sometimes you don't want it to happen but people come over and start fighting you. Next thing you know your pal has a bottle, police are there, you've got done for assault.'

'The only time anyone ever goes to jail from my bit is when they've been at the drinking. Literally is. I've got 3 or 4 pals who have been on community service because of the drinking.'

Mike blames excessive alcohol and drug use for the high levels of violence and crime on his estate. He says there is no way to escape the drinking and gang fighting, although he has tried to avoid the gangs by staying in his home. Even then, people come to him or are contacting him via social media to join them and drink:

'You can't go out. In my bit you have to stay in the house and play games. You can't go out and drink. Something will kick off, someone will be on Facebook and say they are gonna fight and you are in someone's house drinking and the message goes out and they turn up at the door to have a fight.'

The lack of things for people to do in the area, apart from the community centre, was cited as a reason why people drink and commit crimes. Now 17, Mike feels he is too young for the youth club at the centre. Therefore when he sees his friends at the weekends he knows there will be the same trouble. He also knows that once he has completed this payback order and his curfew, he will be

facing prison if he gets involved in another violent crime. He however says that there is no escaping from the inevitable engagement with the criminal justice system:

‘It’s a big circle. It starts from a drink, to court, to community service, to nothing. Then back to a drink again.’

Mike attended a number of the Join the Dots sessions and although sometimes quiet, he says the majority has ‘been a laugh’ and he has pleased to have the opportunity to use art materials again, something he hasn’t done since school. He described the expressive process as ‘calming’. Initially, he was unsure about becoming involved in the drama workshops, as it could be ‘pure embarrassing’, but he found himself overcoming his fears and joining in the group activities:

‘Art can be quite calming. But I can’t do it in my personal time. I don’t bother. I used to as a wee boy, but since I left school it’s just all gone away. I’m a shite drawer now so can’t be arsed with it. I used to be able to.’

‘I get the pure fear doing the drama. It puts me on the spot (but) if a big group and people are more hyper then it’s ok.’

For Mike, the speakers coming in from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) had been hugely worthwhile session, as he had previously never considered accessing the service. He said that before he engaged with them through Join the Dots, he had a very negative perception of the job centre and people who claimed the ‘Brew’:

‘It was alright to learn from the people at the job centre, I’d never thought of signing on myself. People from my bit that are on it are pure wee lazy... they don’t want a job. The ones on the Brew are Jag bags who don’t do anything. I never thought of it, it would be embarrassing to be honest, prefer to get myself a job.’

Following the DWP talk he said he’d contact the job centre and get signed on to the Job Seekers Allowance scheme once he reached 18. He however disregarded their advice to report any convictions, as he believed he would not have a chance with an employer if he did so:

‘Only thing is now I’ll have to lie to my employer, as criminal record you won’t get in. The last two interviews through social work I had to tell them criminal conviction and it’s the first time I haven’t got the job. So next one I’m going to do it myself and not tell them. I’ll just take the job and be somebody else for a few months.’

Mike is going to be a father before he reaches the age of 18. He recognises the need for parenting advice but is unsure where to find this and dismisses the guidance given to him by his family members:

‘I’m having a wain. I need parenting skills. Just have my Mum at the moment and my girlfriend’s Mum, trying to boss me about and tell me this and that. I can’t take it from my Ma. If somebody else, you listen because its respectful and you’d take it in.’

Comment

Mike was a committed member of the Join the Dots project and seemed to get a lot from the sessions. He enjoyed the group activities and was an enthusiastic member of the drama group. Mike had a certain fatalism when it came to his life choices, stating that he was unable to escape the alcohol and violence which was part of his estate. He believed himself to be destined to end up in prison because of these external factors. He responded very positively to the speakers from the DWP and it seemed to give him a new hope for his future, although he chose to disregard the advice about disclosure of criminal convictions.

Case Study 5: 'Ella'

Female, 40, Accessed through a homelessness service.

Ella has battled drug and alcohol addiction throughout her adult life. Her young children have been taken into care and recently adopted. She has experienced multiple traumas and shared that her first partner was murdered, her second took his own life in front of her and the children. Ella struggles with anxiety and panic disorder and has in the past avoided group situations, such as that at Join the Dots. She fears confrontation and struggles to assert herself due to her poor mental health.

Ella has a history of drugs use, stating that she turned to drugs to help her cope. She is no longer using hard drugs and has moved to a homeless hostel in an attempt to get away from her former peer group. Ella spoke with enthusiasm about attending Join the Dots project and learning from one of the visiting speakers about trauma and how to manage stress in everyday life:

'I need to isolate myself. To keep myself safe from the things I had to do to manage my stress. If I don't, I'll go back to my old coping mechanisms. I've been learning new coping skills, I've been getting help here. It's great that people understand it at a deep level and a human level. They understand the actual feelings and how it all occurs and it happens.'

Ella heard about the project from other women at the homeless unit. She contacted one of the speakers personally and asked if she could come along to her session on managing trauma. Ella is working to rebuild her life by connecting to services and working on her mental health. She hopes to secure accommodation and aims to get access to her children in 2-years-time. Ella spoke of the difficulty trying to get to appointments in different places in the past and how her poor mental health meant she needed support to access services:

'I was having to go to Brand Street and I suffer from panic and agoraphobia. My nerves are really bad and I was having to walk at 9am in the morning to see a psychiatrist. They'd put a tape recorder in front of me and I wouldn't know why, then I'd go back in 4 months and it would be a different person and they'd be asking all the same questions again. It was too much doing it again. I ended up not going, because I felt it wasn't going anywhere, and then I was told I wasn't engaging. I couldn't get, I missed 4 appointments. And I was getting so worried. Eventually someone came up with me and someone said they'd be my worker and help me. She supported me every time. That was the most positive experience I had ever.'

Ella now works with a number of services which she has learnt about through the staff at her secure accommodation. She spoke of her involvement with a drama group, a gardening club and how she is working to improve her computing skills in order to improve her chances of future employment. She is proactive in her attempts to create change. However, Ella spoke of her difficulties when trying to join an arts group independently before her work with the Join the Dots project and how 'red tape' meant she was not able to access a local group:

'The art isn't really readily available. There was a place in Govan... I walked in, she looked at me funny and asked if I had a CPN and I said 'yeah', and she said 'well go to Brand Street and they can refer you to the jewelry place down there in Ibrox and they can refer you back up to here'. Now this place was a two-minute walk from my house. And I was

walking past and seeing people in it every week, and I was like why would she be like that with me? It was a horrible feeling. I felt like nothing. That day I was feeling well and was able to go in and ask. After that, I avoided it.'

Ella stressed that she felt more able to work with staff members when she was treated with respect and care. She described how she had spent the last three days alone in her room, unable to leave or speak to any other person, because a member of staff had shouted at her:

'One of the workers is shouty, some people need that, but I don't. That's what made me stay in my room for three days last week. I felt like I'd been guilted into doing something, I was told I'd get confused when I never got confused. I don't like that. I don't like being made to feel like a child. Like my mum used to do to me.'

Ella touched on the early childhood trauma she had experienced at the hands of her own mother and how that had impacted on her adult mental health. However, she saw that involvement with services and the Join the Dots project was making a great difference to her ability to cope with aggressive people and understand her own response to trauma. She said that involvement in art groups made a positive difference, because anything that helped build confidence can only be a positive thing:

'I think the art thing is important. Because after a trauma has happened it knocks your confidence till there's none left, and it's really hard to get that back. And I don't think it's something you can get back on your own. I've been trying and its really, really difficult. Today had a really good, positive impact.'

Comment

Ella's story illustrates the desire for services which provide for the holistic support needs of individuals, from creative outlets to employability skills. She has found the information session on how trauma can shape behaviour as particularly insightful. She is ready to create change in her life and needs the tools and support to do so. The need for staff to treat her with care and respect was a key theme of the interview. Again, this is part of the Join the Dots vision; to have staff providing support with kindness and care.

Case Study 6 – ‘Hanna’

Female, 28, accessed through a homelessness agency (and previous prison experience).

Hanna is an articulate young woman who has a history of drug use and prison experience. She is currently working with a number of services to get support for her addictions, mental health and housing. She attended a number of JTD sessions and was a positive presence in the group, vocalising her interest and enthusiasm for the art and drama activities and appreciation of the guest speakers. In interview, she spoke of how she had tried to get help in the past but because of her addictions she was not given any assistance. It was through her involvement with the criminal justice system she has been able to turn her life around:

‘I think it’s very sad I had to go to prison to get the wonderful and help and support that I now have.’

Hanna stressed that getting support and working with people who have a belief in her ability to succeed is what makes a difference to her recovery. Providing services which help people with addictions tackle their mental health needs were considered paramount by Hanna:

‘One of the main things would make addicts life better when they truly are ready to recover is to get help with their mental health. I’m not suggesting this happens when they’re in a full-blown habitual drug use, but I think even just having the feeling that the person has enough faith in them to make you more confident and reduce your drug use.’

Hanna argued that there are services available to people who leave prison, but it depends on the individual’s mindset as to whether they access the support on offer. She has had a positive experience with the WISE group and found out about the Join the Dots project through her work with them:

‘As long as you want help there is a lot of help out there after prison. A lot of organisations give the opportunity to link up with them. It’s all down to the prisoner’s attitude... I’m working with shine, which is part of the WISE group. They work with women on the run up to the release and also after the release. They get to know you and if they hear of something, like for example what’s happening with Join the Dots, and they’ll accompany you say the first time if you’re too anxious to go on your own. They’ll take you to appointments, whether that be the GP or DWP. They’re very, very supportive.’

Getting access to housing is a key challenge when leaving prison. According to Hanna, if she did not have the support of a worker she would have been failed by the system:

‘Housing. A very big challenge, even with all the support I have. I had two days in a row I went and presented homeless and you sit there all day waiting to be shouted and then to be told at 4.30 sorry you’ll have to come back the next day. Luckily because of workers I am linked in with they got in touch with a street team and they got in a not very nice hotel, but better than the streets... the second day that happened as well, then on the third day she said ‘She’s not going to come in and present for a third day. You will have this sorted out, this is beyond a joke’, and right enough that night I was in Elder Street. I feel really sorry for the people who don’t have these supports.’

Hanna spoke of the importance of teaching children self-worth and that they can achieve in different arenas. She said her own schooling was a negative experience and that bullying and a lack of support resulted in her dropping out and becoming involved in drugs:

‘I would like to think it would have to start early, education when they’re young. Teaching us and helping us recognise our own attributes and our own self-worth. Helping kids flourish in the areas they are good at. ... You can feel stupid in school. I think a schools like a tree but you’re asking a cat, a car, a dog and a frog to climb it, so that’s not going to work. I never done well in school, I was a bad attender, partly through bullying and stuff.’

The role of art in Hanna’s life is important. She uses art to express her feelings, to relax and for escapism. She benefits from the offering of the Join the Dots project because these interests are nurtured:

‘I can struggle verbally to communicate emotions, as much as I have an extensive vocabulary and I am a people person, that’s one thing. Also it’s very, very calming. Escapism. It takes you away from the real world and all the dramas in the real world. You sit down with your pen or paintbrush and just forget about things.’

The idea of having a hub which provides art activities and also advice for people, particularly those who have had experience with the criminal Justice System, was felt to be important for Hannah. It was of benefit, she thought, for people with anxiety who may struggle to get to multiple venues for their support needs:

‘If everything was under one roof, especially because people with anxiety where you’re having to go here and there and find these places, it’ll be a lot less stressful.’

Help with form filling was recognised as important. She struggled with forms in the past and now gets assistance from a worker when she has to complete an application. She said that many people she knew felt ‘intimidated’ by official forms:

‘A lot of people are very intimidated by forms. I’m quite smart, but I get intimidated by forms, especially from the DWP. They have more or less the same question four of three times but to asked slightly differently. That’s hard.’

Having experienced the many supports available in prison, Hanna believed there was a need to continue the personal development opportunities for people once they leave the prison service. She commented that much of the proposed programme for Join the Dots was available in prisons:

‘Parenting, employment agencies, talking therapies, education and art - they’re all available in the prisons. It would be good if you could be somehow link up with someone so you can continue that when you’re out. It’s definitely needed outside. Not everyone is ready for all of these things but they should certainly be made aware these agencies are here.’

The concept of Join the Dots was welcomed by Hanna. She stated that for those ready to engage, the non-directive approach would work well. Although she feared some may be overwhelmed by

the services available to them, she stressed that a menu of possibilities would work for the diverse needs of people coming out of prisons:

‘I don’t know if there being so much on offer might intimidate or overwhelm people, but even if you had a big poster saying this is what’s available. You can cherry pick what you want to engage with and make it clear you’re under no pressure. That would definitely work, particularly for people who truly want to and/are ready to start getting better.’

Hannah praised the staff at the Join the Dots project and argued that the pilot should be rolled out. She detailed the impacts the project had had on her, and hoped that others could benefit from such a programme in the future:

‘I’m willing it to work; it’s made a big difference to me. Having friendly, positive people around me, the opportunity to be creative and being provided with the materials, having all these speakers coming in and learning all these great wee things. Understanding myself a wee bit better after speaking with these people. And at least knowing that once or twice a week I’ve got somewhere to come to where the people aren’t going to be under the influence when I walk in, everyone has a big smile on their face and give me a big cuddle. That can make such a big difference.’

Comment

Hannah brought great insight and understanding to the research of what people need once they have experienced the Scottish criminal justice system. There are many positive supports offered in prison that are not always available once back into the community. Hannah identified many benefits she experienced through engaging with the pilot, including the friendly and welcoming staff, the non-judgmental and open atmosphere and the interesting and relevant activities that were provided.

Case study 7 – ‘Cormac’

Male, 18, on Community Payback Order.

Cormac attended the majority of the pilot sessions whilst serving his community payback order. Like the other young man featured in this report, Cormac attributes his past criminal behaviour to the drinking culture and the inevitable violence which stems from gangs getting together and excessive alcohol consumption:

‘If the weather is nice and everyone is out drinking and you don’t want to be stuck in the house, you want to go with them. You end up going out with them and drinking is bad. Usually we’re drinking bottles of wine and causing a rumpus. Mayhem. That’s why I’m on this community service, ‘cos I drank and caused mayhem.’

Cormac blames the culture of violence and alcohol on the scheme in which he lives and says that there is ‘no escape’ from the gang fighting or alcohol-fueled crime on a Friday or Saturday night. He knows a number of young men on community service or serving prison sentences and they all are there because they have ‘been mad with it’ on drink and drugs:

‘You cannae escape it, you need to avoid situations, you cannae escape it. It just comes to you. Many of times if I think I’ll get a drink and that but you know if you get a drink somethings gonna happen, ‘cos it always does, something somewhere. Somebody will fight on a Friday... they’re filled with alcohol and it’s hard to avoid.’

‘You ask someone who is in the jail, did you do that sober or mad with it, and they’ll tell you mad with it. They tell you it was due to alcohol. Do stuff they wouldn’t do sober, wake up and they’ve got the fear.’

Cormac describes the scheme in which he lives as ‘nasty’ and a place where it is difficult to avoid trouble. Again, there was an inevitability that the young men would end up in prison with the police. He spoke of relatives that had been in jail and how it was not unusual to know people from the Estate where both parents have been in prison:

‘The scheme we stay in is nasty man. Most of the people that walk about carry knives. And if you carry it you have to be able to use it. It’s just stupid man. All the schemes just want to be better than them about, be the top scheme. Everybody like that will end up in the jail. I tell that to the wee men in my scheme, you’ll end up like me.’

‘My brother was in the jail for 2 years. My Ma says you’re following his footsteps. My way you’ve got people whose Ma and Da are in the prison, especially the Dads.’

Cormac argued that there was nothing to do on the scheme and no positive role models. He felt that if there were more positive people in his life, to guide and advise him, he might have a greater chance of avoiding trouble:

‘What would make my life better? Probably a positive person in my life, to stop me being a wee fanny, to be honest. You know, getting out, mad with it. What I need to make it better would be someone to keep me from drinking, as I’d say I’m a better person off the drink.’

Cormac enjoyed his time with the Join the Dots project. He said that the drama activities were a 'laugh', the people were always friendly and he 'wakes up pure buzzing' when he knows it's his Join the Dots day:

'At first I came in here and thought fffff what's this man? I didn't want to do it but you get to the second or third week and it gets a laugh and you get to know the people in it. It wakes you up in the morning. You come in and play wee games and it's alright man. You get up in the morning and you're buzzing to come here.'

Cormac responded particularly positively to the DWP session in which staff visited the project and spoke to the group about the Job Seekers Allowance scheme and the benefits to which they may be entitled. He had heard of the DWP before but had discounted it as not relevant to him. Having the opportunity to hear the speakers motivated Cormac to partially fill in an application form and think about his future options.

The other speakers who came to the pilot were not felt as relevant for Cormac. He sat in on all the sessions but bar the DWP, was unable to say who visited or why. He said he mostly just 'went out of his head' when they were speaking and could not recall their messages.

Comment

Cormac attended a large number of sessions and seemed to be enjoying the offering. He saw the sessions as a welcome release from the community service and was usually willing to be involved in the art and drama activities. He was very interested in the speakers from the DWP and learnt about the opportunities available to him, of which he previously had no knowledge. However, he did not feel he benefited from the other speakers and he alluded to the lack of connection or interest in the speakers who came to the afternoon sessions. Cormac obviously enjoyed the high energy group activities in the morning and it could be that the comparatively sedentary afternoon sessions made him disconnect. Like other participants, Cormac felt trapped by the life of the scheme to which he belonged. He craved a positive role model and opportunities to help get him away from the negative and often violent gang culture. He stated that a project like Join the Dots could help in providing the pathways away for people like Cormac, although he said he'd probably not engage unless forced.

Case study 8: 'Aiden'

Male, 28, on Community Payback Order and past prison experience.

Aiden attended most of the sessions during the Join the Dots pilot, coming along with a group of men whilst serving their Community Payback Orders. Aiden has led a troubled life, having been in foster care as a child and in prison a number of times as an adult. However, he is proud of his personal development and with agency support he is working hard to turn his life around. He is battling an alcohol addiction but is seeking help. He has recently moved out of the area which he used to live and is no longer in contact with some members of his family or former friends:

'I've got enough in my life at the moment. I'm trying to deal with my addiction to alcohol and that. Basically pure stuck in this wee bubble and I'm trying to get out of it the best I can.'

'I'm trying to change the person I really are. Change the person I was. Sometimes I feel disgusted, things I've done in the past... I've moved away, I got my flat there in November, I've let go a lot of my friends. I don't call them friends, I call them associates; I just seen them as associates. People to help you get to jail and then they get to jail. It's a vicious circle. The best thing I done is move away. Start a fresh, try and get my son.'

Aiden suffers with numerous mental health issues and his past criminal behaviour has led to job and housing losses. He is currently working with 'Change', a Scottish Prison initiative where he is encouraged to think about his behaviour, his emotional response to situations and how he can challenge his own way of thinking. Now he needs to work on his drinking and his anger:

'Always with me it's straight to the bottle, but I know that's not the answer. I'm trying to go to the gym, to do something with that rage, because I know that's not the answer.'

Aiden's childhood was difficult. His father was an alcoholic and his mother struggled. He was put into foster care aged 11. He says that his mother always blamed his past criminal behaviour and alcoholism on his father's 'bad genes':

'Still to this day my Ma says you've got your dad's genes, you'll never change. They don't understand the life I've lived, two different sets of foster families and all that. I didn't think it was fair and I turned to the drink. It's (just) been more and more.'

Aiden does not want to be like his father. He has a young son and he hopes to develop a relationship with him in the future once he is clean and sober. Aiden described the sadness he felt as a child having an alcoholic father and how that influenced his relationship with his parent:

'I'm drinking every day, all the time now. I was brought up and my dad was an alcoholic and I didn't like my Da, I didn't look up to him or nothing. But I want my son, he's only 19 months now, I don't want him... I want him to look up to me and not say oh there's my Da, drinking again, arseholed again, look at the state of him, like I saw with my dad.'

Again, like the other men in the pilot, Aiden links his drinking alcohol to his criminal and violent past behaviour:

'Drink. If I didn't start drinking at such a young age I wouldn't have these crimes. Everyone of them I was intoxicated, not one sober.'

Aiden seemed to really enjoy the Join the Dots sessions and threw himself into each activity with great enthusiasm. He said that there would have been a time where he could not have performed in front of a group, not without a drink, but he has become more confident:

'Just the fact I quite enjoy it and I've never really done anything like this before, and I feel as if I'm getting a bit more confidence about myself and meeting new people. My confidence used to be quite low. I couldn't leave the house or talk to people unless I had a drink in me. I wasn't confident about myself. But now, I don't care so much. I'm up front, me and Davie are up for it. I'm up for it, I've no fear.'

At the Join the Dots session, Aiden enjoyed the art activities, which he called 'relaxing'. He also enjoyed the drama although initially was unsure that what was he was involved in. He described these activities as 'a good laugh' and 'like being free':

'I like the art activities and that. It's a bit relaxing. I came in last week and there were tunes on and you just focus on the beat.'

'I think it's quite good, it's like your being free and not caring about anything in the world, it doesn't matter if it's embarrassing or that. It's a good laugh.'

Aiden said he 'won a watch' when the DWP coming into speak to the group. He had a number of issues with his benefits but had struggled to get to speak to anybody at the job centre. He felt very angry about his situation and wronged. However, he had the opportunity to talk to representatives at the pilot, people that he described as treating him with 'respect', and doing so he was able to sort out his financial issues and his benefits:

'I'm the kind of person if I would have gone in their myself (to the job centre) I'd have just gone off on one. But they came in here and spoke to us and were basically civil and that... Before I'd have gone in angry, I'd have lost the plot, but when they people from the DWP came in, aye, they kinda helped us out. Made things a lot better for me. The woman went right deep in to find out what was happening my benefits. She was like that, right in... It's nice when somebody actually listens to you, she took the time and she listen to me. I was happy with that.'

'They basically sorted it all out. They put me back on the PIP, they backdated my pay and got my money back, that I was owed. Plus money was coming off every week so I kinda won a watch out of it. I've even got a worker now and she's talking to me about part time employment the now. Because I've not worked for a couple of year now.'

As a result of being involved in the pilot, Aiden was able to speak to someone about his benefits and was assigned a work coach. He was grateful for this opportunity and the support the Join the Dots staff gave throughout the pilot period.

'I got help with a work coach. It was all though Join the Dots, mind those people came in? It felt good man. If I wasn't in Join the Dots in the first place, I wouldn't have known why I

wasn't getting my money back and how to get these benefits. Just from that wee half an hour appointment I found new information.'

Importantly, Aiden felt that all the staff members who worked with him throughout the pilot were patient and listened to him with respect and care. He spoke of his difficulties with social work in the past as he felt 'judged' by them and unable to develop a working relationship:

'I hate social work. They classify me as a pure animal. They classify me with these pure big fancy words, but they are only going by what the courts are saying. They don't know me in person, they judge me by the paperwork. That annoys me, so I snap back at them, but that's the wrong thing to do. I've realised that now.'

However, he is now working with one individual through the social work and has developed a trusting relationship with him. Aiden described how important it was to show this individual how he is working hard to stay out of trouble and rebuild his life:

'My new social worker is dead proud of me. He went away for three weeks and he said he was proud of me because I'd no picked up another conviction and I'd no haven't had a problem with the police. I've no other court cases to go to. I've nothing holding me after the last 7 hours of community service. I can get back on track.'

Comment

Aiden gained a great deal from his involvement with the pilot project. He spoke of how he developed in confidence through the drama activities, felt calmed by the art activities and was able to speak to staff about his financial problems which were then resolved. He flourished in the group and encouraged others to join in the activities and engage with the speakers. When Aiden's Community Payback Order came to an end, he said he would make the effort to come in using public transport and finish the pilot, as he wanted to prove he could commit to the project.

Case Study 9: 'Derek'

Male, age 46, Former Prisoner and supported by a homeless charity.

Derek was the oldest participant in the sample and had experienced the longest periods in prison. He now lives in a homeless hostel and is at a point in his life where he wants to bring about change and focus on his future. He still struggles with alcohol and drug dependency, but hopes to find permanent accommodation, get sober and stay out of jail. His involvement in the Join the Dots project was the first step for Derek in reintegrating into the community and bringing about personal changes:

'... Getting a house because I'm staying in a hostel. Maybe getting a job. And be a normal citizen of society, because my past not been too good. I've been in and out of prison all my life. And I want to change that.'

'I don't want to break the law anymore. I want to give back to the community, because I've let people down in the past with my criminal activities, and I want to change all that now. So going to Theatre Nemo (Join the Dots) is that first step for me... I'm getting older now, I've got a family who care about me who I've left down in the past. I need to get my act together and get back to a normal life.'

Derek has attended a number of sessions and enjoyed the art activities. He has made a piece for the exhibition exploring his relationship with alcohol. He writes poetry and enjoys the drama sessions. He described the very act of coming into the project and sitting with people who were different to him, not living in a hostel or former prisoners, as beneficial. The pilot gave him purpose, was helping to build his esteem and made him feel like he had a choice to spend his time in a worthwhile pursuit:

'I've done a bit of art here. Just stuff I've never done before. Talking to people and being a wee bit artistic. I'm doing one now and I'm trying to portray I'm a different person. I'm making a bottle and I'm showing how I've changed now. It's brung out an artistic side in me which I didn't know I had. I did stuff like that in Prison but just because there was nothing else to do, but it's good to have this! To know every Wednesday you can go there, relax and be confident doing something never done before and I enjoy it as well.'

'The artistic side that's generated a kinda, I look forward to this morning so I can do my art. I find it excellent. It keeps me out that hostel all day. Coming in here and talking about some decent things, with decent people. I actually look forward to coming here on a Wednesday you know? I really do.'

The friendly and welcoming staff have played in important role, making Derek feel at ease. He said that their attitude, and the positivity felt by the other members of the group, had been crucial especially at the initial stages:

'On the first day I didn't want to really be there. I was a wee bit anxious. But the staff there have been brilliant, really welcoming. And it's because of them I feel more relaxed in the group and I can talking to people from different backgrounds, people who have never been involved in crime, so it's good to get a wee bit of advice from them.'

A turning point for Derek was when he had the opportunity to meet the speaker from the Violence Reduction Unit. Derek had never spoken to anybody about his difficult childhood before and was not aware of the way in which Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) can shape behaviour. Derek had the opportunity to speak to him following the session, which he described as a powerful experience in which he began to receive the support he needed:

‘A couple of weeks ago I was sitting here and something came in called the Violence Reduction? Now I’ve never sat down and talked to anybody about my past before, and that was the first time I’ve done it with James you know, talking about my childhood. It made me understand where all my trouble stems from, it’s my childhood. It was really good to talk about it, because it made me realise why I’m like this. He listened and understood, because he’s been there himself.’

‘My past was really bad you know? And to talk to somebody, it was a bit of a relief you know? I trusted the guy and I talked to him. And if I’m going to get help to become a decent guy I need to open up to people and speak to them, get the support I need. And it’s thanks to Theatre Nemo I’ve been able to do that.’

The need to trust staff and ‘open up’ to them was identified as key to Derek to moving forward. He is beginning to understand the impact of experiencing early childhood trauma. He has struggled with addiction and witnessed his father’s alcoholism. He found the session about trauma and recovery enlightening, as he had never connected his addiction and his difficult upbringing:

‘I’ve been in and out of prison all my life. Drugs, and alcohol. It helped me forget about my past. That load has been on me for many years, you know? It was good to talk about it. My dad has got a lot of things to do with the bad stuff in my past. He’s still alive but I don’t really like to see him. My dad had an alcohol problem at that time and that’s why he acted how he acted. I’ve been an alcoholic myself, so I understand where he’s coming from you know?’

Speaking to staff and the guest speakers at Join the Dots has been Derek’s first step into sharing some of his early trauma and learning acceptance. He described this opportunity as a relief:

‘I’ve never spoken to anyone before about my background. To open up and talk about my past is kinda a relief. I always bottled up and never told anyone about myself. I always thought if I said I was just feeling sorry for myself, but it’s the exact opposite you know? The more you share about your background the more people can help you.’

Finally, Derek said that although his relationship with his father was a difficult one, but being able to speak to him about the art work he’d been making at Join the Dots and the progress he was making in the groups had been extremely positive. Derek could tell his father that he was making a changes in his life and Join the Dots was the first step to change:

‘It’s my father’s fault. He could’ve been a better father if he wasn’t an alcoholic. Mind, I’ve been talking to him about what I’ve been doing on Join the Dot’s and he’s quite proud of me. My dad always thought I was a loser and a pain in the arse. Never heard of me wanting

to do anything to change my life, so telling him about this Join the Dots thing, he's like that, kinda proud of me!

Comment

Of all the participants in the sample, Derek seemed to get the most out of Join the Dots project. This could be because Derek was exactly the kind of person the pilot is designed for; people who have experienced the prison system, are disillusioned and/or struggling to reconnect into society, may be isolated and lonely, and are often battling addictions and escaping their criminal pasts. Derek flourished in the pilot project and hopes to maintain contact with Theatre Nemo to continue developing his art and his involvement in drama. Derek found the opportunity to speak to trained staff about his own ACEs as extremely useful. He had never spoken to anyone about that before and her described the opportunity to do so as a 'release'. The pilot provided a platform in which he could learn, get supported, become more engaged in the community and feel more confident about himself. For Derek, the project was a great success.