Corrections Research Symposium 2025

Belfast, Northern Ireland

CRS 2025

ICPA International Corrections & Prisons Association

EURO PRIS

Acknowledgements

Organized as a collaboration between the *International Corrections and Prisons Association (ICPA)* and *EuroPris*, the fourth biennial Correctional Research Symposium (CRS) was hosted by the Northern Irish Prison Service, Northern Ireland Department of Justice, Visit Belfast, and Tourism Northern Ireland. Thanks are due to the Executive Directors of ICPA and EuroPris, Natalie Boal (Australia) and Gustav Tallving (Netherlands) and their respective teams for their efforts in planning and executing the event.   Appreciation is also extended to the Symposium's major sponsor, the International Association for Correctional and Forensic Psychology.

More than 250 representatives from some 36 countries attended the Symposium, a mixture of corrections practitioners and researchers who gathered as colleagues to discuss the relevance and implications of research for improving practice.

The Symposium organizers thank the Program Committee for the Symposium, which included Maria Watson (Northern Ireland Prison Service), Dr. Michelle Butler (Queen's University Belfast), Dr. Emma Regan (Irish Prison Service), Dr. Adriano Martufi (University of Pavia), Dr. Helen Kosc (University of Oxford) and Dr. Frank Porporino as Chair (Canada). Last but not least, the organizers sincerely appreciate the efforts of our graduate student contributors, who volunteered to attend the Symposium and provide summaries of presentations. They include Elliot Bowden, Amelia Desmond, Isla Donaldson, Hannah Ferris Blair, and Silvia Martins. Their detailed summaries of the research presented at the CRS are included in this compendium, essentially as submitted with only minor editing.

This compendium was visually designed and edited by Dr. Kevin Wright and Kara Forrai, with the goal of presenting the graduate student contributors' work in an accessible and visually engaging format. Some of the student contributions were mildly edited by Dr. Frank Porporino.

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Fourth Correctional Research Symposium 2025

From Individual to Ecosystem: Sharing Research that Matters for Corrections

Welcome & Introductions

Hosted by the Northern Irish Prison Service, Northern Ireland Department of Justice, Visit Belfast, and Tourism Northern Ireland, the fourth Correctional Research Symposium took place at the International Convention & Exhibition Centre in Belfast. In a collaboration between the ICPA and EuroPris, the 2025 Correctional Research Symposium was introduced with a warm welcome and with poignant reflections from the presidents of the ICPA and EuroPris, Peter Severin (Australia) and Caron McCaffrey (Ireland). The major sponsor of this symposium, the IACFP, was later introduced by IACFP President, Dr Emma Regan (Clinical Psychologist & Director of Care and Rehabilitation, Irish Prison Service, Ireland). Naomi Long (Minister for Justice, Northern Ireland) continued the introductory session, emphasising the importance of collaboration and shared responsibility in working to change the lives of people who come into contact with the justice system. Executive Directors of EuroPris and ICPA, Gustav Tallving (Netherlands) and Natalie Boal (Australia), followed with reflections on previous Correctional Research Symposiums and the new challenges that the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and acceleration and evolution of technology present to correctional research and practice. They also introduced the central theme of this Correctional Research Symposium – 'From Individual to Ecosystem: Sharing Research that Matters for Corrections'. The Global Track Chair of the Symposium, Dr. Frank Porporino (Corrections & Criminal Justice Consultant, IACFP & ICPA, Canada) welcomed the more than 250 representatives from some 36 countries in attendance, and reiterated the commitment to improving the strong alliance between correctional research and practice. He emphasised how this kind strong alliance with research can help us monitor performance on the one hand, are we getting the results we want, and help us innovate on the other, are we able to do better with a somewhat different approach. Dr Porporino then welcomed Dr Faye Taxman (University Professor, George Mason Virginia, USA) to present the opening plenary: '"How to Improve" the Psychology of Criminal Conduct and Risk-Need Responsivity Frameworks in Improving Corrections."

Summary of CRS Plenary Sessions

Theme: Individual Factors

"How to Improve" the Psychology of Criminal Conduct and Risk-Need-Responsivity Frameworks in Improving Corrections
Professor Faye S. Taxman Ph.D., George Mason University, United States

Summarized by Silvia Martins, Northern Ireland

Dr. Faye Taxman delivered a comprehensive critique of the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model, highlighting both its theoretical strengths and practical limitations within contemporary criminal justice systems. Advanced initially by Don Andrews and colleagues in the 1990s, the RNR framework is built on three core principles: **risk** (identifying individuals most likely to re-offend), **need** (addressing criminogenic needs such as substance use or antisocial attitudes), and **responsivity** (tailoring interventions to an individual's learning style and cognitive abilities).

Recent research (*Fazel et al., 2024*) confirms inconsistent model application. While the **risk principle** is widely supported by empirical evidence, the assessment of **needs** varies significantly across assessment tools, and **responsivity** remains underdeveloped. Only **general responsivity**—delivering interventions within social learning environments—shows consistent effectiveness, while **specific responsivity**, such as adapting to trauma histories or learning differences, lacks sufficient study.

Persistent Challenges in RNR Assessment Tools

Taxman underscored critical flaws in third- and fourth-generation risk/needs assessment (RNA) tools that undercut the model's effectiveness:

- **Inconsistent Measurement:** Criminogenic needs are assessed unevenly across instruments, and expanding need domains have not improved predictive validity (*Taxman, 2016*).

- **Over-Complexity Without Validation:** Tools have grown more intricate without corresponding gains in accuracy. Many are used for purposes they were never validated for.

- **Scientific Weaknesses:** Assessment quality varies widely. Many tools perform below acceptable predictive thresholds (AUC < 0.70), and concerns remain about their fairness across race and gender. Newer methods like machine learning add complexity but lack clear evidence of superiority.

Although RNR aims to guide rehabilitation, deterrence, and even some retributive goals, its real-world impact is constrained. Implementation often suffers from poor fidelity, and many risk tools fail to measure public safety threats—such as the potential for violence—accurately. Needs assessments frequently conflate historical and current behaviours, and metrics for responsivity are largely absent. Most critically, many staff lack confidence in these instruments, relying instead on intuition—an unacknowledged "gut factor" absent from RNR's empirical framework.

Organisational and Cultural Barriers

Implementation failures are compounded by systemic issues rooted in correctional infrastructure and institutional culture. Although agencies may formally embrace rehabilitative aims, punishment often dominates in practice. Frontline staff—many without clinical training and operating in under-resourced environments—frequently misuse or misunderstand risk/needs tools. These instruments usually omit key factors like offence severity, intimate partner violence (IPV), housing instability, and individual strengths. Instead, they emphasise superficial metrics, such as offence frequency—what Taxman critiqued as "counting bites of the criminal justice apple."

Responsivity, in particular, is undermined by outdated technology, inadequate training, and neglect of social learning strategies. Ideally, this principle would accommodate client-specific factors like literacy, trauma history, motivation, and readiness for change. In reality, the three principles are often ignored the most.

Evidence from Frontline Practice

A qualitative study by [Viglione, Rudes, and Taxman (2015)](#) on officers' use of RNA tools over more than a decade illustrates these challenges:

1. Some officers completed assessments based on prior client knowledge and pre-filling Likert scales without formal input.

2. Others had their clients complete assessments but never reviewed the results.

3. Many officers did not find the tool's items helpful in guiding decisions.

4. Overrides were common, especially for high-stakes but low-risk offences (e.g., sex offences, DUI).

5. In cases involving women, officers often raised risk scores to secure needed services—essentially manipulating the tool's output.

6. Officers generally lacked an understanding of the risk categories.

7. There was widespread confusion about concepts such as criminal thinking and cognitive distortions.

These findings reveal a fundamental disconnect between the intended tool function and practical use.

The Research–Practice Gap

Taxman emphasised that a persistent gap between research and practice undermines the model's effectiveness. A meta-analysis of 26 studies showed inconsistent RNR outcomes, primarily due to the rarity of full implementation—only 20% of evidence-based practices reach consistent operational use. This crisis stems from top-down implementation strategies that ignore frontline realities and systemic mismatches—such as 28.3% of clients needing substance abuse treatment, while only 12.7% receive it.

Taxman advocated for **implementation science to address these deficits** and a healthcare-derived approach focused on rapid-cycle improvement. Unlike traditional research models, this framework delivers actionable insights within 12 to 18 months by engaging stakeholders, testing changes iteratively, and transforming organisational culture.

She outlined four key shifts:

1. **Staff Empowerment:** Move beyond one-off training to co-production models, where practitioners help shape reform and receive ongoing professional development.

2. **Practical Tools:** Develop plain-language resources like "appropriateness statements" that guide decision-making (e.g., reducing collateral contacts for low-risk individuals).

3. **Expanded Scope:** Broaden assessments to include social determinants of health—housing, mental health access—and client strengths in work, education, and relationships.

4. **Strengths-Based Approaches:** Challenge the RNR model's deficit orientation by promoting prosocial identity formation through social learning and positive reinforcement.

Taxman highlighted innovative resources like the **RNR Simulation Tool**—used for aligning supervision and treatment resources—and knowledge-sharing platforms like the **Global Community Corrections Initiative** as key vehicles for change.

In conclusion, Dr. Taxman's critique reframes the RNR model as a valuable but flawed framework that requires modernisation. To evolve from theory to practice, RNR must centre fidelity, frontline insights, and updated tools that address violence risk, gendered pathways to crime, and clients' strengths. Her vision positions the model as evidence-based and human-centred—empowering practitioners and promoting meaningful rehabilitation over punitive default.

Summarized by Isla Donaldson, Irish Prison Service

Dr Faye Taxman is a health service criminologist and University Professor at the Schar School of Policy and Government at George Mason University, Virginia, USA. Dr Taxman opened with a brief history of the PCC/RNR frameworks, outlining the central components of risk, need, and responsivity. The impracticalities of applying these frameworks within correctional settings were then discussed in the context of: lack of clinical training and confidence in using risk assessment tools, under-resourced agencies, and the tension that can exist between rehabilitation ideals and the operation of the punishment system. The challenges in measuring the effectiveness of PCC/RNR and the resulting low number of studies that fully test the frameworks were highlighted, and Dr Taxman proceeded to outline three key areas identified as needing action for effective implementation PCC/RNR frameworks:

1. Staffing of correctional agencies – promoting staff confidence, understanding and empowerment
2. Practice frameworks being under-utilised (or not utilised at all) – encouraging stakeholders to consume and synthesise research findings, and to design and utilise best practice guidelines

3. Bringing RNR/PCC models into the modern day with new scientific information and practical realities – balancing service needs with system capacity to meet these needs

The value of implementation science in "addressing the Achilles Heel of RNR" was also discussed, with emphasis being placed on its utility in guiding practitioners to adapt evidence-based practice (EBP) to their own environment. Enhancing communication and collaboration between researchers and practitioners was also highlighted as being crucial to the application of EBP, with expanding the audience of existing research being one suggested strategy to facilitate this. Dr Taxman concluded the plenary session with a vision for a revised RNR framework, one that integrates consideration of risk for violence, criminal justice involvement, the social determinants of health, and social productivity.

Theme: Interpersonal Factors

Peer Mentoring in Criminal Justice
Gillian Buck, Associate Professor of Social Work, Faculty of Health, Medicine and Society, University of Chester, United Kingdom

Summarized by Amelia Desmond, Research Assistant, Irish Prison Service

Dr Gillian Buck is an Associate Professor of Social Work in the Faculty of Health, Medicine, and Society at the University of Chester, UK. She is also Principal Investigator on the currently in process Imagining Possible Futures for Lived Experience Criminal Justice project, the first large-scale participatory study of lived-experience led criminal justice in the UK and Ireland. Gillian defined peer mentoring as community members, often with lived experience of criminal justice, working or volunteering in helping relationships in the criminal justice system. She spoke about peer mentoring as hope- and strength-based. Gillian provided an overview of the historical roots of peer mentoring, dating back to the 18th century. She discussed her Ph.D. study which was carried out through semi-structured interviews (with 18 peer mentors, 20 mentees, four mentoring coordinators, and two probation staff) and analysed using thematic analysis and voice method. Five themes were identified: 1) identity; 2) agency (e.g. having choice, control, and self-direction, through dialogue with peers and the environment and self); 3) values (e.g. good mentors being caring, listening, and taking small steps); 4) change; and 5) power. The authenticity of the ex-offender identity was inspirational for mentees that change could happen, with the tension between known habits and unknown futures. Consciousness-

raising is needed to reduce stigma, as different prisons have different procedures and policies – e.g. deciding not to let mentors in; publicly humiliating mentors by making them use different toilets. Professionals should be open to other types of knowledge and other strategies available outside professional understanding, looking at how people are being taken care of in those spaces. Gillian highlighted that culture changes can occur in prisons as a result of peer mentoring, creating more humane systems.

Summarized by Silvia Martins, Northern Ireland

Peer mentoring has emerged as a dynamic and increasingly institutionalised practice within the criminal justice landscape in the UK and internationally. Drawing upon the lived experience of those who have successfully navigated the penal system, peer mentoring offers a unique and often transformative form of support to individuals currently undergoing rehabilitation. At the heart of peer mentoring lies a powerful reconceptualisation of knowledge and authority. Lived experience is repositioned not as a liability but as a source of insight, legitimacy, and empathy. Peer mentors, having endured the disempowerment of incarceration and the challenges of re-entry, can offer support grounded in authenticity. Empirical evidence from interviews and observational studies reveals how peer mentoring facilitates identity reconstruction. For individuals whose sense of self has been fractured by abuse, addiction, or institutionalisation, mentoring provides a space to rediscover agency, voice, and purpose. Programmes such as the *Identity Mask* project at HMYOI Aylesbury exemplify this approach, using art-based methods to promote reflection and alternative narratives of selfhood.

Equally significant is the role peer mentoring plays in fostering agency. Many mentees arrive in the system burdened by internalised stigma and diminished confidence. Through non-judgemental encouragement and modelling pro-social behaviour, mentors help shift the focus from deficits to strengths. This relational dynamic often sets in motion a virtuous cycle: mentees gain confidence, acquire skills, and sometimes become mentors themselves. This peer-to-peer continuity enhances the sustainability of support networks and cultivates a sense of solidarity and shared accountability.

Defining Peer Mentoring and Historical Roots

Dr. Buck's keynote at the 4th Correctional Research Conference further enriched the understanding of peer mentoring by interrogating its definitions and historical lineage. Peer mentoring, she noted, lacks a universal meaning. While UK government guidance frames mentors as "wise friends," Dr Buck advocates a broader conceptualisation: community members, often with lived experience, engaged in supportive and empowering relationships.

Contrary to the notion that peer mentoring is a modern development, Dr. Buck highlighted a historical continuum dating back to the 18th century. Reformers like John Howard, artists like Arthur Koestler—whose Koestler Arts Awards celebrate prisoners' creativity—and 19th-century initiatives such as peer-led education in Dartmoor Prison all reflect an enduring legacy of mutual aid and lived expertise within criminal justice. This tradition continues today through global examples like the Samaritans' Listener Scheme in the UK and Ireland, peer health programmes in Australia, life-sentenced prisoners mentoring in Louisiana's Angola Prison, and peer-led governance models in Rwandan correctional facilities.

Research Insights: Identity, Agency, Values, and Power

Dr. Buck's qualitative study of peer mentoring programmes in England revealed five interlinked themes: identity, agency, values, change, and power ([Buck, Tomczak and Quinn, 2022](#)).

- **Identity**: Shared experience allows mentors to connect authentically with mentees. This bond fosters trust, builds inspiration, and often motivates mentees to give back—deepening their desistance from crime.
- **Agency**: Unlike top-down models of supervision, peer mentoring operates through egalitarian relationships that encourage mentees to take control of their paths.
- **Values**: The most effective mentoring relationships are rooted in care, active listening, and small, achievable goals, fostering resilience and self-worth.
- **Change**: The journey of personal transformation is rarely linear. Mentors help demystify the fear, grief, and uncertainty of change while advocating for systemic reform to reduce structural barriers.
- **Power**: While peer mentoring is grounded in equality, traditional power dynamics can re-emerge. Mentors may face institutional suspicion, onerous security checks, or find themselves inadvertently reproducing authoritative roles.

Challenges and Ethical Considerations

Peer mentoring, while powerful, is not without risk or complexity. Mentors are often exposed to emotional labour and potential re-traumatisation. Institutions can resist integration, marginalising peer workers through heightened vetting procedures or limited recognition of their professional status. The "Standard Plus" security classification in the UK exemplifies this paradox—offering employment pathways for former offenders yet reinforcing their outsider identity. Co-option is also risky: peer mentors may inadvertently fill service gaps created by state withdrawal rather than being empowered as change agents. Dr. Buck cautioned against such instrumentalisation and called for trauma-informed support and fair employment practices for peer mentors.

Creative and Participatory Approaches

Dr. Buck's work also champions **creative methodologies**—such as murals, storytelling, and participatory research—as practical tools in peer mentoring. These approaches decentralise traditional hierarchies of knowledge, foster inclusive dialogue, and offer therapeutic value. Programmes like the "Hope" mural at HMP Albany and Unlock's narrative-based advocacy illustrate how lived experience can reshape public and institutional perceptions.

Future Directions

Advancing the field requires:

- Reforming **vetting procedures** to reflect genuine rehabilitation.
- Scaling up investment in **arts-based and peer-led programmes.**
- Ensuring peer mentors are integrated as **equal partners** in reform, not just symbolic participants.
- Providing ongoing **psychological support and professional development** for peer mentors.

Peer mentoring challenges traditional conceptions of justice by foregrounding the agency, insight, and humanity of those with lived experience. It offers individual transformation and a broader reimagining of rehabilitation—one in which justice is co-produced, solidaristic, and inclusive.

As Dr. Buck and her collaborators remind us, systems must evolve to recognise the risks associated with past convictions and the assets embedded in lived experience.

Theme: Responding to Community Obstacles

Structural Measures for Capacity-Problems in the Netherlands
Maaike de Boois, Department of Justice and Safety, The Netherlands
Loes Schoenmaker, Department of Justice and Safety, The Netherlands

Summarized by Silvia Martins, Northern Ireland

The Dutch prison system has faced mounting capacity challenges since late 2023, rooted in a convergence of long-term systemic pressures. These include rising sentence lengths, a sharp increase in high-need detainees such as juveniles and individuals requiring forensic psychiatric care, and persistent staffing shortages. Though the Netherlands continues to have one of the lowest incarceration rates in the EU—just 45 detainees per 100,000 inhabitants—its prison infrastructure has reached a critical tipping point. With occupancy now regularly exceeding 99%, emergency overflow measures such as using police holding cells have become commonplace. In response, the Ministry of Justice and Security has launched an ambitious reform programme with a 10-year horizon to address root causes rather than rely on short-term fixes.

This comprehensive initiative is being led by **Dr. Maaike de Boois**, a sociologist, seconded by Dutch Probation Services and Loes Schoenmaker, a seasoned prison and forensic care operations specialist. Their joint expertise bridges system-level policy design and frontline institutional practice. They have taken a whole-chain approach to reform, acknowledging that lasting capacity solutions cannot be found within prison walls alone. Instead, reform must encompass sentencing policy, alternatives to incarceration, reintegration practices, and the interdependencies between forensic care and correctional facilities.

Loes Schoonmaker, program manager for the Ministry's capacity planning, contextualised the problem's scale. The system comprises 26 prisons across 33 sites, with just over 10,000 beds— half of which are in double-occupancy cells already filled. In 2023, the annual inflow surged to 27,000 detainees before dropping slightly to 22,000 in 2024 due to emergency interventions. Yet the majority of detainees—over 60%—serve sentences under three months, which places a heavy operational burden on intake and release procedures. Staff shortages since 2017 have exacerbated this strain, resulting in unit closures and deferred maintenance, further reducing usable capacity. Although the system implemented immediate responses such as early release

for low-risk prisoners and small-scale expansions, these measures remain stopgaps rather than sustainable solutions.

A historical analysis presented by **Dr. de Boois** revealed how incremental policy changes over the past two decades have quietly eroded system flexibility. Since 2016, longer average sentences—particularly for drug and violent crimes—have offset declining conviction rates. Concurrently, capacity was reduced by closing halfway houses, scaling back conditional releases, and introducing more restrictive regimes. Specialised units for terrorism suspects and mentally ill detainees now consume disproportionate resources, while staff attrition and budget constraints limit expansion. These trends have collided to create a bottleneck in the system, and one made worse by reduced extramural reintegration options, now down by over 20% since 2021.

The reform team has modelled a range of future scenarios through to 2035—from sharp capacity reductions due to falling crime to demand tripling if current trends persist. Their strategy is structured around three key levers. First, **demand-side interventions** include investing in prevention, diverting low-risk offenders to community sanctions, and reinstating phased reintegration programmes such as work release. Second, **supply-side innovations** explore modular prison models with phased security levels, allowing for flexibility in staffing and design. Third, **cross-system collaboration** focuses on better alignment between sentencing policies and operational realities while leveraging international best practices to calibrate reforms.

Pilot projects are already underway to evaluate electronic monitoring, restructured community sanctions, and triage-based transfers to forensic care for detainees with mental health needs. However, **de Boois** and **Schoenmaker** acknowledged the significant political and fiscal barriers to reform. Resistance to sentencing reform remains strong, and large-scale facility expansions have not yet secured dedicated funding. Early release protocols—initially set at five days and now extended to two weeks for short sentences—have provoked a political backlash, illustrating the tension between populist punitive instincts and evidence-based corrections policy.

Despite these constraints, the team is committed to forward-looking, data-informed change. They emphasise that long-term planning offers a critical safeguard against crisis-driven policy

swings, even in a politically charged environment. **Dr. de Boois** said, "While political climates shift, our 10-year horizon ensures proposals outlive short-term cycles." This orientation toward systemic thinking is one of the reform programme's key strengths and offers a potential model for other jurisdictions grappling with similar challenges.

Practice Implications: What Can We Learn from the Evidence?

Several practice implications emerge from the Dutch experience, offering valuable lessons for national and international policymakers. First, the evidence underlines the importance of **early intervention and diversion** as tools to reduce long-term prison demand. Community-based alternatives for low-risk offenders not only alleviate pressure on institutions but are often more effective in reducing recidivism. Second, **flexible infrastructure planning**—such as modular low-security units and automation of detention processes—can offer crucial agility in responding to fluctuating populations without overcommitting to fixed, capital-intensive facilities. Third, the reform effort highlights the value of **cross-sectoral integration**, particularly between mental health, probation, and custodial services. The rise in detainees with forensic care needs demonstrates that prison reform must be approached in tandem with health system reform. Fourth, the Dutch model reinforces the need for *data-informed governance*. Scenario modelling and impact assessments are central to ensuring that reforms are responsive to long-term trends, not merely short-term political pressures. Finally, the Netherlands offers a cautionary tale about the consequences of neglecting the cumulative effects of restrictive penal policy. Even in a low-incarceration context, extended sentences, staff attrition, and limited reintegration pathways can quickly produce systemic gridlock. Thus, The Dutch experience invites reflection on managing capacity and reimagining incarceration's function in modern societies.

Theme: Adjusting Organizational and Policy Responses

Navigating the Road to Reform: Lessons from Northern Ireland

Dr. Michelle Butler, Queen's University Belfast
Richard Taylor, Governor in Charge, Hydebank Wood College
Jacqui Durkin, Chief Inspector, Criminal Justice, Northern Ireland

Summarized by Hannah Ferris Blair, Queen's University Belfast

Discussion around the transformation journey of Hydebank Wood College.

The programme (transforming from prison to secure college) has been in place since 2013.

Focus on inspiration, not manipulation.

Staff team at Hydebank described as 'dealers in hope'.

Following a review in 2010, recommended that Hydebank should transform into a college. There was no blueprint, as there had been no work done on it previously, the team were working month to month.

Criminal justice inspectorate, alongside others, did an unannounced visit of Hydebank in 2013. This was the worst report to have happened in Northern Ireland, it was recognised that a task force for change was needed to create custodial change.

Hydebank is the only prison in Northern Ireland where women are housed.

Previously, going into Hydebank was going into a hostile environment, nobody cared about problems that existed within the criminal justice system.

Following the report, a new director was brought in, Richard Taylor was the deputy director.

Obvious that there were problems with staff routines.

Residents spent up to 23 hours per day in their cells and collective punishment was used.

Hydebank Wood was representative of broken window theory, there was people yelling at each other from cells into the outside, broken windows, litter etc.

110 recommendations were made for Hydebank.

How does real change begin? Acceptance of the problems so that steps can be taken.

Looked at structure of management. People had not bought into the new programme. Morale at an all-time low, had to get staff to start thinking they could make change and change the culture in Hydebank.

It was said that unless Hydebank improved within 18 months the prison was looking at privatisation or closure. Unions were a strong part of the structure at Hydebank, Unions were involved.

A day manager role was created, 12 hours 8am-8pm, 7 days a week of a three-week rota basis.

'Culture eats strategy for breakfast'.

Started to look at the offending rate, prison population, trying to see the appetite for change.

Made a conscious decision to treat everyone equally and to have both men and women be allowed in the college. Started referring to everyone as students.

Therapy dogs, animal husbandry, 'city farm' all integrated into the college.

Started programmes to create employment, building confidence and creating qualifications.

Over 85% of those in the college were illiterate in literacy, numeracy and ICT, now there are qualifications available up to level 3.

There was a budget cut of 1.2 million, focused on what changed would be made and tried to think private. Applied for lottery funding etc and ended up getting 2 million in funding. Started to look at neurodiversity and violent offending.

'A happy landing is an empty landing', most landings in the single figures every day.

Started to raise money, incidents decreased.

Top 3 ingredients for change: support from prison service, spend time with the prisoners, giving strength and confidence to the staff.

High levels of staff sickness were reduced to low levels.

Staff at all levels came up with ideas for change.

Described the change as a rollercoaster, going up the hill for a long time but then once you're over the top, you're over the top.

Michelle Butler

Looking at the different mechanisms that were being used to promote desistance, because a big focus of the policy document was education for desistence.

A study was done, 40+ interviews with prisoners and 17 staff, alongside observations.

Transformative learning giving people tools to transform how they think about the world and themselves.

Programmes like art were used, encouraged thinking about past, present and future self.

Supports were put in place to help people learn how to create identity changes and learn how to respond to people and events differently.

Creating opportunities to be viewed pro-socially within the community, roles within the prison to be a barista, barber etc and that meant that people got to take on that role.

Detained people can feel low in levels of efficacy and agency, but agency and efficacy are important when getting out of prison as important when getting out of prison as stigma, barriers etc. Are present.

Programmes created to build up confidence and being told they could do it. Programmes had short term goals to allow people to build confidence quickly and efficiently.

Created teams that allowed people to have supports. A lot of people in on short-term sentences, emphasis on introducing smaller qualifications that could be built on to get people engaged in education without having to complete a whole qualification.

Problems with the outside, enhanced people's socialisation skills and also developing prosocial supports. Emotional work and helping people to repair and rebuild past relationships with family, community etc.

Opened the Hydebank gates, allowed people in to reduce stigma and meant they could come back for support post-release, also worked with employers for placement.

Worked on people's sense of safety because it is difficult to work on self if not feeling safe.

Increased time out of cell to avoid rumination, self-harm etc. And increased access to mental health services and improved staff/ prisoner relationships.

Goal setting, individualised approaches and making an education for employment, for example building a CV for increased self-confidence. Skills provision based around their goals for work. Diversifying the training in Hydebank to reflect the needs of Hydebank students.

Jacqui Durkin

Independent inspections of prisons are important because they uphold UN obligation OPCAT.

Assurance, public confidence and improvement of Northern Irish criminal justice system.

Create a roadmap to create a space that's suitable and gives a voice to the voiceless.

Hydebank Wood's turn around journey was long, leading leaders and supporting people, not defining them by their convictions. More than just improving the prison for the next inspection.

Northern Ireland context with the Troubles, terrorism, political prisoner, staff as targets etc. Makes it difficult for the public to view prisons positively.

Men in cells too much and women not equipped with any skills.

Half of people are on remand and female population has tripled since 2015.

A whole inspection team approach to inspection, everyone has their own roles.

In Hydebank, staff are impressive, they are hope givers to prisoners.

Prisoners could tell inspectors what their plans were, what they had been involved in and what they had been involved in impressed the inspectors.

Current director and Richard Taylor and his team are committed to making change and continuing to improve Hydebank.

Positive relationships are necessary, charity and voluntary sector, Belfast Metropolitan College etc have all been great partners. It's all about people and embracing people.

As inspectors, deliver independent reports that aren't hidden or sugar coated. Inspector team want same thing as Hydebank staff, continued improvement.

Criminal justice system issues, systematic issues etc are global problems and entail a confirmed need for improvement, excited to see where Hydebank goes.

*At this point a previous female student of Hydebank joined the plenary to get engaged with questions.

Questions
*Plenary speakers asked questions to former Hydebank student.

Q from Richard Taylor: What are your feelings about Hydebank, and experience of Hydebank?

A: It was very overwhelming going to Hydebank, but it was through own faults that ended up there. Can't complain about treatment at Hydebank, there were opportunities, education and full-time employment. Never been unemployed but opportunities at Hydebank allowed her to remain employed through incarceration and able to retrain while there too.
Mental health improved and maintained because of opportunities and activities involved in,

such as the choir.

The introduction landing was a blur, after the introduction saw that staff weren't there to punish, reassured her and her family whenever they visited. Being able to work while at Hydebank saved her life. Had the opportunity to show sheep at Balmoral show, involved in choir and football.

Trying to get people involved and being encouraged to get involved, there are opportunities there if you want to take them.

Q from Jacqui Durkin: Do you think that things change once inspectors leave? Do you have any tips to get that authentic voice?
A: No, always encouraged to keep things tidy. There was no major overhaul for inspections, there is always people painting walls etc.
A lot of people don't want to speak out at a landing meeting, getting people alone so they can talk authentically and not be overshadowed by louder voices.

*Questions moved to the audience

Q for Richard Taylor: The things done at Hydebank for change, were these changes theory driven?

A: We put decision making down to everyone at all levels, we were taking all ideas from all staff. A lot of the stuff tried didn't work, but able to just move on and try different things. A lot of the staff were criminology graduates so there were theory drive ideas too. The changes made in Hydebank could be made in any prison, it is people driven and using people to make changes.

Q for Richard Taylor: How was resistance to change managed at the time?

A: There were clear areas where people were resistant, and people not always advocates for change. These people weren't fought against, a lot of the time these people were not fought, they would transfer etc. During the course of the changes, the management team changed 3 times, and new staff were brought in.

Q For former Hydebank student: Were any of the talks bullsh*t?

A: As far as being in prison goes, it was pleasant and I couldn't have been treated with more respect.

Theme: Closing Session – Heads of Service Panel

Summarized by Elliot Bowden, Irish Prison Service

The closing session for the ICPA Correctional Research Symposium Belfast 2025 consisted of a round table discussion involving four heads of service: Shie Young Lee – Singapore, Rob Jeffreys – Nebraska, David Brown – South Australia, and Beverly Wall – Northern Ireland. The roundtable discussed research, its role in corrections, transparency, political context, and measuring success.

The panel shared their experiences, values, and practice. There was not the scope to delve into the intricate differences in each nation concerning corrections, each of the heads of service spoke to the values of their respective office and their aims going forward. There was a remarkable amount of agreement and shared experience in the discussion. All appreciated and acted upon research where applicable, though shared difficulties in doing this. The main problems facing the use of research in practice identified were the lack of definitiveness from researchers, who explore complex issues in an often-limited scope and are able to give advice and findings but often must request more research be conducted, given the complex and difficult nature of social policy. The panel all share a use of research and data in making informed decisions and are receptive to data that will show them why something may have happened, including internal and external research to bridge gaps and tell a more complete story which will further inform practice. There was an emphasis on how research can be used to identify 'pain points' and aid in the management of resources that are often constrained; something which outside researchers are often less aware of in terms of a practical application. There was also interest in cross examining policy implemented in other state's correctional management such as technology concerning electronic monitoring for remand prisoners to help reduce strain on institutions and bed numbers.

On the disjoint between external research and practical application, the fact that external researchers tend not to think about the political context resonated with panel members. It has been identified that in small trials, most policy ideas work, having scalable practical policy measures presents real challenges for the corrections system world-wide. Leadership plays a large role in the successful implementation of policy and practice, a strong alignment from the top to ground level is required for a truly successful implementation. This is often not taken into account where researchers may not look to the existing power structures, or necessarily be aware of them. If an initiative is not politically viable, there may be a disjoint between leadership and practitioners that would negatively impact the practical application of ideas, and the leadership who propose it. There are also often large changes across organisations such as the criminal justice system in terms of structure and leadership that can destabilise policy implementation. It appears that external and internal research and experience may be sometimes at odds in terms of their perspective and value systems. In order to create a more harmonious research environment, increased collaboration seemed to be in favour across the panel which would help both sides remain informed and realistic about policy.

This requires transparency, an important tenet that was touched upon during the discussion. There appeared to be some slight differences in publication across the offices on the panel that would be linked to governmental structures and procedures. All spoke to a desire or commitment to make all internal research public and keep those outside (and those inside) informed on work being done to increase understandings and improve the correctional process. Some were honest about the lack of openness and reservations to open up communication channels to the public, though generally an increase in communication between the institution and the public/external researchers seemed promising.

Finally, there was a focus on measuring success. All members of the panel seemed to be frustrated with the metrics imposed upon corrections by the respective wider governments, all of which appeared to impose total desistance as the only metric for success. A desire was evident for other metrics, as some felt that recidivism is not the fault of the institution. The point was made that an institution could do all that is possible to improve the condition of someone imprisoned in a correctional institution, though when they are released, they are at the mercy of wider society. Imprisonment generally was pointed to as a failure of the social system and community, so how may we expect the outcome to be different when discharging the individual to the same circumstances as before they arrived. Some have pointed to 'distance travelled' as a better measure. Having a binary 'recidivism or desistance' model discounts much of the hard work that may have been done in order to get that individual *closer* to desistance and perhaps a more skilled and educated individual. There could well be a failure of reintegration but not necessarily because of the correctional facility itself, so a wider conceptualisation was said to be needed than corrections sharing the sole responsibility when it comes to recidivism statistics as a measure of success.

To conclude, all panel members appeared to share a commitment to evidence based practice, improving communication between internal and external researchers, and becoming more open and transparent as institutions. There also appeared to be a shared issue with the way in which success is measured in this industry, leading to a call for more comprehensive metrics that may well be better at revealing the nature of corrections and reintegration as a shared practice between both correctional facilities and the wider communities into which individuals are released into.

Summary of CRS 2025 Parallel Workshops

Theme: Individual Factors:
Subtheme: Focus on Violent Offending
Summarized by Isla Donaldson, Irish Prison Service

Violence risk screening in prison practice, is it feasible and does it work? Results from a national study in The Netherlands.

Dr. Michiel de Vries Robbé, Netherlands

Dr. Michiel de Vries Robbé is a Psychologist and Senior Researcher at the Amsterdam University Medical Center (AUMC) in The Netherlands. Dr de Vries Robbé introduced two risk screening tools in this session; The Risk Screener Violence for adult prison practice (RS-V) and the Risk Screener Youth for juveniles and young adults (RS-Y). The session opened with acknowledgement that comprehensive risk assessment tools are not universally applicable within forensic populations, which has paved the way for the application of user-friendly risk screening tools that provide initial evaluations of concerns about violence by considering individual need, risk and strengths. Dr de Vries Robbé then introduced the RS-V, a new violence risk screening tool that evaluates; historical risk factors, dynamic risk factors, protective factors, and concerns about the future. A self-assessment version of the RS-V facilitates client involvement and assists in providing a more holistic evaluation of concerns about violence. Initial prison practice and file-based validation studies of the RS-V capture strong inter-rater reliability, and good predictive validity for violent incidents within prison in the four months after RS-V scoring. The RS-V was highlighted as particularly sensitive to predicting violent recidivism amongst female detainees in the 12 months following release, and also showed promising results for predicting post-release violence recidivism amongst male detainees over the same timeframe. User experience of the RS-V was described as positive, with improvements to safety, insight, decision-making and communication being highlighted as key benefits of using the risk screening tool. The RS-Y is adapted for juveniles and young adults, evaluating a greater number of risk and protective factors, and screening for concerns relating to both violent and non-violent criminality. Similar to the RS-V, initial evaluation of the RS-Y highlighted predominantly positive user experiences from professionals and clients, and a drop in dynamic risk factors and increase in protective factors was also observed over

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time when RS-Y screening was repeated. The session concluded with a vision for wider applicability of the RS-V and RS-Y, facilitated in part through further staff training.

An Organisational Response to Supporting the Complex Needs of Violent and Disruptive Prisoners: Key Performance Indicators from the National Violence Reduction Unit

Dr. Gráinne McKenna, Ireland

Dr. Gráinne McKenna is a Senior Clinical Psychologist/National Violence Reduction Unit Co-Lead working in the Irish Prison Service. Dr McKenna began the session by providing a brief overview of the National Violence Reduction Unit (NVRU), a psychologically-informed, secure rehabilitative unit within the Irish Prison Service. Established in 2018, the NVRU is specifically designed to manage and support violent and disruptive prisoners. The performance and progress of the NVRU was then outlined in the context of four key strategic aims. In terms of reducing repeated violent offending, reductions in assaults on staff and in staff injuries were observed, despite the increased capacity of the unit, but the operational challenge of direct release from the NVRU into the community was reflected in the length of time individuals spent in the community post-release. Providing therapeutic interventions from multiple disciplines was key in aiming to improve the health, well-being and relationships of individuals in the NVRU, as was aiming to foster consistency, encourage social connection, and reduce isolation. Staff support was identified as vital in improving staff competence, confidence and attitudes, and has been addressed by implementing trauma-informed practices such as regular and structured staff meetings/trainings, and through staff health checks and supervision. Annual health checks in 2024-25 (utilising the Maslach Burnout Inventory and Professional Quality of Life Scale) highlighted high levels of personal accomplishment, moderate compassion satisfaction, and low levels of burnout, secondary traumatic stress, emotional exhaustion, and depersonalisation. A vision for improving efficiency and service quality was then shared, along with a hope to collect specific data on cost-effectiveness in the future. Dr McKenna closed the session by outlining the planned next steps for the NVRU, which include introducing a stepped approach to release, and developing a sensory space in the unit.

Personality Profiles of Persistently Disruptive Offenders in a Singaporean Prison Population

Dr Melvinder Singh, Singapore Prison Service

Dr. Melvinder Singh is the Deputy Director and a Senior Principal Psychologist working in the Singapore Prison Service, and also currently serves as the Secretary of ICPA's Research and Development Network. Dr Singh opened the session with an overview of key demographics of the prisoners and staff in the Singapore Prison Service. Dr Singh then introduced the focus of the session; a study examining the personality profiles of the top 1% of inmates who present with frequent, persistent and pervasive patterns of misconduct. Scores on the Personality Assessment Index (PAI) were used to compare 'Misconduct' (persistently disruptive) and 'Control' (matched on demographic variables) groups in terms of personality disorders and personality traits. No statistically significant difference between groups was found in terms of Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD), but instead, results suggested that evidence of Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) could potentially distinguish the two groups. In terms of personality traits, the Misconduct group scored highly on many of the personality trait scales, but further exploration highlighted that the group's significantly higher scores in relation to aggression, paranoia, and anxiety-related disorders could be used to distinguish them from the Control group. Using a trauma-informed approach and facilitating interventions that target difficulties associated with BPD were amongst suggestions identified for implementing the knowledge from these findings into practice. From these findings, a phased progression pathway for persistently disruptive offenders has also been developed, outlining the recommended type and purpose of interventions proposed at each phase of the pathway. The new pathway has been operating in the Singapore Prison Service since 2024. Dr Singh concluded the presentation by outlining the key target areas that implementing the new pathway for persistently disruptive behaviours is hoped to address; improving understanding of this specific population of prisoners, embodying a responsive approach to deliver the right resources to the right people, formalising the structure of this approach, and collaborating with local stakeholders and officers.

Theme: Individual Factors:
Subtheme: Risk and Recidivism
Summarized by Silvia Martins, Northern Ireland

Recidivism in Norway

Stian Haugen & Atiqur Rahman, Directorate of the Norwegian Correctional Service

The Norwegian Correctional Service is responsible for executing prison and community-based sentences in a way that safeguards society while promoting rehabilitation and preventing recidivism. Its guiding principles are legality, safety, and innovation. Norway is currently transitioning from traditional, punitive correctional practices ("red" strategies) to more sustainable, rehabilitative models ("green" strategies). This includes better allocation of resources, increased use of alternatives to incarceration, and individualised rehabilitation programs tailored to offender risk profiles and social backgrounds.

The Service is divided into five regions and employs over 4,300 staff. There are 54 prisons and 36 probation offices with approximately 3,000 inmates, of whom 59% are serving sentences in the community. Specialised services, such as drug courts and probation-based programs, are available to tailor interventions according to offender needs.

Recidivism in Norway: Key Findings

Norway's recidivism rates are among the lowest in the world, a trend attributed to deliberate policy changes and focused interventions. As of 2021, only 16% of individuals released from unconditional prison sentences reoffended within two years. For a longer five-year window (2018 data), the figure was 27%. Those released from community sentences showed even lower reoffending rates. Notably, drug court participants had a higher two-year recidivism rate of 23%. In comparison, those who served their sentences under electronic monitoring (EM) showed only a 5% reoffending rate, demonstrating this approach's effectiveness.

The highest recidivism rates are consistently found among individuals under the age of 25. This age group remains a focal point for targeted intervention, with statistics showing significantly higher rates of reoffending compared to older demographics. The correctional service has responded by strengthening cross-sector collaboration and investing in specialised staff training to support youth rehabilitation. A graphical representation of recidivism trends from 2009 to 2021 shows a steady decline across most sentencing types, especially among those serving sentences under electronic monitoring. This further supports the view that structured, supportive environments during and after incarceration contribute to lower reoffending.

Why Is Recidivism So Low in Norway?

Several external and internal factors can explain Norway's consistently low recidivism rates. Externally, there has been a systemic shift in sentencing practices over the last decade, with decreased reliance on traditional imprisonment and an increased use of EM. Political decisions and evolving police priorities—particularly concerning drug offences—have also shaped how offenders are processed and rehabilitated.

Internally, the correctional service has adopted more proactive and individualised strategies. Preventive measures target high-risk groups more effectively, with staff encouraged to build strong, motivational relationships with offenders. Screening tools have become a central component of this strategy, helping identify key needs and risks at the individual level. However, reintegration challenges remain, particularly regarding housing, employment, and mental health after release.

Defining and Measuring Recidivism

Norway defines recidivism as the date of the first new offence committed after the completion of an unconditional or community-based sentence. The data is derived from individual-level records collected via the correctional service's central database and supplemented by detailed screening information on needs and resources. This enables the Norwegian Correctional Service to distinguish between various forms of reoffending and design more precise intervention programs. Recidivism is calculated based on the first new principal offence committed and recorded by justice authorities. This data-driven approach ensures reliability and supports a nuanced understanding of criminal behaviour over time.

The Role of Electronic Monitoring (EM)

Electronic monitoring has played a transformative role in lowering recidivism rates in Norway. First piloted in 2008, EM allows certain offenders to serve part or all of their prison sentences under supervision in the community. The decision to use EM can be made at the front end by the probation service or post-incarceration by the prison service (back door). The program expanded rapidly, from 784 EM cases in 2009 to 2,729 in 2014 and 3,692 in 2021. EM offers structure and oversight without the social and psychological harms associated with imprisonment. The data clearly show that EM participants, especially those deemed low- to medium-risk, are significantly less likely to re-offend. As a result, EM has become a

cornerstone of Norway's broader strategy to shift from incarceration to community-based sanctions.

Recidivism and Social Factors: Insights from Screening Data

The Norwegian Correctional Service uses a comprehensive screening tool to assess the needs and risks of individuals serving sentences. Analysis of over 14,500 cases—distinguishing between individuals who reoffended and those who did not—highlights the strong association between social disadvantage and recidivism. Financial strain emerged as a prominent factor: 82% of those who reoffended had experienced a difficult economic situation, compared to 66% of those who did not. Exposure to violence was also highly correlated with reoffending; 80% of recidivists had experienced violence themselves, and 46% were identified as possible victims of violence, versus 61% and 27% among non-recidivists, respectively.

Substance use and health-related factors further differentiated the two groups. Individuals who had tried narcotics made up 55% of the recidivist group, compared to just 25% of non-recidivists. Similarly, 39% of recidivists were flagged for possible alcohol-related issues, almost three times the rate seen in the non-recidivist group (14%). Anger and aggression issues were reported by 40% of those who reoffended, compared to 19% of those who did not. Physical health concerns were also more prevalent among recidivists (39%) than their counterparts (29%).

Housing stability and employment played a critical role. Only 31% of recidivists lived with family or owned their own homes, compared to 46% of non-recidivists, suggesting that stable housing contributes significantly to successful reintegration. Employment history was another strong indicator: 78% of recidivists had been unemployed for an extended period, while only 52% of non-recidivists shared this experience. Furthermore, 58% of recidivists were identified as having possible employment-related issues, compared to 44% of those who did not re-offend.

These findings underscore the importance of addressing underlying social conditions as part of any effort to reduce recidivism. Norway's individualised, resource-informed approach is designed to account for these disparities, offering targeted interventions that extend beyond punishment and focus on long-term rehabilitation.

Moving from Descriptive to Predictive Analysis

The Directorate is now shifting toward predictive analytics to enhance its understanding of what causes reoffending. While current data provides a descriptive overview, the next step is determining which social and personal factors strongly predict recidivism and why. This approach—sometimes called developing a form of "corrections medicine"—will enable the Norwegian Correctional Service to offer tailored interventions, better allocate resources, and ultimately lower reoffending.

Conclusion: Practice Implications of Norway's Recidivism Trends

The evidence presented on recidivism in Norway offers a compelling model for correctional practice and public safety strategy. Norway's steadily declining recidivism rates—particularly among those serving sentences under EM or community-based programs—highlight the effectiveness of shifting from traditional incarceration to alternative sanctions. This shift is particularly impactful when applied to lower-risk offenders, allowing for more sustainable and rehabilitative corrections.

One of the most important takeaways is the critical role of individualised assessments and early screening. The Norwegian Correctional Service's use of a comprehensive screening tool has enabled the systematic identification of criminogenic needs—such as housing instability, substance use, mental health issues, and financial difficulties. These factors strongly correlate with the likelihood of reoffending and, therefore, provide a roadmap for intervention. Another key implication is the importance of investing in young offenders, who consistently show the highest recidivism rates. Preventive, age-specific programming that emphasises education, mentorship, and long-term reintegration support is essential. Norway's targeted efforts in this area demonstrate a scalable and evidence-based response. Furthermore, the success of EM as a sentencing alternative suggests that EM is not merely a surveillance tool but a structured way of promoting responsibility and reintegration.

Summarized by Hannah Ferris Blair, Queen's University Belfast

In 2021, Norwegian recidivism rates hit an all-time low. This is an impressive feat, especially when recognising that their recidivism rates are low even when compared to other Nordic countries, which are typically recognised for their trend of effective, desistance-promoting criminal justice systems. Astoundingly, in 2021, only 16% of those who re-entered the community following incarceration in a Norwegian prison went on to reoffend within two

years, and when considering those who were given a community sentence, only 7% went on to reoffend within two years. The purpose of this talk was to consider the methods used within the Norwegian criminal justice system; to allow listeners to reflect on the practices of their country's justice system approaches, the talk held a particular focus on the usage of electronic monitoring as a means of community sentencing.

The discussed culture of low-level recidivism was delivered via statistics generated from Norwegian Correctional Service data, this was due to both presenters, Stian Haugen and Atiqur Rahman, being senior advisers at the Directorate of Norwegian Correctional Services.

The talk delivered by Rahman and Haugen provided insight as to why Norway may hold such low recidivism rates, which generally sits around 20% when acknowledging the crime-reducing impact of Covid-19. A major point was the importance of community sentencing, which, as an alternative to prison, typically took the form of electronic monitoring, prison was now reserved for serious offenses only. Currently, the Norwegian criminal justice system allocates the use of electronic monitoring for those whose offences would result in an incarceration period of 6 months or less, and those who are currently incarcerated can apply to be placed on electronic monitoring. Further, it was highlighted that plans were in place to review this form of sanctioning to allow those with longer sentences to avail of this scheme.

A main takeaway from this discussion was the individualised approaches taken by the correctional services of Norway, with all prisoners having the option to complete an in-depth needs assessment which highlighted to staff what needs were present for the individual as to appropriately prepare them for re-integration into the community. It was also clear that a lack of life disruption due to criminal sentencing was of upmost concern, a concept which can often be overlooked or snubbed across many justice systems. The increased usage of electronic monitoring supported this notion as it allowed individuals to maintain relationships, uphold employment and remain housed, practically this was supported through the reasonable hours of an 8pm-8am curfew.

For those who do end up imprisoned, the transitional nature of the Norwegian prison system allows for a reduced likelihood of re-integrative shock. Prisoners are first placed in a maximum-security facility prior to entry into a minimum-security setting, followed by a half-way house before release on an electronic monitoring system. This allows for support needs to

be understood prior to full re-integration and, given their low-levels of recidivism, supports a desistance-aligned method of punitive responses.

Summarized by Silvia Martins, Northern Ireland

Enhancing Risk Assessment in Corrections: The Critical Role of Acute Dynamic Factors

Professor Melissa Hamilton JD, PhD, Professor of Law & Criminal Justice, University of Surrey, England

The field of corrections has long relied on risk assessment as a cornerstone for decision-making, particularly in managing individuals' risk of reoffending. Traditionally, assessments have focused primarily on static risk factors—fixed attributes such as criminal history, age, and gender. Although these continue to offer foundational value for establishing baseline risk levels, emerging evidence has highlighted the critical importance of dynamic risk factors, particularly acute ones. These acute dynamic factors—such as emotional instability, sudden housing loss, substance relapse, or interpersonal conflict—are transient, rapidly changing conditions that may vary within hours or days. They offer unique insight into the likelihood of offending, providing key opportunities for timely and preventative intervention. Research increasingly demonstrates that these short-term fluctuations are among the most accurate predictors of imminent antisocial behaviour.

Understanding Risk Across a Continuum

While static factors provide a generalised indication of long-term risk, they do not account for situational volatility. For example, an individual assessed as chronically high-risk might remain stable for months, whereas another with a lower static profile may experience a crisis, such as an emotional breakdown or conflict, that dramatically elevates their short-term risk. The integration of dynamic factors, especially acute indicators, allows risk to be understood as a continuum, reflecting both long-term traits and short-term vulnerabilities.

Dynamic factors are typically distinguished as either stable—those evolving over months, such as employment status or substance use patterns—or acute, which reflect immediate changes in an individual's state or environment. These include short-term stressors, mood fluctuations, and contextual triggers that heighten risk. Notably, studies now suggest that daily evaluations

of acute dynamic risk can significantly enhance the accuracy of recidivism prediction, offering critical insight that static tools simply cannot provide.

Operationalising Acute Dynamic Risk in Practice

For professionals working in probation, prisons, or community rehabilitation, this understanding shift demands cultural and procedural change. Risk management must move away from static categorisations and adopt a responsive, real-time approach. In practice, this involves continual monitoring and adjusting the intensity and nature of supervision in response to acute developments in an individual's behaviour or circumstances. For example, an offender exhibiting signs of emotional distress or facing a recent housing crisis may require immediate support, such as same-day counselling or emergency accommodation. Conversely, in periods of stability, supervision intensity might reasonably be reduced. This way, intervention becomes proportionate, timely, and better aligned with actual risk.

Incorporating acute dynamic factors also requires practical changes to professional protocols. This includes the training of staff to identify and interpret short-term risk markers, using structured tools for frequent assessment, and developing agile intervention plans that respond to acute needs. These measures apply within custodial settings and are equally vital in community supervision, where environmental and social triggers can vary significantly.

Integrating Protective Factors and Promoting Resilience

Professor Hamilton's approach further recognises the significance of protective factors—the social and psychological elements that buffer against criminal behaviour. Positive developments such as newfound motivation, increased family support, or removal from criminogenic environments can reduce an individual's risk profile. Proactively identifying and nurturing these factors is essential for supporting long-term desistance and promoting rehabilitation. The ability to identify protective as well as risk factors allows for a more holistic model of assessment and supervision. It enables practitioners to intervene in crisis, build on strengths, and sustain progress, fostering more durable outcomes for those under supervision.

Implementation Challenges and Future Directions

Despite its benefits, incorporating acute dynamic risk assessment faces considerable implementation challenges. Many correctional institutions still operate with outdated infrastructure and limited capacity for real-time monitoring. Assessment systems often prioritise static tools, and professional training may not adequately prepare staff to interpret or act upon dynamic risk indicators. Emerging technologies, such as machine learning and predictive analytics, offer promising solutions for analysing complex and time-sensitive risk

patterns. However, these must be carefully deployed and balanced with human judgment. Algorithms may process vast datasets efficiently, but they cannot substitute for trained professionals' contextual understanding and ethical discernment. Moreover, using machine learning introduces significant concerns around privacy and data protection. These systems often rely on collecting and analysing sensitive personal information, raising the risk of misuse, unauthorised access, or discriminatory profiling. To ensure ethical practice, any technological integration must adhere to strict data governance frameworks and uphold individual rights.

Summarized by Hannah Ferris Blair, Queen's University Belfast

Presented by Professor Melissa Hamilton, a professor of law and criminal justice at the University of Surrey, this presentation focused on the concept of dynamic risk and how it can be used as desistance-promoting assessment tool. Dynamic risk is an area that is beginning to emerge in criminology research and literature, it goes beyond the conventional assessments of static risk factors to assess offenders' risk of recidivism in a way that is both individualised and relevant to the present. Dynamic risk subverts the current practice of assessing the likelihood of reoffending, not only assessing static risk factors (such as previous incidents of offending), but current issues (such as relationships, substance use disorders and the state of an individual's mental health) and how they may influence desistance pathways. The hope with acknowledging dynamic risk, is that practitioners could learn to notice when their client may be more prone or likely to reoffend, allowing for these issues to be tackled prior to escalation and subsequent recidivism.

This talk highlighted some significant and genuinely important considerations when working with those at-risk of (re)offending. A prominent point made by Hamilton was the rapid and unstable nature of dynamic risk, how perceived risk, or the external factors that influence it, could change day-by-day or even minute-by-minute. It was clear that, while this topic of discussion could almost be considered common sense, the real-world impact of reintegration and desistance was so often dismissed or overlooked by practitioners, or that rather, global justice systems were not built to provide those seeking to desist with grace or individualised support.

An additionally important point of discussion was the significance of trauma for many, if not most, of those involved in the criminal justice system. It was anecdotally noted that the fluctuation of dynamic risk was often influenced by engrained trauma or a trigger for PSTD, and that by not taking use of dynamic risk assessment, such triggers could be missed and not accounted for or considered in the potential event of reoffending. This point of trauma was highlighted with a particular reference to substance use disorders, in which a trigger can often result in a relapse, creating an extremely high risk of reoffending.

At a practitioner level, Hamilton's talk provided key insights and guidance into the use of dynamic risk within criminal justice systems, firstly noting that it was not an area to delve into without full institutional support, whether that be monetarily or otherwise. Hamilton warned against the use of punitive responses to actions that stem from trauma, instead highlighting that understanding a client can allow for their behaviours and reasonings for said behaviours to be viewed individually and holistically. Further, considering both static and dynamic risk factors can benefit case-load allocation, allowing for real-time prioritisation to occur, which is important in a time of constrained budgets and ever-growing waiting lists. Finally, a key takeaway for practitioners is to consider both dynamic risk factors and dynamic protective factors, as a degradation of supportive forces in a person's life can be just as damaging as the introduction of negative influences.

Theme: Individual Factors:
Subtheme: Focus on Youth
Summarized by Amelia Desmond, Research Assistant, Irish Prison Service

Young Men, Vulnerability, and Imprisonment
Conor Murray, Ireland

Dr. Conor Murray is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology and Postgraduate Tutor within the School of Applied Social and Policy Sciences at Ulster University (UU). He spoke about his nine-month ethnographic study of the needs and experiences of young men imprisoned in Hydebank Wood Secure College. This was carried out through both participant observation and semi-structured interviews (26 with people in custody and six with Prison Officers and support staff). The findings were analysed through the lens of critical masculinities studies. Masculine communication is often conveyed through signaling, with a conspicuous absence in

the prison setting of communicating social vulnerability, as to do so can result in victimisation and exploitation as it is associated with femininity. The idealized expression of masculinity is characterized by autonomy, self-control, and strength. Physical and mental illness is associated with weakness. This links to increased rates of self-harm and suicide – in 2018 Northern Ireland's suicide rate for young people aged 15-24 was more than double the rate in England. Most young men attempted to present as impenetrable, controlled, and stoic. Masculinities in prison's public spaces reinforced the subordination of those who visibly struggled to cope. Conor highlighted that prison is an inherently masculine setting, where isolation in cells encourage lack of discussion.

From Policy to Practice: Enhancing Child-Friendly Juvenile Correctional Training Across Europe

Claire Machan and Heloisa Becker, IPS, Portugal

Claire Machan is coordinator of the Rehabilitation, Reintegration, and Community Portfolio at Innovative Prison Systems (IPS), an advisory and technology development firm based in Portugal. She spoke about ARISA (Assessing Risk of Isolation of Sentenced and Accused) Child Research project, which aims to enhance the capacity of correctional services to work with convicted children by sharing best practices to increase knowledge. A comparative training needs research study, employing surveys and qualitative interviews across 10 EU member states, revealed common deficiencies in training for staff working with juveniles. The ARISA approach is through three areas: 1) needs assessment; 2) experience and best practice sharing events and compendium; and 3) online digital training course for staff available in six languages (English, Bulgarian, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, and Greek). Policy recommendations include: 1) introducing minimum requirements of qualifications and competencies, through compulsory initial and continuous training with a focus on children's rights, psychology, social work, and education; and 2) revising training programmes regularly. Claire highlighted the importance of developing organisational training policies and practices in youth justice that are informed by both empirical models of rehabilitation and staff needs. (Note: Heloisa Becker did not present.)

Collaborative Justice—A Paradigm for Youth Crime Prevention and Penal Policy Reform

Federica Coppola, Spain; Jarrell Daniels, USA

Jarrell Daniels is currently a Ph.D. researcher in Psychology and Social Intervention at New York University, as well as a Community Organizer, National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellow, and the founder of the Justice Ambassadors Youth Council (JAYC) at Columbia University's Center for Justice. He was formerly incarcerated. Jarrell spoke about collaborative justice, which he defined as prevention and safety through holistic solutions to harm, looking at the structural and social determinants of crime and victimisation. This involves looking at change at the macro level (i.e. institutional/structural change), intermediate level (i.e. community change), and micro level (i.e. personal change). Examples of macro level change included 'Inside Criminal Justice,' an eight-week civic educational seminar bringing prosecutors and incarcerated people together to co-develop criminal legal system policy solutions. Examples of intermediate level change included 'Project Restore,' a two-year community violence intervention (CVI) pilot programme focused on public safety and gang violence prevention by bringing together 30 rival crew leaders from two warring factions. Jarrell highlighted that the broader application of collaborative justice affects three areas: 1) the criminal legal system through intervention and prevention; 2) policy-making involving participatory-design with lived experiences; 3) ongoing education and training for legal system actors and organisations.

(Note: Federica Coppola did not present.)

Theme: Interpersonal Factors
Subtheme: Focus on Lived Experience
Summarized by Isla Donaldson, Irish Prison Service

Expanding the scope for understanding peer mentoring: implications for women's prisons

April Smith, University of Portsmouth, England

Dr April Smith is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology and Psychology at the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Portsmouth. Dr Smith's presentation began

by highlighting that although the implementation of peer mentoring schemes has increased within criminal justice reform, how such programmes actually function within a women's prison has not yet been fully explored. Key findings from previous literature were briefly discussed and highlighted both the value of peer mentoring programmes for women in prison, and the challenges that women in prison can face in relation to trusting and communicating with male staff. In Dr. Smith's study, 27 interviews and four focus groups were conducted with peer mentors, mentees, prison officers and project workers. Through use of thematic analysis, an overarching theme of *'Peer mentoring as operational support'* was developed. Under this, two further themes outlined the *'Emotional demands of peer mentoring'* and the *'Extension of institutional functioning'*. In the context of *'Emotional demands'*, *'Emotional toll'* and *'Coping mechanisms'* were discussed, with participants describing both the pressure of being consistently emotionally available to others, and of being sustained by the emotional reciprocity of supporting others. Under '*Extension of institutional functioning'*, *'Practical and emotional support*, *'Mediating between staff and prisoners'* and *'Encouraging compliance'* emerged as subthemes, with participants describing both the significant level of support that peer mentors provide, and an increasing reliance on peer mentors. Dr Smith concluded the session by reflecting on the ethical tension that exists between the institutional benefits and the emotional toll of peer mentoring in women's prisons. Dr Smith suggested that these findings support further safeguarding for peer mentors, and that this could include: providing clarity on the boundaries of peer mentoring roles, ensuring structured supervision is provided, and considering the implementation of hybrid models involving charities and prison staff.

'It's Prisoners Talking to Prisoners': A Qualitative Exploration of Peer-Led Mental Health Advocacy in Prison

Alison O'Dwyer & Sarah-Jane Winders, Irish Prison Service

Alison O'Dwyer and Dr Sarah-Jane Winders work as an Assistant Psychologist and a Senior Clinical Psychologist respectively within the Irish Prison Service. They opened their session with an overview of the value of peer support initiatives both within and beyond prison settings, and by outlining the existing partnership between the Irish Prison Service, the Red Cross, and the Education and Training Board that facilitated the adaption of the Red Cross Community Based Health and First Aid Programme for forensic settings to enable volunteers to engage in a range of projects whilst in prison. The rationale for the current study was a lack of existing research on peer-led mental health programmes in custodial settings, and a similar lack of

exploration of the impact on the facilitators delivering these programmes. The impact of peer-led mental health programmes for both facilitators and attendees was examined in the context of how individuals make meaning from peer-led mental health initiatives, and whether such programmes contribute to mental health education and reduction of stigma. The workshops examined in this study were collaboratively designed by prisoners and staff following a prison-wide survey, and were then delivered by peer support volunteers. Eight semi-structured interviews were undertaken after the workshops had been run (four with workshop facilitators; four with workshop attendees), and through use of thematic analysis, four key themes were identified. The benefits of shared understanding and experience were described under the themes of '*Meaning derived from experience*' and '*Impact of peer led workshops*'. Both facilitators and attendees described the benefit of learning more about mental health under '*Mental health literacy*' and similarly, '*Learning experiences*' were identified and described as positive. The value of these workshops in providing short-term and low-intensity support to larger groups of prisoners was then discussed, as was the benefit of building social connections through shared understanding and experience. The session concluded with an acknowledgement of the study's limitations, and with reflections that a repetition of the current study, in combination with supporting quantitative data, could be conducted as future research.

Bridging the Gap: The voices and experiences of men in open prisons in England and Wales and their transition towards release

Laura Pope, HMPPS, United Kingdom

Laura Pope is a social researcher and Senior Evidence Specialist Lead working for HM Prison and Probation Service in the UK. The session began with an overview of the prevalence and purpose of open prisons in England and Wales, before then outlining the aims of the current study. The study was described as an exploration of the barriers and enablers to quality delivery in open prisons, giving due consideration to contextual factors and to staff and prisoner perceptions/experiences, all with the hope of utilising learning from findings to strengthen practice. A total of 33 men from five open prisons were interviewed, integrating a mix of men who were new to the open prison, currently in a handover window and soon to be released, or not currently in a handover window. Through use of reflexive thematic analysis, three key themes were identified. The first theme of '*Transitions*' highlighted mixed experiences. Under subtheme (A) '*Transition to Open*', the challenges of this transition were discussed, and some

participants relayed a sense of being 'mis-sold' on what being in an open prison would be like, highlighting the need for managing expectations around this transition. Subtheme (B) '*Preparation for Release*' captured the concerns held in relation to impending release, and the limited opportunities that awaited. Subtheme (C) more positively described '*Bridging the gap*', with participants stating that they felt supported, highlighting key staff members that stood out to them in this and in the continuity that was provided. A second key theme described accounts of '*A system working against you*', where participants struggled; '*Procedurally*' with inconsistencies, differential treatment and mistrust, '*Relationally*', with inconsistencies and lack of support, and '*Experientially*', with a sense that goal posts were always moving and feeling like they were being set up to fail. The final key theme of '*Progression*' described both a feeling of '*Going backwards*' due to carrying the assessed risk that was associated with their past lives, and of '*Moving forwards*' with a concept of their future selves, a sense of intrinsic motivation, and an understanding of the value of open prisons. In summarising these findings, the "pains of freedom" were discussed in contrast with the opportunities afforded by being in an open prison. The importance of carefully managing this high-risk transition period was also highlighted, with acknowledgement that wider system pressures can be a barrier to this. The session concluded with an invitation to challenge the assumptions that may be held with regards to the benefits of open prisons, and by encouraging attendees to consider the following questions:

1. *How can prisons and probation working together at this critical juncture to better prepare and support individuals, whilst acknowledging the difficulties this can present at a high-risk transition period?*

2. *How can staff be better supported to foster prison cultures and environments which encourage a sense of agency and hope for those nearing release?*

Theme: Interpersonal Factors
Subtheme: Social Supports
Summarized by Silvia Martins, Northern Ireland

Social Participation in the Execution of a Custodial Sentence: Volunteer Assistance to People Who Have Completed Their Imprisonment and Are in Crisis of Homelessness

Dr. Karolina Całkowska, Assistant Professor, The Academy of Justice, Poland

Dr. Karolina Całkowska presented compelling insights into an ongoing research project examining the role of volunteer support for individuals who, upon release from prison, enter a state of homelessness. These individuals often face dual exclusion—both as former prisoners and as people experiencing housing insecurity—rendering their return to community life particularly fraught. In many instances, their reintegration depends not on formal institutional structures but on the goodwill and commitment of volunteers operating within non-profit frameworks. These volunteers function as essential bridges, helping to restore a sense of belonging and dignity to those who have been doubly marginalised.

The presentation opened with a contextual overview of the scope of the issue. Data collected indicates that a significant portion of formerly incarcerated individuals remain in crisis upon release, often transitioning directly from prison into homelessness. Although official statistics suggest that approximately 4.4% of the homeless population in Poland cite prison release as the direct cause of their housing instability, Dr Całkowska cautioned that the real number may be significantly higher due to underreporting and incomplete records. Respondents to her survey highlighted a range of contributing factors to homelessness, including alcohol dependency (19%), family conflict (17%), eviction (11%), relationship breakdown (8%), unemployment (7%), and ill health or disability (7%). Notably, more than 5.6% of participants linked their homelessness to prior involvement with the criminal justice system.

Central to Dr. Całkowska's research is the concept of double or multiple social exclusion, which she defines as a condition where individuals are prevented from full societal participation due to overlapping vulnerabilities—specifically incarceration and homelessness. These forms of exclusion lead not only to economic deprivation but also to profound psychological and social isolation. Consequences include a breakdown of personal relationships, loss of identity, and significant barriers to self-realisation. The research argues that such exclusion is both a cause and a consequence of systemic failure, underscoring the urgent need for inclusive, rehabilitative responses.

Dr. Całkowska's study is grounded in home theory, which views a stable and supportive home environment as foundational to human dignity and successful reintegration. Volunteering, she argued, serves as a unique form of social participation that directly contributes to this stability. Volunteers, often working without pay and with minimal institutional support, offer material assistance, companionship, empathy, and mentorship. These relationships—formed through shared human connection—are foundational to rehabilitation and desistance from crime. The

research hypothesis posits that the relationship between the volunteer and the aid recipient is the key rehabilitative mechanism.

While volunteers benefit from their work's altruistic and social dimensions, recipients benefit from a restored agency, reduced isolation, and renewed hope. Such interactions offer a form of social validation that many institutions fail to provide. Dr Całkowska emphasised that volunteering is not a replacement for systemic support but rather a vital complement, particularly when formal structures fall short.

The early findings of her research show that volunteers are frequently the first consistent, non-judgmental human contact individuals receive after release, making their presence not just supportive but life-changing.

In response to an audience question regarding including young adults, Dr. Całkowska clarified that her current research focuses on adults over 18, with most respondents aged 50 and older. However, she acknowledged that individuals aged 18 to 25 represent a particularly vulnerable demographic and may be included in future phases of research.

Practice Implications

The evidence presented has clear implications for policy and practice. First, voluntary support networks should be formally recognised as critical actors in post-custodial rehabilitation, deserving of state support, training, and protection. Secondly, reintegration strategies must be tailored to address double exclusion, combining housing, mental health, and employment support with relational, community-based care. Finally, policymakers should consider mechanisms to strengthen collaboration between state institutions and NGOs, ensuring continuity of care beyond the prison gates.

As Dr. Całkowska's work powerfully demonstrates, rebuilding lives after imprisonment is not only a logistical challenge—it is a profoundly relational process in which society must be willing to engage meaningfully through both professional systems and grassroots solidarity.

The interplay of family relationships and visits in the process of prisoner recidivism
Márta Miklósi, Senior Lecturer, University of Debrecen, Hungary

Lili Kramer, Policy Researcher, Hungarian Helsinki Committee

This workshop explored the complex interplay between family contact, prison visitation, and the likelihood of reoffending, framed through the lens of desistance theory and the sociological concept of the "pains of imprisonment" (Sykes, 1958). Building on extensive literature that evidences sustained familial relationships during incarceration aid rehabilitation (e.g. Klein et al., 2002), a Hungarian research team conducted a mixed-methods study between March and May 2024. The research aimed to test two primary hypotheses: firstly, that even robust prison-based reintegration programmes may be undermined by criminogenic influences within the offender's family environment, and secondly, that distinct familial factors—supportive or otherwise—can significantly shape the likelihood of recidivism.

Hungarian Prison System and Recidivism Research

Hungary currently operates 27 correctional institutions, housing 19,437 inmates as of 2023. This includes pre-trial detainees and yields the highest incarceration rate in Europe at 192 prisoners per 100,000 inhabitants. Overcrowding remains a persistent issue, with prison occupancy reaching 141.95% against an official capacity of 17,998. Notably, 24% of the prison population are women—a significant proportion compared to regional averages.

A research team from the National University of Public Service, comprising Miklós Tihanyi, Máté Sivadó, Márta Fekete, and Noémi Baráth, conducted their study across five correctional institutions—Baracska, Debrecen, Kiskunhalas, Tiszalök, and Vác—with a total sample of 224 recidivist inmates (192 men and 30 women). Data collection focused on several key areas: demographics and criminal history; family background including income, relationships, and role models; visitation frequency and contact persons; and post-release plans, especially concerning housing and income.

Dr Márta Miklósi shared the quantitative findings, highlighting the socio-educational disadvantage of the population: 39% of respondents had completed only elementary education, and fewer than 5% held tertiary qualifications. The sample was economically vulnerable—43% came from impoverished households, and 25% reported dysfunctional family environments. Crucially, prisoners with consistent family contact during incarceration exhibited a lower fear of reoffending and a higher confidence in their capacity to desist. Parents and spouses were the most frequent visitors, though the latter were less likely to maintain contact in violent crime cases. A strong positive correlation was identified between childhood parental role models and

ongoing prison contact. At the same time, inmates with children were visited less frequently—likely due to financial or logistical constraints on family members.

The study affirmed that stable post-release housing, particularly when it involved returning to the family home, was critical in preventing reoffending. Conversely, prisoners lacking familial ties or post-release support structures faced a significantly heightened risk of failure. These findings align with the principles of the Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) model, which identifies family crisis and antisocial connections as core criminogenic factors. However, researchers also encountered challenges in working with a heterogeneous prisoner population. Respondents ranged from white-collar offenders to individuals with functional illiteracy, with some claiming they "didn't have their glasses" to avoid completing questionnaires.

Nonetheless, the overall data painted a consistent picture: family engagement remains a decisive protective factor, while its absence can exacerbate the cycle of reoffending.

Qualitative Perspectives from Civil Society

Lili Kramer of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee provided a broader policy and advocacy context. Hungary's high incarceration rate is compounded by rigid sentencing practices and historically high recidivism. Civil society actors, such as the Helsinki Committee, have been central to efforts to reform the punitive culture of Hungary's prison system. One of their core areas of focus has been the erosion of family contact during incarceration, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic when visits were suspended for 21 months, and physical contact was banned for seven years.

Strategic litigation led to significant changes, notably in the *Tapolca v. Hungary* (2023) ruling, which found blanket visitation restrictions unlawful. As a result, limited physical contact—such as hugging or kissing at the beginning and end of visits—is now permitted for detainees with at least one year of good behaviour. While most visits still take place through 50cm protective screens, these incremental changes mark a shift toward more humane prison policies. Yet gaps remain: visitation intervals for children are still fixed at six months, a duration that fails to meet developmental needs and undermines long-term family cohesion.

The Committee's advocacy toolbox includes legal empowerment strategies (e.g. simplifying penal policy language for affected families), public campaigns such as #FecskeCampaign, which uplifted family voices, and prison monitoring reports. These initiatives have been vital in reshaping public narratives around imprisonment and humanising incarcerated individuals and their relatives. The Committee continues calling for policy changes that treat family relationships as assets in rehabilitation rather than security liabilities.

Practice Implications

The evidence presented during this session points to several critical practice implications for criminal justice systems, policymakers, and rehabilitation service providers. Firstly, the consistent association between strong family ties and reduced recidivism underscores the need to treat family relationships as an integral part of reintegration, not as peripheral or security risks. Correctional institutions should adopt more flexible and humane visitation policies—particularly for children and spouses—to preserve these vital connections during incarceration. Secondly, reintegration planning must include stable post-release housing, ideally involving familial support, as this significantly reduces the risk of reoffending. Thirdly, **given the** complex needs and varied backgrounds of inmates, rehabilitation programmes must be tailored to address functional illiteracy, economic disadvantage, and social exclusion. Finally, civil society organisations such as the Hungarian Helsinki Committee highlight the essential role of strategic advocacy, public awareness, and legal empowerment in holding institutions accountable and driving reform. Embedding these insights into practice could lead to more effective, humane, and sustainable rehabilitation outcomes.

Who Helps Offenders Desist? Exploring the Role of Informal Support Networks

Catherine Arseneault, Professor, Université de Montréal, Canada

The research is framed within contemporary **desistance theory**, which understands desistance from crime not as a single event but as a gradual, non-linear process. Three main types of desistance were introduced: *primary desistance*, defined simply as the cessation of criminal behaviour; *secondary desistance*, which refers to the internalisation of a new, non-criminal identity; and *tertiary desistance*, in which this new identity is recognised and validated by the community. Central to the study was the concept of **assisted desistance**—the idea that desistance is co-constructed and supported by others through *formal* mechanisms (e.g.

probation officers, social workers) and *informal* relationships (e.g., partners, parents, friends). These close supporters are essential in influencing the offender's journey towards rehabilitation (Farrall, S. and Maruna, S., 2004).

The study also incorporated insights from **differential association theory**, which suggests criminal behaviour is learned through social interactions, and **social learning theory**, which posits that exposure to prosocial role models can discourage delinquency. Likewise, **informal social control theory** illustrates how family members, particularly children or romantic partners, often serve as responsibility anchors. The broader conceptual lens of *social support*—emotional, instrumental, or supervisory—was crucial in promoting positive outcomes and enabling families to assist in desistance. However, the research shifted focus from the impact of these supporters on the offender to the reverse: how a loved one's criminal trajectory affects those who support them.

Participant Profiles and Justice Trajectory Impacts

The study involved 35 participants, the majority of whom were women (76.4%). The average age of participants was 41.47 years. Most identified their relationship to the justice-involved person as a parent (65.3%), while 30% were partners and 6.6% were friends. Interestingly, 9 participants reported having previous involvement in the justice system, indicating a layered complexity in their support roles.

The justice-involved individuals they supported were overwhelmingly male (97%), with an average age of 34.56. At the time of the research, 30% were incarcerated, 3% were in transitional status, and 67% were living in the community. Their criminal histories were significant: the average number of arrests was 6.9, and the average number of incarcerations was 1.6. These profiles contextualise the social dynamics explored in the study and illustrate the enduring impact of long-term justice involvement on familial and relational networks.

Key Concepts in Desistance and Support

The research was anchored in key concepts central to understanding desistance and familial support. *Primary desistance* refers to the cessation of criminal behaviour, while *secondary desistance* involves a shift in identity in which the individual no longer sees themselves as a criminal (Maruna & Farzall, 2004; McNeill, 2014). Crucially, *assisted desistance* captures the external supports that enable and reinforce these internal changes, including professional

interventions and community programmes (Dufour et al., 2018). Informal support is the moral, emotional, and often financial assistance provided by close others such as family, partners, or friends (Ouellet & Dubois, 2022). These forms of support are pivotal, yet they remain undervalued within mainstream criminal justice responses.

Consequences at Every Stage of the Justice Process

The study's findings underscore that the consequences for supporters of justice-involved individuals emerge at every stage of the justice process and extend far beyond the legal system itself. The **arrest** phase was described by participants as a moment of trauma, bringing with it feelings of shock, confusion, shame, and social isolation. One participant, Émilie, who supported a partner arrested for child abuse, shared: *"He was arrested in May 2022... We kept it to ourselves for a long time."* This decision to maintain secrecy reflected the powerful stigma attached to certain offences.

Incarceration introduced new layers of difficulty. Some participants described loyalty conflicts when asked to perform morally or legally questionable tasks. Cindy, for example, was asked by her partner to smuggle tobacco into prison—a request she initially honoured but later refused: *"I did it at first but wouldn't again."* Phone communication also proved burdensome; Josianne, the daughter of an incarcerated man, said: *"Calls cost a thousand dollars a month,"* revealing how contact with incarcerated loved ones can create significant financial strain.

The **release** of a loved one, often viewed externally as a moment of relief, was experienced as complex and bittersweet. Josée, whose brother-in-law was granted temporary leave, described the emotional toll: *"I felt like I was inside an hourglass... It was cruel."* Others reported ongoing pressure to enable re-entry into society, sometimes including requests to mislead authorities or parole officers. Linda, a mother, refused to help her son avoid detection for a parole breach, saying she would not compromise her values to protect him.

Perhaps most moving were the reflections on the **emotional toll** supporters experienced. One participant, Émilie, shared: *"It's the worst year of my life... I'm reaching the end of my resilience."* This quote encapsulates the exhaustion, isolation, and mental strain of those providing sustained care and loyalty under highly challenging circumstances.

Expected Outcomes and Practice Implications

This research points to several critical areas for policy and practice. First, professionals working in the criminal justice and social service sectors must acknowledge families' substantial role in desistance and provide structured support for them. Currently, services for family members are sparse; in Quebec, for instance, only one formal support group exists for relatives of justice-involved people. Expanding access to mental health support, peer groups, and informational resources is essential. Secondly, systems must reduce the financial and emotional burdens placed on supporters. This includes addressing the high cost of prison phone calls, the logistical challenges of visitation, and the emotional labour involved in navigating stigma and secrecy. Corrections institutions should also be encouraged to foster family contact—not as a privilege but as a rehabilitative right. Thirdly, interventions promoting desistance must be designed with a *relational lens*. That is, policies and programmes should target the individual offender and engage with and support their social networks. As the findings show, these relationships are often strained and tested, but they remain vital in desistance. Effective re-entry plans must, therefore, include support for the individual and their family or carers.

Ultimately, helping individuals desist from crime also requires that we *help those who help them*.

The emotional, financial, and psychological toll on supporters is profound. They are not passive bystanders but active participants in the justice process—often without recognition or resources. Strengthening the safety net around them is not only fair but fundamental to long-term community safety and justice system reform.

Family Engagement in European Prisons: Research, Training Gaps, and Innovative Practices

Rhianon Williams, Director, Interchange, Germany
Willem-Paul de Gast, Social Worker, Hoppenbank e.V., Germany

This presentation examined the evolving role of family engagement in European correctional systems, using insights from the PROMOTE Project as a foundation. The PROMOTE Project, part of the EU's Pact for Skills and Centres of Vocational Excellence, involved 10 EU member states and included 18 partners focused on improving the skills and training of those working

across the justice ecosystem. Over the first year, the project conducted DACUM (Developing A Curriculum) workshops, 120+ semi-structured interviews, and collected responses from 700+ surveys, representing a broad spectrum of roles, including prison officers, probation workers, psychologists, and NGO practitioners. One of the project's key findings was a significant misalignment between the actual responsibilities of justice professionals and the official skill profiles listed in ESCO (European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations). In particular, the roles of prison officers and prison re-education professionals were broader and more socially integrated than ESCO suggests, reflecting a shift toward holistic rehabilitation and reintegration support.

EU-Level Training Gaps & Solutions

Across all participating states, the research identified several training gaps consistently reported by frontline workers. The most pressing needs included training in resilience and staff wellbeing, mental health awareness regarding incarcerated individuals, support for those facing substance abuse issues, and strategies to foster family and community reintegration. Practitioners emphasized that training offerings often remained inconsistent, outdated, or inaccessible despite the demand for these competencies. Many reported that professional development was non-mandatory or loosely prioritized within their institutions. To address these issues, the PROMOTE team recommended a blended training model combining digital and in-person learning to increase access and flexibility. Additional strategies included promoting interprofessional knowledge-sharing, cultivating a workplace culture of continuous learning (e.g., regular "learning from success" discussions), and diversifying learning formats, such as mentorships, peer task forces, and collaborative workshops. These approaches aim to bridge the gap between formal qualifications and the lived realities of justice system work.

Local Focus: Bremen's Family-Centric Programs

In Bremen, Germany, this European-level analysis has been directly translated into local initiatives prioritising family engagement as a key factor in rehabilitation. At the ministerial level, Bremen supports programs such as the CHANCE Network, which offers reintegration-focused training for nonprofit partners working in the justice system. In parallel, the KVL Network fosters cooperation between educational, youth, and correctional services to protect the rights and needs of children whose parents are incarcerated.

Within Bremen's prison system, several initiatives promote family ties. These include formal parenting courses and implementing child-friendly visitation spaces, including the PICO (Parent-Child Interaction) model. Two notable civil society programs—Read to Me and Game with Mum and Dad (GWMD)—complement this institutional work. GWMD, in particular, offers incarcerated fathers the chance to engage in physical play with their children in a relaxed gym setting. These activities are co-facilitated by Hoppenbank e.V. staff and prison officers, who divide responsibilities such as activity setup, food preparation, and logistical support. What is especially unique in Bremen's model is that external staff from Hoppenbank have autonomous access to prison facilities, enabling smoother organization of weekend events. These programs are partially funded by temporary grants from the Senator for Justice and Constitution and, in the case of GWMD, by EU funds secured through COPE (Children of Prisoners Europe). Their goals are to reduce the emotional isolation of parents and children, uphold the right to family life, and support desistance through sustained emotional connection. Evaluation from participants—fathers, children, and caregivers—has been overwhelmingly positive. Many have reported strengthened family bonds, a greater sense of hope, and an improved outlook on release and reintegration.

Practice Implications

The practical implications of this research and programming are manifold. First, vocational training frameworks for justice professionals must be rethought to reflect the centrality of relational work—particularly family dynamics—in rehabilitation and desistance.

Institutions should formally integrate modules on family engagement into correctional officer and educator training.

This includes equipping staff with the interpersonal skills and emotional awareness needed to support incarcerated parents and their families. Second, prison systems should move toward embedding successful NGO-led initiatives like GWMD into their official programming. Rather than relying solely on temporary grants or external project cycles, correctional facilities should formalize these models as core components of rehabilitation. This requires interagency cooperation, stable funding mechanisms, and recognition of civil society organizations as equal partners in justice work. Third, the Bremen case illustrates the value of granting select NGOs limited institutional access. Allowing trusted nonprofit staff to operate semi-independently within prison settings can increase program efficiency and reduce staff burden, especially

during off-hours like weekends. This level of integration, however, must be accompanied by shared governance structures to ensure trust, security, and role clarity. Finally, initiatives like PROMOTE highlight the need for European-level coordination in setting new standards for prison-based vocational training.

By aligning training with the actual functions carried out on the ground, the justice ecosystem can better prepare its workforce to support reintegration, reduce recidivism, and protect the rights and well-being of incarcerated individuals and their families.

Theme: Interpersonal Factors
Subtheme: Social Supports
Summarized by Amelia Desmond, Research Assistant, Irish Prison Service

Translating Research into Practice: An Evolution of Looking Forward, Offender Motivational Programme in Singapore

April Lin & Vivien Soh, Singapore

April Lin Liangyu is a Principal Psychologist with the Singapore Prison Service (SPS) and currently serves as the Senior Assistant Director of the Correctional Research Branch, overseeing research activities of SPS. Vivien Soh is a Senior Correctional Rehabilitation Specialist with SPS, currently with the Programme Design and Evaluation Branch. They spoke about the Looking Forward (LF) motivational programme which aims to support offender rehabilitation by initiating readiness for change and enhancing receptiveness to intervention. LF takes place during the early stages of incarceration over six 1.5-hour sessions in a classroom group setting facilitated by both officers and inmate facilitators. Each session follows the structure of 1) check-in, 2) psychoeducation, 3) activities and videos, 4) action plan and homework, and 5) check-out. Homework includes looking at the costs and benefits of actions, both to self and others, and in the short-term and long-term. LF has had evaluations leading to programme updates taking place in both 2019 and 2025. Facilitators of the programme implementation include leadership support and integration with institutional routines. Barriers to implementation include difficulty managing operations and rehabilitation duties. The impact on participants included increased motivation to change and willingness to engage, and deeper insights into reasons behind their offending behaviour. Increased rapport among inmates and

officers helped inmate management, with the officers' encouragement of inmates being particularly appreciated. LF falls under the Singapore Correctional Model looking at the levels of change affecting individual, personal, community, and society through continuous research and evaluation.

The changing interpersonal landscape of correctional centres in New South Wales, Australia: Digital tablets and Five Minute Interventions (FMI)

Mark Howard, New South Wales, Australia

Dr Mark Howard is Manager of Research and Evaluation at the Corrections Research Evaluation and Statistics branch of Corrective Services New South Wales (CSNSW), Australia. He spoke about the impact of using digital tablets, with a focus on the new initiative Five Minute Interventions (FMI). Use of digital tablets during in-cell time was first piloted in two prisons in October 2020, with phased state rollout between September 2021 to October 2023. Tablet usage is highly secure. There is a 1:1 tablet to individual ratio. It was reported that 91% use tablets daily. The most common uses include the telephone system, learning and development, and games. Positive feedback from people in prison include providing greater connection with family and friends; reduced points of friction; and more positive perceptions of prison environments. Positive feedback from staff in prison include creating an improved unit atmosphere and relations with people in prison. It was found that there was a significant increase in contact and significant effects on assault rates. FMI is a relational approach that draws on a set of rehabilitation skills and techniques looking at everyday interactions. It was developed in the UK and adapted for NSW. All CSNSW staff were trained across the 32 correctional centres. It was found that there was a significant change in attitudes towards prisoners, and motivation and ability to support rehabilitation after a six-week follow-up, with an improvement again seen at one-year follow-up. There was also a significant effect on violent offence trends. Mark highlighted that the introduction of digital tablets was associated with trends towards greater delivery.

Enhancing Rehabilitation Outcomes through Prison Staff Training and Development

Caroline Acha, Pivaga Theophile Bani, and Maisala Ernest, Cameroon

Caroline Acha is the Coordinator and Director of Victim Offender Prison Care Support (VOPS) Cameroon. She spoke about the mixed-methods study which surveyed 75 staff and interviewed 15 senior administrators across three correctional institutions in Cameroon. The trauma-informed care training aimed to enhance skills and knowledge amongst prison staff by looking at guidance, support, supervision, communication skills, and problem-solving skills. Results showed that when staff completed the training that recidivism was reduced and behaviour in prison improved. Challenges included burnout and compassion fatigue, and limited resources. Recommendations for policy-makers included providing funding and support for prison staff training and development support with a focus on evidence-based practices.
(Note: Pivaga Theophile Bani and Maisala Ernest did not present.)

An investigation of job-related factors impacting the stress level and burnout amongst Case Management Officer in the Namibia

Ndeyapo Emma Nafuka, Namibia

Dr Ndeyapo Emma Nafuka is the head of the Directorate Rehabilitation in the Namibian Correctional Service. She spoke about an investigation of job-related factors impacting the stress level and burnout amongst Case Management Officers (CMOs) in the Namibia. CMOs are correctional officers who provide support and guidance to justice involved persons to execute individualised plans, e.g. by developing offender's' criminal profiles and conducting Risks and Needs assessments to identify crimogenic factors. There is a high turnover rate amongst CMOs, almost twice as high as that of Security Officers. CMOs are predominantly women with psychology or social work backgrounds. They experience moderate stress, mainly caused by problems with co-workers and supervisors (e.g. insults from officers). Recommendations included policies focused on the prevention and management of stress and burnout for employees, and clear reward and promotion criteria. Ndeyapo highlighted that the paramilitary nature of correctional services offers fertile ground for disrespectful and abusive behaviour – whether intended or unintended.

Theme: Interpersonal Factors
Subtheme: Transformation
Summarized by Hannah Ferris Blair, Queen's University Belfast

Transformation Through Sport in Prison: Examining the Impact and Psychological Mechanisms of a Football-Based Programme in the UK (PID045)

Dr. Linus Peitz, United Kingdom

If asked, "how can we help those in the criminal justice system?" most would not immediately, or perhaps even ever, think of football. Yet, this presentation demonstrated that the integration of sports into our prisons can hold significant positive impacts on the day-to-day running of prison, and those involved in the sport. Aimed at improving the psychological and physical health of those in the criminal justice system, this programme paired local professional sports teams with local prisons across the UK, so far over 1000 individuals had been involved in the programmes. This was to see if engagement in football and sporting education (such as coaching qualifications) could promote pro-social identity changes and behaviours amongst incarcerated individuals.

This talk, delivered by Dr. Linus Peitz, discussed the integration of sporting programmes into prisons and justice system institutions across the UK. Pairing local prisons with local sport associations, such as Wormwood Scrubs and Queens Park Rangers FC, both male and female prisoners could sign-up to start training to achieve a coaching qualification. Two studies, segregated by gender, were conducted amongst the participants, the findings from which (with a particular focus on the female group) were presented at this workshop session. Participants were required to undertake surveys that measured their wellbeing before and after the studies (which aligned with the start and end of the programmes) began, to add greater depth to the understanding of the programme's impact, qualitative interviews were also utilised.

The programme proved to be an overall positive impact on the participant pool, a 50% decrease in adjudications. Further, involvement in the programme and sports team created non-offender identities and established a sense of belonging. However, for the male participant pool there was a ceiling effect on wellbeing, as those who applied to participate were typically relatively healthy.

The female participant pool showed that there were various barriers and enablers to programme engagement, which often reflected gender-specific needs for the group. For example, one barrier showed that a lack of high-quality menstrual products and high strength painkillers made it difficult to engage while the women had their period. Further, while a lot of the women had plans for employment upon release, it was acknowledged that a career in football coaching

would lack relevance to the life they would be going back to. However, this is not to say that involvement in the programme did not have positive impacts, as the women enjoyed their time on the course and had improved wellbeing as a result. Some of the women particularly recognised that women were not stereotypically viewed to enjoy sports and were grateful for the opportunity to get involved. Further, one woman highlighted that her new-found football skills had been a key element in rebuilding her relationship with her sons, and that they regularly played together.

The benefits of facilitating programmes such as these across criminal justice institutions should be considered by practitioners, as not only was this course shown to reduce custodial incidents, but it was also revealed that engagement with staff who did not treat them as offenders encouraged the formation of a pro-social identity. Aligning with this, one takeaway was that some participants struggled to discuss issues with prison staff, creating a need for staff training that creates a healthier staff-prisoner dynamic. Practitioners should be aware of the gender-specific issues of sporting programmes, ensuring female healthcare provisions are available to allow for engagement that encourages gender equity. The reoffending data for study participants is due to be published next year (2026), which will hopefully provide further justifications for the establishment of sporting programmes across the criminal justice system.

Study 2 Main Overall Themes:

Theme 1 Improved wellbeing- women had higher confidence levels after completing the programme and enjoyed being engaged in a different to usual learning environment.

Theme 2 Helping Others- Football helped some of the women re-connect with their children, they began to play football with them and one woman discussed how delighted her sons were that their mum was now interested in football, and this helped rebuild their relationships.

Women felt as though they were forwarding the help they had received to others, they took use of their coaching qualification and got local children engaged in football. One woman discussed how she felt that her coaching and engagement with local youth helped provide a safe space as her local area was rife with crime and gang-related activity that put the young people at risk.

Theme 3 Relevance of Learned Skills- Some of the women were unsure what to do with the skills they had gained while involved in the programme, they weren't very relevant to their life plans. Other courses the women were involved in had more of an obvious practical benefit for participation. One woman discussed how she had plans to go back to hairdressing when home and had completed multiple qualifications while incarcerated that would improve her business and practice.

Study 2 Barriers to Engagement with the Programme:

Barrier 1 Women's Health- lack of access to quality menstrual products and suitable pain killers that were strong enough was a barrier to participation at times. This was made more of

a problem due to the presence of male staff and prison officers, women felt that the men would treat the topic as taboo or were just generally more inclined to discuss these issues with female staff.

Barrier 2 General Health- Low levels of fitness and a poor body image deterred women from signing up to the programme at all. Concerns were raised about exercise opportunities provided within the prison and the quality of food provided which was not viewed as healthy/ nutritious enough.

Barrier 3 Programme Schedule- Programme sessions were either too long or too short, when it was too short there was not enough time to engage and when it was too long it was difficult for the women to recall properly what they had learnt on the programme. This showed that the programme needed to be tailored to the individuals engaged with it.

As the study was also conducted across a winter session and the prison did not have a suitable area for indoor exercise, there was a lack of signups for the programme due to the cold. Some of the women on the course felt that, because the programme accepted most people who signed up due to there being free spaces, rather than merit, that a lot of the participants weren't overly engaged and didn't really want to be there.

Barrier 4 Lack of Efficacy- The women felt that as a result of prison, they were quite institutionalised and that their priorities upon release would not be football but rather reintegrating and keeping their heads straight while they navigated society. While some of the women thought that a job/ continued engagement in coaching would be good, they also acknowledged that this would just depend on the reality of life outside prison.

Study 2 Enablers to Engagement with the Programme-
Enabler 1 Social Connections and Support- the programme allowed the women to socialise within mixed groups of people that would not have typically engaged with in prison. They also felt that the coaches on the programme didn't treat them differently or as prisoners, which was a nice experience.

Enabler 2 Absence of Criminal Identities- Some of the women grew in their confidence around desistance as while on the programme they did not feel like prisoners and criminals. Some of the women on the programme discussed well-thought out and solid plans for employment upon release.

Enabler 3 The Draw of Football- Women felt that because of stereotypes, women were not viewed as people who would automatically enjoy sport, the women on the programme liked that they had the opportunity to engage in football and felt that this was recognised despite their gender.

Both studies (male and female) showed a positive impact on participant wellbeing. Engagement in group activities, team building and improved social bonds were noted as key elements of their improved wellbeing.

Women experienced female-specific barriers to engagement in the programme, this highlighted that programmes should not be gender-specific and should be built to accommodate all people.

There are still questions about the programme, need to look at whether this positive engagement and impact will happen with particularly vulnerable groups or those who are not close to release from prison.

Need to consider whether the courses and their positive effects continue after the course and if these benefits continue after release, however, this currently cannot be tracked.

Questions

Q: Regarding women's health as a barrier to participation, proper fitting bras are a huge issue in US prisons, as is the limited access to showers and clean clothing, did this come up in your study?

A: No, women were provided with jogging bottoms if they were not comfortable with shorts or tight clothing. Issues with sports bras didn't come up with the women, however I don't know how prisons in the US and UK compare.
*Moderator then commented that a similar project has been done in the US and that in that programme both organisations will need to commit to things like maintaining laundry etc. If they are going to commit to the programme.

Creating Connections in Corrections: Leveraging Resident Initiatives to Build International Networks

Ginny Oshiro, Kabrina Riley and Jorrell Hicks, Amend, USA

This workshop presentation showcased the innovative and unique 'Cell2Cell' programme, this was established through engagement with Amend, a rights-based organisation which focuses on reducing harms within US prisons. Amend, flew staff from the Washington Department of Corrections to Norway, to allow for a once in a lifetime training course from their criminal justice system. Upon their return, staff were determined to put their newly learnt practices to good use. It was then that prisoners from the Washington Department of Corrections asked, "why can't we go to Norway?" and from that, Cell2Cell was born.

Cell2Cell aims to target a public "health crisis" that is ongoing within the US prison system, where both staff and prisoners are facing, as detailed by the speakers, isolation, a lack of choice and institutionalised mistrust, described as a mentality of "us vs them". Inspired by prisoners and their desire to engage in, what is typically viewed as a more humane prison system, remote video calling sessions between US prisons and Norwegian prisons are facilitated monthly. These sessions welcome both staff and prisoners alike and are aimed at discussing not only issues in the justice system, but how these issues can be resolved. Further, the groups (which include both male and female programmes) can choose to engage in joint initiatives to create a tangible outcome, such as 'Beyond Success' an educational manual for those involved in the justice system.

Cell2Cell has been considered a genuine success, allowing those involved to be feel as though they are part of something that inspires real change and provides a platform for listening and understanding. A key finding from this programme, as seen by the US prisoners, was the acknowledgement of the benefits of a holistic approach compared to punitive responses. One participant stated that they realised they have to "do harder time" to ensure they did not end up reincarcerated, revealing 'harder' to mean greater emotional labour and in-depth self-work and assessment. However, the greatest outcome from this programme may be the establishment of a team and an understanding of how to work within it. Within their groups, prisoners were able to engage in projects and tackle issues that made genuine positive impacts to their day-to-day lives and increased their sense of self and agentic abilities. Further, the participants learn how to engage in conversations and debates that they may not agree with, in a constructive way that allows for everyone to speak openly and have their place, whether in agreement or otherwise.

There is a lot to be learnt for practitioners from the Cell2Cell programme, one being that the establishment of international thinktanks, as inaccessible as they may seem, can be powerful motivating tools within the workings of a prison system and can provide both staff and prisoners with improvements to their daily lives. Most importantly however, is the belief in prisoners, and that belief must be shown through holistic and non-punitive treatments, alongside the opportunity to co-create and problem solve in issues that impact their lives to the greatest extent, in a peer-led community-driven programme.

Kabrina Riley

Kabrina works in corrections, went to Norway for training and realised what could be different in the prison she worked in. She saw that in Norway there is not a punitive correctional model, instead there is dignity and a human centred environment that is rooted in kindness.

Norwegian prison standards are being integrated into this prison.

Practicing what Cell2Cell teaches encourages prisoners/ trains prisoners to be better with interpersonal relationships. Encourages prisoners and staff to learn how to have better days in prison.

Cell2Cell involves everyone in the prison system, allows for long-term sustainable change and empowers prisoners to drive change.

One prisoner said, 'maybe we need to do harder time to not come back,' not harder in a punitive sense but putting in personal work, emotional work, improving their communities. Programmes have come out of C2C to improve the lives of those around them, this allows people to learn that they have the power to make change.

Residents have the opportunity to collaborate with those within Norwegian prisons and people have travelled across the US to see what they're doing within the C2C programme.

Residents in the US found that Norwegian prisons are not soft, and that instead, difficult self-change is done within their prisons. Residents learn how to have conversations with people of different cultures, how to have conversations where there is disagreement and how to have those conversations for growth rather than defensiveness.

Programme encourages human dignity and humane treatment. Without humane treatment, safety and security don't work and don't make people want to drive change.

Those involved in the C2C programme have set goals around what they want to achieve, it's not just a monthly meeting with no goal, they need to want to drive change in a prison setting.

The goal of C2C is to become more structured, more international collaboration and continued use of the programme.

*A video is shown, where **Jorrell Hicks** talks about C2C.

The video talks about C2C and what it means, how the public thought it was cool. Talks about the benefit of staff connections and how they had misconceptions about Norwegian prisons. Talks about how C2C made a better atmosphere in the prison, and allowed people to engage with each other and become more engaged in education etc. Continues to discuss how the programme allows for staff and prisoners to have better power dynamics, there is a neighbourly culture where people help each other. Helps people to have new perspectives, to learn from each other's lives and learn from other cultures.

Ginny Oshiro

Discusses the hypotheses of the C2C programme, that it will encourage individual, interpersonal and cultural improvements, reduce isolation and improve wellbeing.

Results from the programme will be released soon, but the programme has shown the need to affirm the humanity of those in the criminal justice system, both staff and prisoners.

Questions

Q: Could you give an example of what a C2C session looks like? And what do the Norwegians learn from the US?

A: Generally, there is talk about the programmes that are being proposed. Everyone, staff and prisoners get a chance to talk about whatever they would like, and this is aimed at bringing out the best in each other.

In Washington, people are allowed a tablet that ca be used as a phone, this is not the same in Norway. A proposal was written as the women's prison in Norway wanted this initiative which is now at a HQ level for consideration.

Currently making a peer-based education manual using experiences from the US and Norway, called 'Beyond Success' and each country has time to discuss and think about things so they can continue to work on the manual at the next session.

Q: How does the programme work timetable-wise, how long does the programme last? What about staff presence, how does that impact the environment?

A: Sessions are hosted once a month at a time that is best suited to both facilities, it is a rolling programme, this will have different people and institutions present at the sessions

sometimes. Everyone is welcome to speak and input, everyone (including staff) can participate and say what they want to say.

There are two time models, it can be project-based and that gets a new cohort after each programme, some are open-ended and ongoing. As it is a participant-led initiative, this is up to the prisoners.

There is always a staff member present, staff are invited to participate. With women's groups, they will be informed in advance (that men will be present), so they can consider what they will say as they may want to rethink what they will talk about. There is a monthly liaise with staff and prisoners to plan sessions.

Q: How are the meetings facilitated? Is there a leader nominated? Could you talk about the differences in how the programmes work between men and women's sessions?

A: There is not a lead or moderator, everyone understands that everybody is there to be heard, it is rare that interruptions happen. Sometimes with the women we will need to move on from someone who is taking up a lot of the time, or we will need to point it out to them at the end of the session that they can't take up as much time for the next session. It is about allowing people autonomy to do things in their own way.

Theme: Focus on Community
Subtheme: Holistic Considerations
Summarized by Elliot Bowden, Queen's University Belfast

Process of desistance and reintegration: A longitudinal study on parolees and desistance from crime

Victorie Palousova, Czech Republic

This research from the Czech Republic encompassed a longitudinal study of 10 corrections centres over 3 waves, containing a total of 410 parolees. This research aimed to obtain a fuller picture of the demographics of the reoffending/desisting population and identify factors that influenced these trajectories. This would enable more effective prediction of individuals likelihood of reoffending dependent on their circumstances, and open up pathways for assistance in reaching desistance.

The sample was made up of 22.2% Female and 77.8% Male parolees, which was a slight overrepresentation of Females, who make up just 8% of the wider prison population. The sample were also generally more highly educated than the rest of the prison population which may impact the data. The sample was also made up of only 10% first-time offenders, whereas in the rest of the prison population, around 30% are first-time offenders. This sample was studied at 3 months, 9 months, and 18 months after release, making up the 3 waves.

Within this sample, the most salient predictors appeared to be addiction (alcohol, drugs, and/or gambling as identified in the research), with recovery and motivation for recovery/change having a large impact on desistance, and at-risk friends in the younger population. Respondents who were in the lower age group were much more affected by the presence of at-risk friends which would make them more vulnerable to reoffending. This is perhaps due to the increased importance of these parasocial relationships in early age, as identified by other research at the symposium.

A major and noteworthy component of this research is the development of a 'desistance calculator' whereby any statistically significant factors were identified and could be placed against other predicting factors, weighted by age and other demographics, to suggest the likelihood of reoffending. This could have large policy impacts for isolating or focusing on populations most at-risk of reoffending and have resources more accurately distributed – though a larger sample size and more sophisticated modelling over more variables would be required in order to create a meaningful predictor of desistance. This could also be used to identify the factors most linked with reoffending and allow for better resources at the front-end of the criminal justice system that would perhaps be able to target populations at-risk of offending in the first place and reduce the strain on the carceral side of the justice system.

Prisoner's backgrounds and needs: Pathways from assessment, sentence planning, enforcement to post-release integration

Sasu Tyni, Prison & Probation Service, Finland

This research project was conducted by the Prison & Probation Service in Finland and was based on diverse data concerning prisoner's backgrounds, needs, and their situation after release. The aim of the research was to highlight issues and suggest improvements for prisoner's reintegration, therefore promoting desistance and improving the post-release lives of prisoners. This addressed policy/institutional shortcomings and the frustrations that this causes for staff and prisoners alike.

The project centred around the 'sentence plan' which is a program offered to prisoners which seeks to highlight their goals and what they would like to get out of their sentence, and how this would help them post-release. The research identified 3 main goals most often chosen by prisoners under the umbrella terms: Substance abuse & addiction, thinking attitudes, and daily

life skills. The aim of the sentence plan is to produce targeted goals that would be monitored and used to promote a purposeful and effective prison term. Though this is an ideal scenario. In practice, these plans are quite generalised and require a timely construction (at the very beginning of a sentence) and motivation to see them through in order to be effective.

Some of the feedback suggested that those who felt heard in the sentence plan preparation were more likely to implement it, and those who experienced delays in feedback or development were less motivated. A key issue identified was the struggle for staff to balance the institutional method with prisoner's needs; generalised sentence plans in practice appear to be too restrictive and loosely defined. In order to combat this, the research suggests that the process be reviewed and amendments be implemented according to a developmental process including input for prisoners and corrections/probation officers on the user side.

The salience of incarceration history disclosure and stigma in health service delivery

Erin McAuley, USA

McAuley's research focused on the disparities in healthcare experienced by women who disclose imprisonment (deliberately or otherwise) to their healthcare provider in the US. This was done with a focus on stigma and the lived experience that accompanies its imposition. There is an emphasis on the intersection between public health and corrections institutions, with an intent to highlight the need for policy reform and techniques for dismantling and managing the impacts of stigma on public health.

The project contained 2 parts: Qualitative interviews with patients and healthcare providers, and a vignette. These methods looked to inform whether disclosure of incarceration shaped the care received.

Perhaps most notably was the assertion by all healthcare providers in the study that disclosure did not impact their opinions of patients, though all stated that they had observed that it affected their colleagues. There were a few main ways that disclosure was observed to occur; through a note in a patient's chart, a prison being listed as a location for a past treatment, direct observation through a prison program for treatment or treatment within the institution itself, and patient disclosure. Providers in the sample were shown to treat these individuals differently, often seeing the prison as a sign of trauma, leading them to administer trauma-

informed treatment. However, from the patient's side, they often viewed their disclosure as leading to a stigma-informed treatment, with some citing they had been looked at and treated as if they weren't 'human'.

In terms of a possible recommendation for change, the healthcare providers had cited the need for training in treating incarcerated persons. They had been shown to suggest a program of training within medical institutions that contained information on the conditions of confinement experienced by potential patients, information on the scope and scale of the criminal justice system (i.e., how does the criminal justice system work behind closed doors), and a wider understanding of how incarceration acts as a determinant of health.

The supplementary method of a vignette was also used. Here 150 participants read and responded to a vignette on a female patient presenting with endometriosis. The condition was chosen as there are a range of treatments with varying severity. The control group of respondents had no mention of incarceration, 50 respondents had been informed she had been incarcerated. The control group favoured a lower-impact course of medication, whereas the non-control group were more likely to suggest extreme treatments such as a hysterectomy, rating more invasive treatments (that would result in sterilisation) as more appropriate. This indicates some very severe consequences to incarceration, even in post-incarceration healthcare. This is shown in conjunction with perceptions of healthcare professionals in the non-control group who registered the incarcerated woman as overall less trustworthy than the control group and perceived her as less likely to follow through with treatment, perhaps being a large causal factor for the selection of more extreme treatment that doesn't require follow-up or a course of medication.

It would appear then that incarceration stigma can have serious and lasting effects that are textualized by, and increase the negative impacts of, lower quality healthcare received by prisoners, especially women in prison. This highlights the need for policy measures that aim to decrease stigma, improve confidentiality, and improve the healthcare treatment for incarcerated persons.

Theme: Focus on Community
Subtheme: Transition from Prison
Summarized by Amelia Desmond, Research Assistant, Irish Prison Service

Antecedents of post-prison expectations of prisoners in Switzerland

Anna Isenhardt, Germany; Conor P. Mangold and Ueli Hostettler, Switzerland

Dr Anna Isenhardt is a Professor at Kiel University of Applied Sciences, Germany. She spoke about looking at the role that correctional facilities, attitudes and personal circumstances of prisoners, and perceptions of everyday life in a facility play in post-prison expectations. In 2017 a survey was carried out with responses from 381 male inmates across 28 Swiss correctional facilities (both open and closed institutions) using a subscale of the Organizational Structure and Prisonization Scale. They had a 70% response rate. Results showed that low self-control had a significant negative correlation with post-prison expectations, while hold and support (by prison staff) and legitimacy (attitudes towards the law) had a significant positive correlation with post-prison expectations. There were no or very small effects regarding facilities. Personal attitudes and circumstances showed the biggest effect. Anna highlighted the importance of social relationships and prison staff on positive post-prison expectations. (Note: Conor P. Mangold and Ueli Hostettler did not present.)

Culturally Engaged Release for Indigenous Prisoners in Queensland

Julie Sharp, Parole Board, Queensland, Australia

Julie Sharp is the Deputy President of the Parole Board Queensland, Australia. She spoke about the Culturally Engaged Release for Indigenous Prisoners (CERIP), a pilot programme in Queensland to help Indigenous people reintegrate back into their community. In Queensland almost 35% of the total prisoner population are Indigenous, although they make up only about 4% of the population. There is a huge rate of recidivism. Challenges to reintegration include extensive travel home (e.g. two flights), domestic violence exacerbated by substance abuse, and lack of resources in the Torres Strait Islands. CERIP aims to create hope and motivation for the future in order to stay out of custody. The distinct cultural rights of Indigenous people are considered, such as kinship connections; connection to land, sea, and air; cultural lore; Dreamtime and songlines. CERIP works with community corrections to put protective factors around Indigenous prisoners. An example of this is the community justice groups, which provide services such as court assistance (e.g. giving the judge information about kinship connections), and personal engagement with the Indigenous Prisoners 'in language' to motivate

a return to the community. Julie highlighted that they are attempting to break barriers to parole through collaboration with the Indigenous community in Queensland.

Early release from a custodial sentence: an investigation in Italian prisons

Claudia Pecorella, Melissa Miedico, and Massimiliano Dova, Italy

Dr Claudia Pecorella is a Professor of Criminal Law at the University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy. Dr Melissa Miedico is an Associate Professor of Criminal Law at Bocconi University, Italy. They spoke about their investigation into why inmates who are eligible for alternative measures for detention – due to the sentence to be served, or their personal characteristics (drug addiction, seniority) – are still in prison. Inmates serving sentences of less than four years are eligible for alternative measures, which accounts for 63% of all inmates in Italy. Looking at three prisons in Milan, 75% of inmates are segregated in prison, while 25% get out of prison to work during the day (comprised of 26% of the male inmate population and 19% of the female inmate population). In Italy, prison officers are graduates of law or education working on prisoner rehabilitation, while police officers (known as Polizia Penitenziaria, or Prison Police) perform the security duties in prison. Prison officers were found to experience uncertainty about their role; lack of training (e.g. on laws); lack of teamwork; and frustrating relationship with judges (no contact). Although prison officers evaluate inmates and make any recommendations for alternative detention when suitable, police officers can disagree on this, with a judge then having the final decision. They highlighted that the good opinion of prison staff is vital in this decision, however prison officers are found to not feel confidence in their opinions.
(Note: Massimiliano Dova did not present.)

The Size, Scope and Effectiveness of Community Corrections: A Global Review of Research

James Byrne, USA

Dr James (Jim) Byrne is Professor Emeritus at the School of Criminology and Justice Studies, University of Massachusetts Lowell, an affiliated faculty member at George Mason University's Center for Advancing Correctional Excellence (ACE), and the Co-Director of the Global Community Corrections Initiative. Ninety percent of the global prison population is held in 50 countries. Figures from twenty-eight out of those 50 countries indicate that roughly

52% of estimated correctional populations are within community corrections. Jim spoke about the development of a global community corrections database and resource centre. Country-level profiles have been completed for six countries. He requested that researchers and organisations share their estimates of their country's community correctional population in order to continue to develop this. Agreement is needed on acceptable available measures of probation and parole effectiveness. Jim highlighted that the goal is to advance community correctional practices throughout the world, to create global awareness at pre-trial, sentence, and re-entry of the Criminal Justice process.

Theme: Focus on Community
Subtheme: Diversion & Desistance
Summarized by Silvia Martins, Northern Ireland

Diversion from Ireland's Main Remand Prison over 20 Years from 2006 to 2025: Navigating Healthcare, Housing & Criminal Justice Systems

Conor O'Neill, Consultant Forensic Psychiatrist, National Forensic Mental Health Service Eimear Ní Mhuircheartaigh, Senior Registrar, National Forensic Mental Health Service, Ireland

Strain on Capacity and Infrastructure

One of the most pressing practice implications emerging from the workshop is the severe strain on both the prison and mental health care infrastructure in Ireland. As of May 2025, the prison system is operating at approximately 115% capacity, with around 4,500 prison places and a population that exceeds this limit. This level of overcrowding not only places pressure on correctional staff and physical space but also has a detrimental effect on the ability to deliver timely and appropriate mental health care to incarcerated individuals. Simultaneously, Ireland's psychiatric bed capacity remains limited and fragmented. Of the 1,913 psychiatric beds available nationally in 2022, a substantial proportion—24%—are in private facilities, which are generally inaccessible to prisoners.

Furthermore, 35% of available beds are used by individuals aged 65 and older, and another 36% are designated as long-stay beds, meaning they are rarely vacated. In practice, this leaves a tiny and constrained pool of beds for the prison population, most of whom are young to middle-aged men. The imbalance between need and availability results in delays missed

treatment opportunities, and increased risk of deterioration for individuals with serious mental illness.

Underutilisation of Forensic Hospital Resources

Despite the recent opening of one of the world's newest forensic hospitals—the Central Mental Hospital, rebuilt in 2022—Ireland still struggles to meet the demand for forensic psychiatric care. The facility has a designed capacity of 170 beds, but only 112 were operational as of May 2025. A significant number of high-support and medium-support beds—58 in total—remain unopened due to resource and staffing constraints. As a result, critically ill individuals in the prison system, particularly those suffering from psychotic disorders or dementia, face significant barriers to accessing hospital-based care. Legal provisions exist for transferring these individuals under the Criminal Law (Insanity) Act 2006, but they are rendered ineffective by the lack of designated, available beds. Moreover, 20 years after this legislation was enacted, no additional designated sites beyond the Central Mental Hospital have been developed. This points to a long-standing systemic failure to operationalize legal safeguards intended to divert severely unwell individuals from punitive to therapeutic environments.

Gaps in Legislative Function and Implementation

The legislative framework governing mental health diversion in Ireland—primarily the Mental Health Act 2001 and the Criminal Law (Insanity) Act 2006—provides some tools for intervention. Still, these mechanisms are underused or entirely blocked by logistical realities. For instance, under Section 12 of the Mental Health Act, Gardaí (police) can bring someone to hospital before incarceration. However, once an individual enters the prison system, pathways to diversion become significantly more limited. Transfers under Section 15 of the Insanity Act require space in the designated forensic facility, which is rarely available.

Furthermore, the insanity defence is rarely used (two to three times annually), typically resulting in extremely long custodial placements. Ireland also lacks community treatment orders or hospital orders akin to those in other jurisdictions, meaning there is little scope for court-mandated psychiatric treatment in the community as an alternative to incarceration. The workshop highlighted that, despite relevant legislation, diversion is often informally achieved through the bail process and voluntary hospital admissions, which are less structured and less equitable approaches.

Operational Models That Work: PICLS as a Scalable Solution

The Prison Inreach and Court Liaison Service (PICLS), based at Cloverhill Remand Prison, provides a compelling example of an effective, multidisciplinary intervention. Since 2006, the

PICLS team has worked five days per week and includes consultant and trainee psychiatrists, forensic nurses, an advanced nurse practitioner, and a housing support worker. Their structured workflow begins with a two-stage screening process for all new committals, followed by triage, assessment, and, where necessary, preparation of court reports or direct court attendance. The service can deliver treatment in the prison where appropriate or arrange transfers to hospitals for those requiring higher levels of care. The inclusion of a housing support worker is particularly impactful, as many patients face homelessness upon release. This role ensures continuity of care and stabilisation by coordinating accommodation placements and physically accompanying individuals to their housing, thereby reducing the risk of reoffending or relapse.

Need for Early and Widespread Diversion Pathways

The workshop underscored the importance of diverting individuals as early as possible in the criminal justice process. Ideally, through partnerships with Garda stations, mental health assessment and diversion would begin at the point of arrest, However, Ireland has over 530 police stations, and without additional resources and funding, expanding the PICLS model to this scale is currently unfeasible. Attempts to replicate models from jurisdictions such as New South Wales, Australia, where services are integrated across local courts, have been limited by staffing and financial constraints. Since Cloverhill Prison handles 40–60% of national remands and 9% of the total prison population, concentrating resources here has yielded a national impact. However, a more distributed network of diversion teams is needed to serve the rest of the country equitably and to ensure that diversion is not dependent on geographic proximity to a central remand prison.

Integrating Mental Health, Housing, and Justice Sectors

The case vignette presented in the workshop—a homeless man in his early thirties with schizophrenia arrested for minor offences—highlights the intersection of mental illness, homelessness, and criminal justice involvement. His repeated admissions and lack of post-release support reflect systemic fragmentation. This profile is representative of many individuals on the PICLS caseload, underscoring the necessity of integrated service delivery. Effective diversion requires collaboration between the health and justice sectors as well as housing and social services. The current PICLS model exemplifies this integration at a small scale, but national adoption would require cross-departmental coordination, sustainable funding, and formal service-level agreements. Without these elements, individuals with severe mental illness will continue to cycle through courts and prisons without receiving the comprehensive support they need.

Conclusion: A Call for National Policy and Structural Reform

Ultimately, the workshop illustrated that while models like PICLS demonstrate success, they operate within a larger system that remains structurally underprepared to address the scale and complexity of mental health needs within Ireland's criminal justice population.

Prison overcrowding, limited psychiatric bed access, and under-implementation of mental health legislation collectively hinder progress. Policymakers must act on the growing body of evidence supporting diversion and stepped-care models by investing in dedicated staffing, expanding designated mental health facilities, and enabling legislative tools to function as intended. National reform is needed—not only to improve clinical outcomes but to uphold human rights and reduce the criminalisation of mental illness in Ireland.

So, what practice implications can we draw from the evidence? First, diversion services like PICLS are practical and scalable if properly resourced—highlighting the value of multidisciplinary, integrated approaches to mental health care in custodial settings. Second, mental health and housing must be treated as inseparable in any model aiming to reduce recidivism and support recovery. Third, legislative frameworks must be backed by actual infrastructure—beds, staff, and services—or they risk remaining symbolic. Lastly, early intervention—particularly at the point of arrest or first court appearance—must become a national priority if Ireland is to reduce the incarceration of individuals with serious mental illness and provide care in the most appropriate and humane settings.

The evidence calls for a coordinated, cross-sector response that bridges the gaps between justice, health, and housing systems. Only through such structural reform can Ireland ensure that its response to mental illness in the criminal justice system is not only clinically effective but just, ethical, and sustainable.

Summarized by Hannah Ferris Blair, Queen's University Belfast

This presentation was delivered to convey the mental health crisis that is ongoing within the criminal justice system of the Republic of Ireland and the measures that have been taken to reduce harms within Cloverhill prison as a result. With thousands of beds being stripped from the psychiatric hospitals of the Republic of Ireland, there is a significant dearth of forensic psychiatric beds, causing a myriad of stress and harm to those who need them. Professor Conor O'Neill, who founded the Prison Inreach and Court Liaison Service in 2006, alongside Eimear

Ní Mhuircheartaigh, a High Specialist Trainee in psychiatry at Cloverhill prison, discussed the work that has gone into managing this issue of dwindling resources, and how the Prison Inreach and Court Liaison Service has provided thousands of prisoners with the support they need. To do so, results from multiple studies conducted from the Prison Inreach and Court Liaison Service were considered, alongside a narrative detailing the need of the service and the needs of those involved within it.

Within the Republic of Ireland, 7% of the total prison population have a psychiatric illness, showing the pervasive nature of the mental health crisis within the criminal justice system. However, those most impacted are those on remand, reflected in the rates of psychiatric illness within Cloverhill, Dublin's main remand prison, where 15% of its population have a psychiatric disorder. For many, prison is used as an alternative to hospitalisation as there is literally nowhere to place all of those with mental health disorders. Further, as the number of psychiatric beds has decreased, the number of those placed in prisons has expanded. In 2006, the Prison Inreach and Court Liaison Service was formed, providing a framework and service that diverts those with the most severe psychiatric disorders out of the criminal justice system, so far over 2000 diversions into community inpatient/outpatient services and the central mental hospital have been completed.

One such diversion service is wing D2 in Cloverhill prison, which Ní Mhuircheartaigh detailed and provided context to the lifechanging and saving work that is ongoing on that wing. On this wing, a full team made up of, psychiatrists, a consultant and nurse practitioner (who can liaise with courts) and housing support, work 5 days a week to provide care and planning support for those on the wing. While it is true that the grim reality of the Irish mental health provisions is ever-present, with 26 individuals who should be hospitalised holding residence on the wing, the staff team make great efforts to provide clients with not only mental health support, but engaging programmes and services that are therapeutic, promoting prosocial values.

For most practitioners, it is unlikely that this issue of a diminished mental health service is strange or unusual, however, lessons from O'Neill and Ní Mhuircheartaigh must be taken with heed. To the best of the service's ability, the provision of long-term, wrap around services must be available, as the speakers recounted the common occurrence of rebounding psychiatric illness that resulted in a cycle psychosis and reincarceration. Further, such services, or similar services must target those with dual diagnosis, with an emphasis on those with substance use

disorders. Lastly, the inclusion of a housing support worker within mental health services is extremely important, as allocation into housing that is safe and stable is necessary for those with psychiatric illness. These housing support workers must also be available to young men, who are a major homeless population and unlikely to secure a space within a forensic psychiatric setting.

Summarized by Silvia Martins, Norther Ireland

They All Come Out: Mapping the Desistance Journeys of 150 Prison-Leavers Over 18 Months

Helen Kosc, DPhil Candidate, University of Oxford

This ground-breaking ethnographic study follows the resettlement journeys of 150 men released from a local Category B prison in Southeast England over 18 months. The research adopts a long-term, immersive methodology—combining go-along ethnography with unstructured, sequential interviews—to explore the lived realities of prison leavers navigating life beyond the prison gates. With an emphasis on qualitative depth and narrative fidelity, this study offers rare insight into the daily struggles, aspirations, and setbacks of those attempting to desist from crime within an environment marked by extreme precarity.

Helen Kosc, a Doctoral Researcher in the Department of Sociology at the University of Oxford, documents these men's desistance journeys from their release—meeting them at the gate, attending probation meetings, and shadowing their reintegration into society. Many were released during the 2023 winter amidst a housing and cost-of-living crisis, with no accommodation, no employment, and minimal access to support services. The study powerfully contextualises reoffending not as an individual failure but as a structural inevitability within a system that offers few sustainable second chances.

One participant said, *"In here, at least I'm a number. Out there, I'm no one."* The accounts are devastating in their honesty. Participants describe a world where basic needs—food, shelter, warmth—are routinely unmet. In this vacuum of support, many spoke of actively seeking re-incarceration to access stability, with one man stating, *"I'll do anything to get me back inside*

the warm for a few nights." These reflections are not anomalies but representative of a broader, repeating cycle of exclusion, marginalisation, and return to custody.

Kosc's findings highlight a staggering pattern: only 11 of the 150 men (7%) secured employment during the study period. Nearly 62% were recalled or reoffended, with at least 10% admitting to intentionally breaching conditions to be re-arrested. A third of participants returned to prison within one month of release. The majority carried histories of trauma, mental illness, substance dependence, learning difficulties, and chronic homelessness. They were, as Kosc notes, "multiply disadvantaged," facing the harshest intersection of societal neglect.

The study also casts a critical eye on the housing landscape. With national statistics indicating over 300,000 people experiencing homelessness on any given night in England, and with council housing waiting lists often spanning 10 to 20 years, prison leavers are frequently left with no viable pathway to stability. Options are grim: rough sleeping, sofa surfing, or temporary placements that are often unsafe and unsuitable. In such conditions, the possibility of behavioural change—let alone desistance from crime—becomes a daily, uphill battle.

What practice implications can we draw from the evidence?

This research underlines the urgent need for holistic and pre-emptive support structures—before, during, and after release. Desistance, the study reveals, is not a singular decision but a negotiated, daily process that demands consistent external reinforcement: safe housing, employment opportunities, mental health services, and meaningful social support. Policymakers must move beyond punitive paradigms and confront the social determinants of reoffending head-on. Resettlement cannot begin at the prison gate; it must be structurally embedded into sentencing, community supervision, and post-release care.

Above all, this study calls for a radical rethinking of reintegration policy. In a country where many feel they are only "seen" once they return to prison, it is no surprise that incarceration becomes, paradoxically, the most dependable form of care. Unless housing, employment, and health support are drastically improved, desistance will remain a fragile hope rather than an attainable outcome. Kosc ends her presentation with the poignant story of a man who, unable to endure another night on the streets, deliberately reoffended to spend Christmas in prison. "I'll be home for Christmas," he said, handcuffed and led away—revealing how broken the

concept of "release" has become for many. Without significant investment and structural reform, we risk ensuring that prison is not the last resort for some—it is the only one.

Summarized by Hannah Ferris Blair, Queen's University Belfast

As described by Kosc, the prison service of England and Wales imprisons more people than any other European country. Kosc relayed that over 2/3rds of this total prison population were sentenced for non-violent offences, and that just over a third were incarcerated for less than 6 months, causing upset and severe disruption to their lives. However, this is made worse by the alarming rates of recidivism and reincarceration, with 48% of prison leavers going on to reoffend within a year. It was as a result of these issues that the Restart project was formed.

Funded by the Ministry of Justice, the Restart programme was funded, acquiring 10 members of front-line staff from local charities to act as "through the gate" support for those leaving prison. At the time of the project's launch, Kosc was a student at Oxford University and a volunteer for local charities supporting those in the justice system. This was how she became aware of the Restart programme, which became the basis of her PhD thesis. Over the course of 18 months, Kosc, alongside Restart workers, tracked the lives of 150 prison-leavers. Data was gathered from the individuals throughout their reintegrative journeys, beginning with in-prison planning, going on to meet them at the gate, where all-day support was provided and subsequently completing fortnightly check-ins.

The speaker highlighted key findings from her time studying the pathway of desistance, most importantly noting that 60% of the prison leavers went on to reoffend, despite their initial motivation to desist. Kosc highlighted housing to be a distinct issue for prison leavers, as 86% of her sample left prison without any accommodation. It was this group whose desistance pathways were most impacted, as of the 60% who went on to reoffend, 94.4% were homeless, with some purposely reoffending as a means of finding accommodation, even if that may be a custodial setting. Kosc also warned against an immediate punitive response to reoffending and stated that "temporary persistence" which was conducted as a matter of survival was often extremely difficult to avoid, especially without housing or a source of income. Further, it was noted that for those who did manage to successfully desist, this was often not the whole picture and that instead those individuals had simply managed to avoid being caught during reoffending periods.

While Kosc's research has not yet been published, practitioners should anticipate its dissemination, as an important lesson is entwined throughout the work: desistance is not a linear process, and moments of temporary persistence may be a natural, and unavoidable part of the reintegrative journey. Further, Kosc's statistics surrounding homelessness are alarming and should prompt practitioners to evaluate the role of stable, secure and safe housing for those leaving the justice system, to ensure that it is not through systematic failure that prison leavers are quickly turned around and placed back into a reincarceration cycle.

Theme: Adjusting Organizational and Policy Responses
Subtheme: Prison Culture
Summarized by Elliot Bowden, Queen's University Belfast

"You have to be fluid" prison officer types, perceived quality of staff-prisoner relationships, and staff burnout in the Irish prison service

Sinead Meade, Ireland

Meade conducted research on the Irish prison service concerning prison officer 'types', influenced by the perception of types constructed in fictional media and the far more measured, fluid, and complex reality of personality types expressed in the Irish prison service. There were semi-structured interviews conducted with 24 participants and a national survey of prison officers with 573 respondents. The aim was to understand if prison officer types can be quantified in the Irish prison service and used to predict the perceived quality of staff-prisoner relationships and staff burnouts.

The findings indicate that the types identified are not rigid and exclusionary, all officers should be adaptable and encompass attributes from all types. A latent profile analysis was conducted to group the officers with the most similar answers which revealed four significant variations: All-rounder, measured engaged, measured disengaged, and alienated. It must be stressed that this represents the group the officers belong to in the moment, which is subject to change according to outside factors. The groups are shown to differ more in intensity rather than type, with engagement at the highest level and lowest level being reflected in type, and in the quality of perceived relationships with prisoners.

Adaptability and fluidity in their work was revealed to be the most important factor in prison officer success. Factors influencing this adaptability include individual personality, occupational culture, gender, workload, and perceptions of organizational justice. Officers reported that their approach to their role could shift depending on these variables.

The study revealed statistically significant differences in the perceived quality of staff-prisoner relationships and levels of staff burnout among the four officer classes. Officers who exhibited more adaptive and relational approaches reported better interactions with prisoners and lower burnout levels. Conversely, those with less adaptive styles experienced higher burnout and poorer relationships with prisoners.

Given the identification of important factors influencing officer type, and therefore likelihood of burnout and quality of workplace relationships, there are factors identified that can be targeted to help officers achieve 'all-rounder' categorisation more often. This would involve bringing in training to help prison officers understand the factors that influence their status, and provide support in these areas. Target policies could reduce the risk of labelling and burnout. It is also advised that the prison service explores ways to address the perception of fairness in the organisation to help individuals regain fluidity and improve officer-prisoner relations.

Trauma and social support experiences of men in Northern Ireland

Daniel McFadden, Northern Ireland

A mixed methods approach of a survey of 384 prisoners and semi-structured interviews with 18 prisoners in Northern Ireland in order to understand the impacts and experiences of trauma and how this relates to social support. Social support is understood to act as a 'buffer' to trauma, helping to minimise the impacts on mental health. However, prison removes individuals from their immediate family and friends, minimising social support, and also being an environment heavily associated with trauma experience.

The responses indicated that perceived social support was 56.8%, which is lower than the average in the outside population, but higher than expected in such an environment. This is likely indicative of an ability for prisoners to form strong relationships inside, which are shown to be an important factor for social support and mental wellbeing. This is significant as 80.7%

indicated having experienced some kind of trauma, making social support of special importance. However, many participants did not openly discuss their trauma histories during interviews. This could be related to factors such as lack of trust, stigma, or challenges recalling traumatic events. Notably, respondents reported lower mental wellbeing, with half of all respondents being in the bottom 15% for mental wellbeing.

One of the main factors negatively impacting social support was substance abuse, with practical aspects such as concealing drug use, and those in recovery distancing themselves, alongside stigma contributing to a lack of support. LGBT individuals also appear to have less social support. Being moved from their locations for protection and to prevent sexual contact means they have less opportunities to develop social support and end up more isolated.

Social support appears to have a large positive impact on mental wellbeing and helps the incarcerated deal with being imprisoned. Therefore, policy adaptations that are able to foster social support networks would be desirable, with a particular focus on those negatively impacted by existing procedures such as substance users and LGBT prisoners.

Enhancing rehabilitation and wellbeing in prisons: The role of the environment

Natalie Parrett & Hayley Peek, SERCO, United Kingdom

This research conducted by SERCO looks to view prison experience holistically for prisoners and staff, addressing the physical and psychological aspects of the environment in order to create settings that promote the rehabilitation and wellbeing of prisoners. The work centred around psychologically informed bespoke units for prisoners. These units are intended to be psychologically supportive, integrating trauma-informed practices, fostering positive staff-prisoner relationships, and ensuring that the physical setting promotes mental and emotional wellbeing. This has been shown to reduce violence and support prisoners in reflecting on anti-social behaviour, and promote positive attitudinal change. In those who complete then unit, this reduction in incidents has been shown to be consistent for the next three months, whereby those who did not complete the unit showed the same decrease, though not for the 3-month post-unit period.

This positive environment has been shown to also improve staff wellbeing. On these bespoke units, the lowest levels of emotional exhaustion and lowest cynicism was reported among staff members at SERCO prisons. Supplementary opportunities for 24/7 confidential private counselling, VR headsets, health kiosks, staff recreational spaces, fresh water, plants, exercise equipment, and sanitary products were all being trialled for staff wellbeing measures with positive outcomes.

For prisoners, mental health aid technology in cells is also being trialled in order to combat loneliness and extensive reflection on negative emotion with no outlet or support. This is a confidential text service that allows prisoners to seek assistance for various issues, including stress and suicidal thoughts.

These are all practice-based measures that are implemented at ground level with aims to improve the prison setting for prisoners and staff within the context of incarceration as it stands today. Whilst there are no large overhauls to existing practice, they demonstrate a commitment to attempt improvements in a practical and implementable way. The primary aims here are staff comfort and wellbeing, and supporting prisoners through psychologically informed units and helping to reduce 'criminal thinking styles', aiding in reintegration post-release.

Theme: Adjusting Organizational and Policy Responses
Subtheme: Staff Well Being
Summarized by Silvia Martins, Northern Ireland

Breaking the Silence: A New Model for the Psychological Well-being of Penitentiary Police Officers

Elena Nanni, Emanuela Mari, & Clarissa Cricenti,
Sapienza University of Rome, Italy

In an ambitious national effort to address long-standing concerns around occupational stress, burnout, and psychological trauma among penitentiary police officers, Italy's Department of Prison Administration, in collaboration with the Department of Psychology at Sapienza University of Rome, has introduced a pioneering psychological support programme. This innovative initiative seeks to provide immediate relief from workplace stressors and embeds

long-term structural reforms that support officers' mental health within one of Europe's most strained penal systems. Working within the high-pressure environment of Italian prisons—marked by overcrowding, chronic staff shortages, and frequent exposure to violence—penitentiary officers face a convergence of operational, psychological, and institutional challenges. Historically, interventions addressing staff mental health were fragmented and lacked coherence, often operating without a clear scientific framework or evaluative structure. The current project seeks to change that trajectory, grounding its approach in empirical research and applied clinical practice.

The programme is structured in three phases: **context analysis**, **intervention,** and **continuous monitoring**. The initial phase involves comprehensive needs assessment through interviews, focus groups, and standardised questionnaires to diagnose the root causes of psychological distress. The second phase delivers tailored support, from individual counselling to group psychoeducational sessions. Special emphasis is placed on peri-traumatic interventions, such as debriefing and defusing techniques after critical events. The third phase ensures longitudinal outcomes tracking, incorporating qualitative feedback and quantitative assessments of well-being, team functioning, and resilience.

Preliminary results from the pilot implementation are promising. Officers report enhanced team cohesion, reduced stress, increased motivation, and greater emergency management capacity. A stable, internal psychological support network is being formalised across facilities, positioning this model for national replication. Significantly, the initiative has also contributed to shifting the cultural perception of psychological services—from being associated with weakness or failure to being seen as vital tools for professional and personal sustainability. The scope of challenges, however, remains vast. Between 2022 and early 2025, Italian prisons recorded over 13,000 self-harm incidents annually, with up to 82 inmate suicides in a single year. Staff were not immune—officer suicides rose from 5 in 2022 to 9 in the first four months of 2025 alone. Aggression towards officers, including physical and verbal assaults, remains a pressing concern, alongside chronic understaffing (currently over 6,700 officers short of the authorised complement).

Recognising the systemic nature of the problem, the 2024–2025 strategy has introduced regular local and regional coordination, clearer communication protocols to reduce stigma, and structured training programmes, including a "train the trainer" model. The guidelines also

define early warning signs of distress—ranging from behavioural changes and absenteeism to cognitive withdrawal and emotional volatility—ensuring that interventions are proactive and responsive. At the heart of this model lies the constitutional principle enshrined in Article 27 of the Italian Constitution: that punishment must not offend human dignity and should serve the purpose of rehabilitation. Just as this principle guides the treatment of inmates, it must also extend to those responsible for upholding the penal system. One speaker noted, "If the staff are well, the entire system benefits—starting with the inmates."

Practice Implications for Correctional Mental Health Support

The evidence presented highlights a critical need to integrate structured psychological support as a core element of prison operations, recognising mental well-being as fundamental to institutional safety, staff performance, and overall functionality. Early, tailored mental health interventions explicitly designed for penitentiary officers have been shown to significantly reduce burnout, improve motivation, and enhance team cohesion. The Italian model, which standardises psychological services and fosters collaboration between academic experts and correctional authorities, provides a valuable, replicable framework for other countries grappling with staffing shortages, operational pressures, and high-stress environments. By reframing psychological support as a proactive, confidential, and non-evaluative resource, institutions can reduce stigma and encourage broader participation, embedding a culture of care in organisations traditionally characterised by hierarchical structures and security priorities.

Fundamentally, the relationship between staff well-being and prisoner outcomes is continuous. When mentally supported and resilient, correctional officers are better equipped to manage the daily stresses of prison work, respond effectively to emergencies, and engage constructively with inmates. This, in turn, creates a more positive and rehabilitative environment for prisoners, fostering mutual respect and reducing conflict. Conversely, when staff experience high levels of stress or burnout, their capacity to maintain order and support inmate rehabilitation diminishes, potentially increasing tensions and adverse outcomes within the prison community. Thus, improvements in staff mental health ripple outward, benefiting prisoner well-being and institutional stability.

Help Us, Help Them: Understanding Correctional Staff Responses to Organizational Policies

Danielle Rudes, Professor, Sam Houston State University, USA

Professor Faye S. Taxman PhD, University Professor, George Mason, United States

Rose Riccciardelli, Professor, Memorial University, Canada

Benjamin James Mackey, Research Associate, Centre for Advancing Correctional Excellence, George Mason University

This compelling panel brought together leading corrections scholars from the United States and Canada to examine the effects of organisational policy on the well-being of correctional staff working in both custodial and community supervision settings. Presentations explored a wide range of systemic issues—ranging from gender-based harassment and mental health crises to structural and cultural barriers—while also offering grounded, evidence-based recommendations aimed at fostering safer and more effective correctional environments. The panellists highlighted a clear consensus: safeguarding the well-being of correctional staff is not merely beneficial but essential to the ethical and functional integrity of the broader justice system.

Gender-Based Harassment in U.S. Prisons – Danielle Rudes

Dr. Danielle Rudes presented findings from a multi-year qualitative study conducted across thirteen U.S. prisons and jails. Her research revealed the widespread and deeply entrenched problem of gender-based harassment targeting female correctional officers, who represent less than 30% of the overall correctional workforce. Through 145 in-depth interviews, her study documented that 44% of women experienced what she termed "organisational tolerance" for harassment—wherein complaints were either dismissed or met with retaliatory actions. A further 44% of participants reported unwanted sexual attention, including physical groping and verbal sexualised ridicule.

In addition to these forms of abuse, non-sexual harassment also emerged prominently, including gender discrimination, such as being passed over for promotions and enduring hostile work environments where women were perceived as "not tough enough" for custodial duties. The culture in many facilities was repeatedly described as a "good old boys club," epitomised by an officer's account of a sergeant instructing her fiancé to "put his woman in line" following a complaint of abuse. Dr. Rudes argued that traditional compliance-based training is insufficient, advocating instead for collaborative, staff-driven learning initiatives that aim to shift institutional norms from within.

Mental Health Crisis Among Canadian Correctional Workers – Rosemary Ricciardelli

Dr. Rosemary Riccciardelli presented results from a large-scale national study of provincial correctional staff across Canada, shedding light on a mental health crisis of troubling proportions. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, 62.3% of correctional workers met clinical thresholds for at least one mental health disorder, with 30.1% screening positive for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These figures remained alarmingly consistent throughout the pandemic period. Nearly half (48%) of participants reported experiencing suicidal ideation during their lifetime, with 10% having made suicide attempts.

The root causes of these mental health struggles were traced to enduring stressors such as repeated exposure to violence—including witnessing inmate suicides—inadequate access to psychological support, and profound moral injury arising from perceived failures of the justice system to hold perpetrators accountable for assaults on staff. Notably, many officers had normalised their symptoms, interpreting anxiety or hypervigilance as an inevitable part of the job. One participant described PTSD as "the new back injury"—a sentiment reflecting widespread stigma and suspicion regarding mental health-related leave. Dr Ricciardelli called for urgent, trauma-informed interventions, including mandatory debriefing sessions to combat workplace gossip—identified as a leading stressor—and protective measures during commutes to facilitate psychological decompression after shifts.

Managerial Justice in Community Supervision – Benjamin McKay

Dr McKay's presentation focused on the rise of "managerial justice" in U.S. probation and parole practices, marking a notable shift from rehabilitation towards risk management and population control. Drawing on Feeley and Simon's "new penology" framework, McKay illustrated how contemporary practices increasingly rely on tools such as risk assessments, behavioural monitoring, and credentialing mechanisms—where conditions of supervision are closely tied to even minor prior offences. Though administratively efficient, these systems often deprioritise individualised rehabilitation in favour of cost-effective oversight. McKay's development and psychometric validation of the "Managerial Justice Scale" confirmed two key dimensions: risk management (α = .79) and credentialing (α = .76). While he acknowledged

that these tools could streamline operations, he also cautioned against their potential to reinforce systemic biases—particularly by intensifying scrutiny over low-level offences. He urged probation and parole agencies to balance efficiency with equity by including frontline staff in policy development, thereby improving effectiveness and fairness.

Organisational Barriers to Reform – Faye Taxman

Dr. Faye Taxman concluded the panel with a frank discussion of the organisational obstacles that frequently undermine reform efforts in correctional institutions. Chronic understaffing, limited resources, and an entrenched "compliance culture" were identified as significant barriers to implementing meaningful interventions, particularly those aimed at trauma-informed care or harassment prevention. Taxman observed that many well-intentioned reforms fail due to their top-down imposition, often resulting in frontline staff circumventing or resisting protocols they view as unrealistic or disconnected from day-to-day operational realities.

She advocated using "co-creation frameworks," where administrative leaders, correctional staff, and researchers collaboratively develop and pilot new policies. Such participatory approaches have succeeded in community supervision settings, improving brake and sustainability. Dr Taxman emphasised that fostering a sense of ownership among staff is essential for achieving long-lasting organisational change.

Cross-Cutting Implications

Across all four presentations, a shared theme emerged: correctional staff well-being must be central to operating just, safe, and effective correctional systems. The panellists underscored the inadequacy of punitive compliance measures and called for more inclusive, psychologically informed approaches to workplace reform. Among the key recommendations advanced by the panel were the following:

- Implementing participatory methods in the design of organisational policies;
- Replacing conventional compliance training with interactive, skill-based learning models;
- Integrating mental health support services directly within correctional facilities;
- Addressing staffing shortages to mitigate burnout and reduce safety risks.

Dr. Ricciardelli captured the essence of the discussion with a poignant reminder: "We cannot care for those in custody if we do not first care for those keeping them safe."

Practice Implications

The evidence presented by the panel offers clear and urgent practice implications for correctional institutions seeking to improve staff well-being and operational outcomes. A key takeaway is moving beyond compliance-oriented reforms towards participatory, staff-led approaches that build trust and relevance in policy implementation. Tackling gender-based harassment requires a shift in institutional culture, supported by peer-driven, experiential learning rather than standardised training modules. To address the mental health crisis, agencies must embed trauma-informed practices into everyday operations—such as mandatory debriefings, on-site counselling, and protected transition periods post-shift—to normalise support and reduce stigma. The growing reliance on managerial justice frameworks also demands critical scrutiny to prevent the entrenchment of systemic biases and ensure that efficiency does not come at the cost of fairness or rehabilitation. Finally, addressing chronic understaffing is not merely a logistical concern but a safety and well-being imperative. Collectively, these implications point to the need for systemic, co-created, and psychologically informed reforms that place staff welfare at the heart of correctional practice.

Theme: Adjusting Organizational and Policy Responses
Subtheme: Prison Climate
Summarized by Amelia Desmond, Research Assistant, Irish Prison Service

Ecosystem Approach to Justice: A Blueprint for Success

Noa Shoshan, Belgium

Noa Shoshan is Knowledge Manager at RESCALED in Belgium. Noa spoke about the work being done by RESCALED, a European network organisation supporting the implementation of detention houses instead of large prison institutions. This work is part of the Erasmus+ RESIZE project. The three principles for operating detention houses are 1) small-scale; 2) differentiated (individually tailored – e.g. by target group, security measures); 3) community-integrated (e.g. community volunteers as peers). They look at justice reform perspectives outside the obvious actors, such as education and employment. The ecosystem doesn't stop at

the physical boundaries of the detention house, and include culture, social life, and education. Levels of influence based on the ecological systems theory from psychology and tailored to the justice context look at the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The microsystem is the most immediate environment (e.g. family, peers, staff, the detention facility). The mesosystem is made up of the interactions between microsystems (e.g. between the detention house and the school), and is based on the collective societal responsibility for the perpetuation of crime. The exosystem is comprised of the external factors that indirectly affect individuals (e.g. government policies, community resources). The macrosystem encompasses the broader cultural, societal, and ideological context (e.g. social norms, prejudices). The chronosystem is the impact of time (e.g. major life events that affect individuals and communities, and broader socio-historical shifts). Harmonious factors include tailored education and work opportunities, while disruptive factors include housing instability.

Culture change in prisons: Where to start?

Flora Fitzalan Howard and Helen Wakeling, United Kingdom

Flora Fitzalan Howard and Dr Helen Wakeling are founding and managing partners at Knowledge to Action (KTA) Research and Consulting LLP, United Kingdom. They both previously worked as Evidence Leads in the Evidence-Based Practice Team within HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). They spoke about how to change organisational culture, using a case study conducted in an English prison to create a preliminary model. They identified six factors or change-enabling conditions: 1) readiness and desire for change and improvement; 2) receiving additional investment; 3) togetherness in the face of adversity; 4) people-focused leadership; 5) restricted regime and population stability (during COVID-19); and 6) easing of central demands and scrutiny (during COVID-19). They also identified 10 mechanisms of change: 1) clarity of vision; 2) empowering and fostering autonomy; 3) active and collaborative leadership; 4) raising and clarifying expectations; 5) recognising and valuing; 6) using and maximising potential; 7) encouraging voice and engagement; 8) caring for and about people; 9) learning-focused; and 10) building momentum for change. Flora and Helen highlighted that evidence-informed tips for culture change in prisons include ensuring good readiness for change, and having clear purpose, vision, and priorities.

Theme: Adjusting Organizational and Policy Responses
Subtheme: Organizational Response
Summarized by Hannah Ferris Blair, Queen's University Belfast

The role of staff well-being in the capacity and capability of prison staff to deliver trauma-informed care in men's and women's prisons in England

Dr Deirdre MacManus and Dr Jude Kelman, United Kingdom

This workshop's trauma-focused approach to the criminal justice system went beyond the typical discussions of how such approaches can be implemented into our justice systems. Instead, McManus and Kelman went down the road less travelled and used prison staff's wellbeing as a measure of how effectively trauma-informed practices can be implemented within custodial settings. Their study into the wellbeing of prison staff was the result of previous primary and systematic studies, some of which found over 80% of prisoners to have experienced over 3 incidents of trauma in their lifetime, showing a need for improved approaches to trauma-informed care. More worrying however, was their acknowledgement that trauma was often overlooked in justice settings, entailing that often, no interventions or support systems were provided for traumatised individuals within such systems.

This workshop was led by Dr Deirdre McManus and Dr Jude Kelman, together they presented data from two studies. Within these studies, prison staff were interviewed to gauge an understanding of their wellbeing, alongside their attitudes to trauma-informed approaches. One participant group was made up staff who worked within a male prison, and the other, female.

A key finding from both studies was the need to ensure that the wellbeing needs of prison staff are being met, both speakers cemented the point that staff could not provide trauma-informed care for those in prison if they did not feel they were cared for. Overall, it was found that there were significant rates of trauma and poor wellbeing amongst prison staff. This trauma was a result of previous life experiences, or due to their roles as prison officers, particularly when incidents of acute violence and distress had been continuously witnessed. Amongst both staff groups, there was a sense of helplessness, staff did not feel they could adequately provide the care that was needed for the prisoners. Staff believed they were over-stretched and, on top of that, expected by management to play roles such as social workers and counsellors.

One of the most poignant points made in this workshop, was the difference in staff attitudes when comparing those who oversaw male and female prisoners. Amongst the male participant staff groups, it was found that newcomers generally had a sense of hope and compassion for prisoners and were generally more trauma-informed and willing to undertake such approaches. However, more experienced staff members had resigned to a generally toxic working culture of "male machismo", using unhealthy coping mechanisms such as dark humour to cope with their careers. For those who did try to connect to the prisoners, derogatory nicknames such as "key fairy" and "con hugger" were thrown around. This was thought to be the result of desensitisation and burnout, after years of being unable to enact real change in the prisoners' lives.

Amongst those who undertook the care of female prisoners, there was a starkly contrasting environment and culture where the women were not looked at as perpetrators but rather considered victims of a broken system. It was obvious to the staff that the women were deeply traumatised by incidents, such as domestic violence and control, that imitated the carceral space they were now housed in. Further, male staff members were hesitant to appear too masculine, aware that their inherent "maleness" could be a trigger in and of itself. The staff did attempt to use trauma-informed approaches, for example, trying to understand the emotions or triggers behind an action, or delaying the use of restraint until it was absolutely necessary. However, a lot of the staff also recognised that given the environment, there was only so much they could do to mitigate trauma-related harms.

As this workshop was centred around staff experiences, it provides direct insights and lessons for practitioners to engage with. MacManus and Kelman developed a staff handbook and training programme called 'Behind the Behaviour', this discouraged the use of force and restraint, provided insight into what triggers from trauma can look like and why mental health and trauma are valid, invasive issues. Importantly, this programme put staff wellbeing at its centre, encouraging that psychiatrists be brought in monthly for staff, to promote healthy prison cultures and greater emotional health. While it can be acknowledged that the integration of a new trauma programme, or the introduction of mental health practitioners for staff can be herculean feat, a takeaway that no practitioner should ignore is that standard trauma training cannot be a one-off session. Trauma training should be continuous, or at the minimum revisited on a semi-regular basis, and this is to allow these approaches to be appropriately engrained in

staffs' minds, to stay up to date with current practices and to foster a trauma-informed prison environment.

Data from two studies presented, one male and one female. Both studies highlighted the need for staff support in prisons.

84% of the participants had 3+ incidents of trauma.

7.7% prevalence of PTSD among male participants, 1.7% met criteria for CPTSD.

Most people not treated for PTSD in prison, their trauma is not recognised.

There is a much higher prevalence of PSTD among female participants.

Did a systematic review of trauma within prison system, high rate of comorbid mental health issues, mixed with self-harm and suicide, often referred to mental health services but not for PTSD.

There is a need to try and implement trauma informed care.

Jude Kelman

There is not a concrete definition of trauma informed care, with HMP aligns with a sense of safety, trustworthiness. Include self-care for staff, staff can't provide trauma informed care if they don't feel like they're care about.

If a service/ intervention is trauma-specific, then the trauma needs of the individual are not necessarily being met. If trauma informed, then that just means staff are informed on impact of trauma. Feels the need for trauma responsive care within prison, prevent re-traumatisation from service provision.

Deirdre MacManus

Discussions about men.

Different culture, policy and practice within men and women's prisons. Men looked at like perps and women looked at like victims. More violence in men's prisons vs more self-harm in women's prisons.

Data from the studies collected during Covid pandemic for women and end of the pandemic for men.

Findings showed groups of staff were very traumatised. Extreme instances/ exposure to violence. Also a lot of trauma in their previous lives, army, police/ fire service, domestic violence, childhood experiences of violence.

Seeing a lot of morally injurious events.

Staff in a hyperreactive state all the time, impacted how they reacted vs staff who had become desensitised. A lot of examples of mental health issues among staff, instances of relationship breakdowns between staff and prisoners.

Coping mechanisms used, poor taste humour, culture of machismo, care/ sympathy for prisoners stigmatised, staff called 'key fairy' and 'con hugger'. Also stigma around staff getting help for own issues.

Newer staff tried to break mould, understanding of trauma and spending time with prisoners. Lots of staff didn't believe in trauma and viewed mental health as an excuse. This meant that prisoners were treated very differently on a day-to-day basis.

Normalisation of violence, using power as a tool for oppression.

A lot of prisoner officers struggled that they couldn't provide proper care for prisoners.

Lack of care for staff, inadequate support and stigma around support.

Training is in recognising mental health issues but not in treating it, staff feel they're expected to be counsellors, nurses, teachers etc. Without any training.

In toxic environments of men's prisons, can there ever be trauma informed care? Especially with lack of staff training and toxic machismo.

Jude Kelman

Discussions about women.

Trauma training already in prisons, how do you know it is good/ effective? A lot of evidence that its good and positive for rehabilitation but no evidence that trauma informed care can be successfully delivered in prisons.

Asked women and staff what they felt were barriers and enablers to trauma informed care. Staff asked about impact of their trauma training, where it was effective etc.

Staff constantly balancing principles of having to provide trauma informed care in a place that is traumatising for women and staff.

Trauma informed prisons are ongoing and has to be a continuous process, staff struggled to consider how they actually applied trauma training, right language used etc. But training wasn't enough. One instance of training, no follow ups.

Staff recognised that there were triggers for women all around them, tried to mitigate but only so much they could do.

Staff had many skills they would need to constantly use, a lot of staff wanted to care/ treated like they would want to be treated etc.

Listening and responding, noticing emotional changes, establishing positive relationships. Lots of male staff, men working hard to minimise maleness so that they didn't traumatise the women as a lot of them had experienced abuse from men. Awareness that their role was to be positive and not damaging because they are men.

Negotiating power imbalance, balancing order and control with care. Trauma informed care, having to maintain orders undermines ability to be trauma informed.
Staff had methods of shifting power imbalances, talking about TV etc to step out of roles as prison staff.

Trying to see prisoners as the same as them but with different life chances and starts.
staff felt powerless as they know they were the ones to have the keys and the punitive environment retraumatised women.

Capacity and opportunities for trauma informed care, understanding issues. 40 women to 1 staff member, women feeling forgotten, staff knew they needed 1-1 time.

Staff felt role was traumatic, as they couldn't do much to help and the very system was anti trauma informed care in how it is.

Trauma informed care fragile.

Staff can't provide proper care if they don't feel cared for.

Wrote book for staff in women's prison.

Gender specific training developed.

'Behind the behaviour' BTB training developed.

Improved opportunities for 1-1, removing power imbalance and reducing use of constraint.

BTB funded for 4+ years, has staff space initiative, compassion forward staff space.

BTB trauma informed training also allows staff to recognise prisoner behaviour alongside their own.

Monthly 1-1 for staff with psychologist, staff felt it improved their behaviours and understanding. Allowed for improvements in how they behaved with prisoners, not using force, using emotional regulation etc.

Over time if staff are given space, given more skills and training, behaviour change, better interactions with prisoners= better care for prisoners.

Questions

Q: What was learnt from women's prison that could be applied to men?

A: Don't promise what you can't deliver, got to support the staff. Wellbeing needs of staff in men's prisons were large and created staff sickness and burnout.

Transforming cultural responsivity and organisational culture: identifying conditions for success based on lessons derived from the Māori Pathways Programme in New Zealand Corrections

Dr. Bronwyn Morrison, New Zealand

2 weeks ago, New Zealand prison population hit all time high, 40% of these people on remand, 50% of women on remand.

Often in New Zealand programmes are evaluated by area, really though a lot of programmes are just impacted by a dysfunctional system, need to evaluate larger system.

Transformation justice, no magic fix for change. Most big projects aren't finished in time, in budget or with all aims met.

Māori Pathways Programme ran five years ago. Began because the most total Māori people in prison ever, more than 50% of New Zealand criminal justice system have been Māori for over fifty years.

Māori strategy created, which became the only strategy used. A lot of Maori people often leaving prison without any/ very little rehabilitation having taken place.

Programme meant to be a cultural pathway, end to end would be a cultural experience within criminal justice system.

Tried everything: culture identity programmes, art, traditional healing programmes, community relationship rebuilding programmes, trauma-informed practice model, integrated case management with prison/ probation etc., holistic family centred programme.

Money given to Māori communities to create and design programmes.

Three pilot programmes, two male prisons and one female.

3 independent evaluations provided by Māori evaluators, challenge to manage and all three of the programmes did not go very far.

Had to quickly put together a lessons learnt review, a lot of aspects of the pilot were finishing up which caused disgruntlement.

Māori prisoners weren't involved in lessons learnt.

Findings from independent review were areas stereotypically understood, however different parts were not integrated/ difficult to integrate:

1. Relationships come first, 'weave the people together'. Trying to rebuild relationships that were damaged, needed to build deep trust that lasts a long time and need to be viewed as a critical first step in the programme. 'build your bridges before you need to use them', cultural liaison officers, jacks of all trades, spent a lot of time getting to know and chat to people. Important because when things kicked off there was someone who could step in to mediate. Need to build a relationship between the programme and existing staff.

2. Shared understanding of purpose, 'everyone onboard paddling in the same direction'. Degree of friction, people didn't always spend time to get on same page
Improved communication among staff about what is being done and why.
Prioritised things that were easy, quick wins rather than the larger bigger goals and purposes.
Pathway staff met with Iwi to align the goals of the corrections purposes and the Iwi purposes.

3. Partnerships lead to progression, 'with your basket and my basket, the people will prosper'.
A lot of good moments among partners, but generally not as much.
Challenges with legal team because lots of things Iwi didn't want in contacts etc, took 6 months to work out legal contracts. More open-door policies in prisons, allowing for partners to come up to the prison more, Iwi participants could be difficult to recruit for the pathway due to fractured relationships.

Authentic co-design, programmes were designed within Iwi spaces, Iwi used connectiosn to get trauma informed Māori practitioners on board that would typically never work with corrections. Had prison staff get involved in the trauma informed programmes, important staff and prisoner relationships and relaxed power imbalance.

4. Experience is everything. Start where your system is, corrections struggled with this because they needed to have new staff who were linked/ connected with Māori people. Initiative took a halt because lack of building in what there was before. Family liaison officers were helpful because they allowed for rebuilding of family relationships.

Let go and let other people help, resist uniqueness bias, start where your system is.

Programme became about cultural change, staff now trained/ training in Māori language, cultural practices. Been able to make an organisational/ cultural shift. Can't change system by just adding to it, need to transform what is there.

Questions

Q: What did Māori justice look like pre-Western system? What can be applied now?
A: Traditional Māori systems were restorative and balancing, may exact revenge, banish someone, however restorative approach was there. Need to build strong relationship connections to alter the research transactions, relationships have a big focus in Māori culture.

Q: Do you see any out from the large prison population problem?
A: Changes are happening, there's been governmental change too. Need to keep working on relationships and how you work with people. Māori pathways developed family and community planning for release, however this requires quite skilled staff that would need to be well informed.

Q: Transformational approach, what were staff's perspectives on cultural changes?
A: Not very well communicated to staff, did not see staff within new strategy. New strategy will include more staff wellbeing and training staff in why it's important and needed. Also staff brought in from national offices, created tension with national vs regional staff groups.

Reflections of Experience at CRS 2025

Hannah Ferris Blair, Queen's University Belfast

ICPA's fourth Correctional Research Symposium was as knowledge-building, diverse and change-motivating as it was impassioned, inspiring and hope-generating. It was clear that all those present - be that plenary speakers, research presenters or those in the audience – held a genuine passion for criminology. I was honoured to be invited to this symposium as an emerging researcher, and the significance of this type of conference being held in my home city of Belfast was not lost on me.

Across the two days there were a diverse range of talks and research contributions, which I found to be thought provoking and welcomed, especially as my position on a PhD programme can often entail focusing on one area for an extended time, making it easy to forget that there is an entire field around you. For me, I found this to be one of the most useful takeaways of my attendance, as I left each day with bullet points for my own work, most of which were inspired by areas that I more than likely would never have thought of organically. So, while it may be difficult to summarise all of the impacting areas featured throughout this conference, there are

two main points that I would like to briefly consider that left the greatest impact: desistance and staff wellbeing.

Desistance is a core focus of my own work, so I am always immediately intrigued to learn about emerging research in this area. However, there were two academics whose work I really connected with, Professor Melissa Hamilton and Helen Kosc. Hamilton's discussion on dynamic risk factors and the minute-by-minute approach to monitoring and supporting desistance was provoking and has become an area of emergent literature that I will be following closely. Additionally, I will be on the lookout for the full findings from Kosc's PhD project. Kosc's study, which followed the reintegrative pathways of 150 prison-leavers appears to have both, unveiled under looked needs, and reinforced existing understandings of some of the most scrutinised members of society at a time of distinct vulnerability and misunderstanding. I am positive that these insights into temporary persistence as a means of short-term survival will contribute distinct and necessary narratives to the literature.

The other area that was both prominent, and a recurrent theme was the health of front-line staff across global criminal justice systems. Staff wellbeing was not something that I had overly engaged with previously, however, it was clear that the poor wellbeing of this population is pervasive. An example of improving the prison environment for staff and prisoners alike that truly stuck out was the innovative and out of the box 'Cell2Cell' programme. Presented by Ginny Oshiro, Kabrina Riley and Jorrell Hicks, the Cell2Cell programme connects staff and prisoners from US prisons remotely with staff and prisoners from Norwegian prisoners. This approach, that encourages humane, holistic practices, attempts to equalise staff-prisoner relationship dynamics and improvement of the mental health and wellbeing of all those in the justice system, including staff, gives hope of a future in criminology and justice system practices that puts humans at the centre of their approach.

Silvia Martins, Northern Ireland

More visible areas of public service often overshadow correctional research in public discourse, yet its importance cannot be overstated. One speaker[1] at the Fourth Correctional Research Symposium (CRS) noted that society frequently honours doctors for saving lives. Still, it rarely recognises that we, too, save lives—when someone stops offending, we break a cycle of harm

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[1] Dr. Emma Reagan, Director of Care & Rehabilitation, Irish Prison Service

that touches victims, families, communities, and future generations. This interruption is not simply about managing risk or reducing recidivism; it is about creating the conditions for human flourishing for those in conflict with the law and those affected by it.

The 2025 CRS, co-organised by the International Corrections and Prisons Association (ICPA) and EuroPris and hosted by the Northern Ireland Prison Service, invited critical reflection on this premise. Under the theme From Individual to Ecosystem: Sharing Research that Matters for Corrections, the symposium challenged us to think beyond isolated interventions.

It urged us to see rehabilitation not solely as a personal journey but as one nested within social systems—institutions, families, communities, and cultures—that must also evolve.

This gathering was an appeal for relevance and responsibility in research. Correctional services must be guided by more than tradition or political expediency; they must be shaped by evidence, tested insights, and practical knowledge from those working on the front lines. Research, when connected to practice, becomes a tool not only for understanding but for transformation. Throughout the sessions, one message was clear: if we are serious about building safer, more humane and effective correctional systems, research must not sit on the margins. It must be embedded into decision-making, co-produced with practitioners, and centred on the lived realities of those who move through the system. This is not simply an academic exercise but a matter of life, safety, and social justice.

Yet, throughout the symposium, it was also evident that achieving this integration between research and practice remains a persistent challenge. Dr Faye Taxman's keynote laid bare the fragile implementation of the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model—still a global corrections standard—revealing that only 20% of evidence-based practices ever reach consistent operational use. The causes are as structural as they are cultural: poor fidelity, undertrained staff, and risk assessment tools used for purposes for which they were never validated. Taxman observed that "many staff rely on gut instinct—an unacknowledged 'gut factor' absent from the RNR's empirical framework," exposing a deep misalignment between research ideals and frontline realities.

This gap—between what we know and what we do—was a leitmotif across many sessions. In Norway, for example, steadily declining recidivism rates have been achieved through the strategic use of electronic monitoring (EM), individualised assessment, and data-informed rehabilitation planning. Only 5% of individuals under electronic monitoring reoffended within

two years—compared to 16% from unconditional sentences—underscoring the power of alternatives to custody when thoughtfully applied. EM allows offenders to remain embedded within their communities, maintaining daily routines, employment, and family connections while closely supervised. This continuity of social ties and responsibilities plays a crucial role in supporting behavioural change and reducing the isolation often associated with incarceration. Furthermore, EM is a more cost-effective option for the criminal justice system, reducing the financial burden of imprisonment. Most importantly, by enabling individuals to live under monitored freedom, EM significantly enhances their chances of successful reintegration into society, contributing to safer communities and better long-term outcomes.

In contrast, Helen Kosc's data from Southeast England highlights the challenges faced by those released directly from custody without such support: only 7% of the 150 prison leavers secured employment during the follow-up period, while nearly 62% were recalled or reoffended, with some even breaching conditions intentionally to return to custody. The rapid return to prison, often within one month, highlights how the lack of stable housing, employment, and coordinated support can derail reintegration efforts. The majority of these individuals faced multiple disadvantages, including histories of trauma, mental illness, substance dependence, learning difficulties, and chronic homelessness.

In England and Wales, the prison population stands at nearly 90,000 individuals. However, reports indicate that only 26% of women and 16% of men received mental health treatment in the year before custody (Ormerod and Dsouza, 2023). Additionally, 25% of women and 15% of men in prison exhibited symptoms suggestive of psychosis—a stark contrast to the general public rate of around 4%. Therefore, reforming existing practices and policies to provide suitable alternatives and support for individuals with mental health problems is imperative, ensuring a system that not only upholds public safety but also promotes the wellbeing and rehabilitation of those with mental health challenges. As Lord Bradley noted:

"While public protection remains the priority, there is a growing consensus that prison may not always be an appropriate environment for those with severe mental illness and that custody can exacerbate mental ill health, heighten vulnerability and increase the risk of self-harm and suicide."

Building on this recognition, Ireland's Prison Inreach and Court Liaison Service (PICLS) offered a powerful example of an ecosystemic approach. By integrating mental health, housing, and justice systems, PICLS diverts vulnerable individuals from the penal system into tailored

care pathways. Its success reveals how innovation depends not only on policy but also on structural support—such as available psychiatric beds and coordinated interagency services—which remain lacking across the country.

Reflecting on the symposium, it's evident that the path forward in corrections requires more than just incremental adjustments. It demands a fundamental shift in how we integrate research into practice, ensuring that evidence-based approaches are not only understood but also consistently applied.

As we move forward, we must prioritise a more holistic, ecosystemic view of rehabilitation, one that recognises the interconnectedness of individuals, families, communities, and institutions.

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Amelia Desmond, Irish Prison Service

This was my first year of attending CRS. Across the two days of the conference I had the opportunity to attend a broad range of the workshops and plenaries on offer which spanned all four themes for this year: Individual Factors, Interpersonal Factors, Focus on Community, and Adjusting Organizational & Policy Responses. Overall, I was struck by both the knowledgeable enthusiasm of each presenter for their research topic and the considered thoughtfulness of every

audience member's question in the discussion afterwards. It was inspiring to hear of the innovation and push for improvement in corrections globally from across sectors in the Criminal Justice System. 'Change' appeared to be the buzzword, with considered practical approaches to the best implementation of changes in the prison system. To conclude, I would like to highlight that this was the first year of the Showcase Sessions, at which I both attended and presented across the two days. I found these sessions to be a valuable opportunity to engage in active informative conversations with other researchers, often with the presenters of the workshops I had attended. I would see the Showcase Sessions as a valuable resource during the timetable of CRS and would support its continuation at future conferences.

Elliot Bowden, Queen's University Belfast

The International Correctional Research Symposium 2025 held in Belfast centred on the theme "From Individual to Ecosystem". This emphasises the need to broaden the scope of correctional interventions beyond individual-focused models, advocating for an integrated approach that considers the broader social and environmental contexts influencing justice-involved individuals.

This shift towards an ecosystemic approach emphasised at the Symposium offers an opportunity to challenge the entrenched, often punitive structures that appear to underpin correctional systems. While the integration of various rehabilitative models is a step towards a more holistic understanding of offender reintegration, it is essential to evaluate how these models are implemented and whether they genuinely address the systemic inequalities and power imbalances inherent in the criminal justice system from arrest through to release and monitoring.

Including visits to institutions Maghaberry, Magilligan, and Hydebank Wood allowed participants to observe the realities 'on the ground' of incarceration and the complexities of implementing new rehabilitative practices for service delivery professionals in these environments.

These visits underscore the importance of critically assessing how facilities are able to implement, trial, and evaluate research findings and whether they contribute to meaningful change, or potentially merely reinforce existing power dynamics and value systems.

To conclude, while the symposium's focus on expanding the rehabilitative ecosystem is commendable, it remains important to interrogate the underlying structures and ideologies that shape correctional practices. Through sustained critical engagement, we may ensure that efforts to reform the correctional system lead to genuine improvement and transformation rather than superficial adjustments that perpetuate existing power relations.

Isla Donaldson, Irish Prison Service

Reflecting on my experience of the fourth Correctional Research Symposium, I am grateful for the opportunity that I had to connect with other researchers and practitioners from across the world, and for their willingness to share their knowledge and wisdom in line with the symposium's central message of 'Sharing Research that Matters for Corrections'. Throughout the symposium, I was struck by a unifying drive to seek, capture, and relay the experiences of people who have come into contact with the justice system, and to aim to integrate their feedback into the implementation of evidence-based practice. Presenting in the symposium's inaugural Showcase Sessions, I was heartened by the interest and positive reception to our work, and I was also thankful for the dedicated space and time for informal (yet insightful) discussions with colleagues from other organisations – a welcome opportunity within in a jam-packed conference schedule! I left Belfast with a sense of positivity and hope for the future after the witnessing the motivation of delegates to strive to further cement the alliance between correctional research and practice.