

**Irish Community Care
Opening Doors 2013-2016: Service Evaluation Report**

Capacity Building Team, Liverpool Charity & Voluntary Service (LCVS)

October 2016



'Since 2003, HM Prison Service has been aware of the failure to adequately address the needs of Irish Travellers in prison in England and Wales. Irish Travellers suffer unequal hardship in prison. Poor levels of literacy, mental illness, limited access to services, discrimination and prejudicial licence conditions for release, disproportionately affect Traveller prisoners. Despite official recognition of these issues and the size of the Traveller population perhaps being as high as 5% of the overall prison population, little intervention has taken place to encourage rehabilitation amongst this group. Without appropriate strategies for Travellers in prison, society will continue to bear the social and economic burden of warehousing an ethnic group who cannot access education courses because they cannot read; a group that cannot complete rehabilitation programmes because they cannot write; and a group that cannot file their grievances because they cannot complete forms.'

MacGabhann, C. (2011) *Voices Unheard: A Study of Irish Travellers in Prison*, The Irish Chaplaincy in Britain (ICB)

'The failure to deal properly with the reintegration of foreign national prisoners is an acute problem. Because they are foreign and may not return to 'our community' they are seen as less deserving and, perhaps, less human. All countries return prisoners to their home-countries with no interest in their welfare or whether they will re-offend. This is desperately irresponsible. It is very bad for individual prisoners, for their families and for the communities to which they return. Our prison population is likely to remain diverse and we need to get better at managing foreign national prisoners. It is a task that needs the co-operation of all countries in Europe and elsewhere, and is one we should not ignore.'

Slade, L. (2015) *Foreign National Prisoners; best practice in prison and resettlement*, Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, Welfare Reform Trust

'Without Opening Doors I would still be in jail, on the run or dead'

Opening Doors Service User, July 2016



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Executive Summary

The Criminal Justice System in England and Wales has undergone major structural change since 2013. From 2015, implementation of the Government's *Transforming Rehabilitation* Offender Management programme has seen the outsourcing of much of the Probation Service in England and Wales. The reforms have replaced the previous 35 individual Probation Trusts with a single National Probation Service, responsible for the management of high-risk offenders; and 21 Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) responsible for the management of low to medium risk offenders in 21 areas across England and Wales.

In 2013, following consultation on the proposed reforms, Chris Grayling the then Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, stated: *'there were important areas of consensus in the response to our recent consultation on 'Transforming Rehabilitation and these principles will act as the foundations of our reform'.*

These principles (set out below) underpin the Opening Doors Service at Irish Community Care (ICC), which delivers culturally competent support services to people in the Criminal Justice System from the Irish, Irish Traveller/Gypsy Traveller communities, significant BAME population groups in the UK, who are over represented in the Criminal Justice System.

These principles include:

- The provision of support to offenders as they pass 'through the prison gate', providing consistency between custody and community;
- An offer of effective rehabilitation to those released from short-sentences, who currently do not get support, to bring prolific reoffending under control;
- Protection of the public - with the public sector taking the key role in this process;
- Engagement of the voluntary sector in delivery - which makes an important contribution in mentoring and turning offenders' lives around;
- Strengthening of local partnerships and bringing together the full range of support, be it in housing, employment advice, drug treatment or mental health services.

Over the past two and a half years Opening Doors has developed and tested a new service model in six prisons in the North West and out in the North West community. Its aim is to support Service Users to recognise and address offending behaviour; offer support and guidance around prison transfers; tag applications; parole; licence conditions; engaging with probation; drug and alcohol dependency; employment, education and training support; emotional support; accommodation /homelessness issues; welfare benefits' advice; assisted prison visits; family visit arrangements; court appearances; prison pickup, resettlement after release and reducing reoffending.

ICC commissioned the Capacity Building Team of Liverpool Council for Voluntary Service (LCVS) to externally evaluate the Opening Doors Programme in Year 3 of delivery, having worked with them from Year 1 in the design and implementation of new monitoring and evaluation systems. LCVS is an external third sector infrastructure organisation which provides research, evaluation and capacity building support to voluntary, community and faith sector organisations.

The evaluation has reviewed the effectiveness of the programme, its community reach and engagement and the impact on health and well being outcomes and reducing reoffending. Following the evaluation, LCVS has provided additional support to ICC in developing the next phase of its Opening Doors service model.

Findings

- ICC's BIG Lottery funded (2013 – 2016) Opening Doors project has delivered one to one person centred information, advice and ongoing support services to Irish and Irish Traveller/Gypsy Traveller Service Users in the Criminal Justice System (CJS) - two BAME communities who are over- represented in the CJS and whose needs go unrecognised. To date the Opening Doors service has engaged with 152 Service Users in year 1; 184 Service Users in year 2; 142 Service Users in the first 6 months of year 3 - December 2015 to June 2016.
- Service Users reported very high levels of impact on physical and mental health, self esteem and relationships with family:
 - 85% reported that their physical and mental health had improved since engaging with Opening Doors
 - 83% had grown in self confidence and self esteem
 - 85% said that their social skills i.e. the way that they deal with other people had greatly improved because of engagement with the service

- 92% reported that the relationship with their families had improved and that they had peace of mind knowing that ICC staff provided a vital communication link often across two countries
- Consultation with ten key local service partners highlighted the high levels of support for current activities delivered by ICC and for its service development proposals for Opening Doors for the next three years. When asked about their views on the existing service, the responses were overwhelmingly positive – in relation to both operational delivery and strategic partnership working
- Staff and Service User consultation found massive on-going need for the Opening Doors service and large-scale challenges in delivering the service due to:
 - High levels of hate crime against Irish and Irish Travellers in the Criminal Justice system
 - High levels of non-disclosure of ethnicity by Irish/Irish Travellers due to fear of hate crime within prisons
 - Lack of continuity in statutory provision – no standard equalities/diversity support services across all prisons
 - Very high levels of illiteracy amongst existing and potential Service User groups and unsuitable education provision which does not take account of the Irish and Irish Travellers as cultural groups – for example English speaking Irish Nationals being included in ESOL/literacy lessons with non-English speaking prisoners – leading to lack of engagement and progress for all
 - Written word is still the basis for Service User communication within prisons – a huge barrier for those with literacy issues
- **Service Development Proposals:** the evaluation found the Opening Doors service model provided a flexible pathway of support that was culturally accessible in its design and delivery to these highly excluded groups. The service model has been further customised to develop the service offer – to include two additional elements: a literacy support element and a pen-friend volunteer led strand.
- ICC also identified that their existing service model and proposals for its next development phase have the potential to be highly replicable across a wide spectrum of settings for many groups across the Criminal Justice System and for other equalities groups. ICC will continue to lobby and influence commissioners and policy makers to promote its replication wherever possible.

Section 1: Irish Community Care - Context

1.1 Introduction:

Irish Community Care (ICC) exists to identify and respond to the health and wellbeing, social care and cultural needs of the Irish (including people of Irish heritage/descent) and Irish Traveller/Gypsy Traveller communities. Its communities are significant BAME communities who experience serious inequalities in health, discrimination and socio economic disadvantage. They face major barriers in access to information and services and are reluctant to access mainstream services.

ICC offers culturally sensitive information, advice and support services to meet the health, social care and cultural needs of its communities. Its services aim to be flexible, person centred and holistic. It delivers across an expanding geographical area including Merseyside, Cheshire, Greater Manchester and the wider North West. Its Service Users form an integral part of its management and governance structures through Irish Voices Service User Forum.

ICC's growth has been in response to the expressed needs of its communities and gaps in existing provision. Its intervention improves health and well being outcomes, tackles issues of health inequalities, deprivation, and discrimination, and improves access to services through culturally sensitive support. It works strategically: locally, regionally and nationally, ensuring the voice of its' communities is heard in improving health and care services.

Its ethos is that, where there is genuine commitment to listening to communities, acting on the issues raised and valuing difference, this will in the longer term reduce health inequalities, improve health and wellbeing outcomes and develop stronger, more resilient and integrated communities.

1.2 Irish Community Care (ICC) Origins:

Established in the 1960s as the welfare section of the old Irish Centre in Liverpool, ICC's aim was to offer mutual support and self-help for Irish people in need. ICC was very much about Irish people themselves being concerned about the welfare of other Irish people arriving in the city with no support mechanisms, little or no information about services, and no family support. In the 1980s ICC had relatively little income and focused primarily on supporting older Irish people in the community. Today ICC is an incorporated charity managed independently by a voluntary management committee. ICC has a team of 16 paid members of staff and over 40 volunteers. The annual revenue exceeds £400,000. The work of ICC now focuses on supporting members of the Irish and Irish Traveller/Gypsy Traveller communities who are vulnerable through age, poor health, isolation, poor accommodation, homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse, offending, domestic violence, racism and hate crime/hate incidents and social exclusion. It aims to improve health and well being outcomes, tackle issues of health inequalities, deprivation and discrimination; through improved access to information and culturally sensitive services and through strategic representation.

1.3 Organisational Development:

1962 – 1970s	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Voluntary Welfare Committee, Irish Centre
1970s – early 80s:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Service delivered by Sisters of Charity
1980s	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Díon (Irish Government) Funding Programme
1987 - 1990	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employment of 2 part time Staff to deliver and develop service, Charitable Status 1989
1990 - 2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff team expands to 6• Hosting the very successful 'Challenging Irish Invisibility' Conference in celebration of European Year Against Racism 1997• Placement Provider for Social/Community Work students• Funding expands to include Liverpool Health Authority and Charitable Trusts.• Services development around welfare benefits, homelessness, drug, alcohol, mental health issues.• Expansion of services to Wirral, launch of Wirral Irish Group• Opening of Irish Housing Project

2000 - 2016

- Relocation to 60 Duke Street, following closure of Irish Centre
- Volunteer Group expands
- Growth of partnership working
- Staff team more than doubles to 16
- Relocation to city centre fully resourced office base
- Expansion of services to include wider geographical footprint
- Expansion of funding base to include Liverpool City Council, Liverpool NHS, Wirral Borough Council, Wirral NHS, Big Lottery and a range of Charitable Trusts
- Facilitators of Connected Irish
- Development of Service User and Volunteer Forums
- Development as Training Provider and recognition as key health and social care placement provider
- Achieving a range of Quality Standards Awards including Advice Quality Standards, Investors in People Gold, Quality Assessment Framework, NHS Health and Wellbeing at Work Charter
- Winner of Irish Youth Foundation, Ireland Fund of Great Britain Quality Awards; Anthony Walker Foundation Award (2015) for excellence in promoting diversity, integrity and harmony enhancing the lives of individuals.
- Sustainability despite challenges of increasing demand for services and reduced budgets

1.4 Legal Status:

In 1989, ICC became a Registered Charity (Registered Charity Number 701796), an organisation in its own right. In 2010 the organisation became incorporated (Registered Charity No: 1136760 Company No: 07259164). In 2016 it changed its name from Irish Community Care Merseyside to Irish Community Care to reflect an expanded geographic footprint.

1.5 Location:

ICC is currently located at 151 Dale Street, with two satellite offices at The Brian Boru Club, 55 Bryn Street, Ashton-in-Makerfield and Civic Buildings, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire. It also hosts regular Drop-In services in key North West prisons. Its services are delivered through a combination of office-based services and outreach services within the community.

1.6 Service Users:

Its Service Users are key distinct Ethnic Minority communities across the North West i.e. the Irish and Irish Traveller communities, both by birth and descent and includes the wider Irish and Gypsy Traveller diaspora, many of whom self identify as Irish through grandparents / great grandparents born in Ireland.

- Irish community constitute the largest, longest established ethnic minority community in Britain; who nationally experience serious health inequalities including higher levels of poor mental health, dementia, cancers, cardiovascular disease, and alcohol and drug misuse. There are also barriers to accessing information and services including institutional racism, historical experiences, use of language, lack of knowledge of systems and procedures. Within the Criminal Justice System Irish people are one of the largest Foreign National prisoner groups.
- Irish Traveller/Gypsy Traveller community; the most marginalised and excluded community in Britain, experiencing serious inequalities in health, income, access to education, training, employment and services. It is estimated that 5% of the prison population in the UK are from this community.

People present to ICC with diverse, multiple and complex needs; homelessness, rough sleeping, newly arrived migrants, offending, daily battles with drug/alcohol, domestic abuse, as a sufferer of hate crime, managing depression, anxiety or more enduring mental health conditions, social and cultural isolation.

1.7 Portfolio of Services at ICC:

Quality Assured Information, Advice and Support Services - Service User led process involving:

- Assessment
- Referral to Key Worker and partner agencies
- Support Planning and Engagement with Service Users via home, hospital, prison visits
- Outcomes Focussed with Regular review
- Drop-In Easy access no appointment necessary point of contact in a welcoming environment
- Delivered by highly skilled staff
- Free at the point of delivery

Health and Well Being Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular health and well being groups for older people including music, song, dance, exercise, cookery, outings, information sharing • Sláinte Le Chéile partnership with St Michael’s Irish Centre promoting physical and social activity and community connections to improve health and wellbeing • Mental Health and Suicide Awareness through Annual Darkness into Light Walk • Cultural celebrations • Access to ICC information, advice and support services • Low / No cost
Training Provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural Awareness Training Programme • Health and Social Care Placement Provider • Work Experience and Volunteer Placement Provider

1.8 The Opening Doors Service – Phase 1 – 2013-2016 - Service Overview

ICC’s BIG Lottery funded (2013 – 2016) Opening Doors (OD) project (ref 10077242) has delivered one to one person centred information, advice and ongoing support services to Irish and Irish Traveller/Gypsy Traveller Service Users in the Criminal Justice System (CJS) - two BAME communities who are over- represented in the CJS and whose needs go unrecognised. To date the Opening Doors service has engaged with:

- 152 Service Users in year 1 - 2013-14;
- 184 Service Users in year 2 - 2014-15
- 142 Service Users in the first 6 months of year 3 - December 2015 to June 2016

Opening Doors has developed and tested a new service model in six prisons in the North West and out in the North West community. Its aim is to support Service Users to recognise and address offending behaviour; deliver support and guidance around prison transfers; tag applications; parole; licence conditions; engaging with probation; drug and alcohol dependency; employment, education and training support; emotional support; accommodation /homelessness issues; welfare benefits’ advice; assisted prison visits; family visit arrangements; court appearances; prison pickup, resettlement after release and reducing reoffending.

The aim of the Opening Doors resettlement model is to support Service Users in accessing fit for purpose, culturally sensitive advice and support from a team of two project officers. This is offered to offenders serving sentences in prison settings and on their release into the community (i.e. through the gate support), with the aim of preventing those just released from sliding back into re-offending or being unable to live independently in the community. The service model has been designed to provide a seamless pathway of prison in-reach, through the gate support, and following this, resettlement in the community.

In designing and developing this first phase of the Opening Doors Service, ICC identified the following issues in the North West:

- Very poor levels of mental and physical health of Irish and Irish Traveller offenders: due to lack of access to essential medical, accommodation, addiction, welfare and training/employment services both in prison and on release
- Very high levels of isolation and exclusion within this target group: compounded by a failure of services to recognise the specific needs of these ethnic groups – racism and discrimination, family/relationship breakdown; challenges of maintaining family ties across two countries; obvious constraints of lack of access to social media/internet/email
- Huge lack of Basic Skills amongst this group: lack of literacy support is key issue for many Irish Travellers in particular. Learning in prison is classroom based, at inappropriate level and is a barrier to accessing support by many who have never engaged with school before
- Fragmentation and scarcity of both early intervention support at the beginning of Criminal Justice journey, and through the prison gate for offenders. Opening Doors offers holistic support: early and continued intervention throughout the Criminal Justice journey. Community Re-integration issues: problems of securing National Insurance Number essential to claim welfare benefits; serving licence/bail conditions in a different country; heightened anxiety in dealing with accessing services for those who have served lengthy sentences.

ICC commissioned Liverpool Council for Voluntary Service (LCVS) to externally evaluate the Opening Doors Programme in Year 3 of delivery, having worked with them periodically from Year 1 in the design and implementation of a new monitoring and evaluation systems. LCVS is an external third sector infrastructure organisation which provides research, evaluation and capacity building support to voluntary, community and faith sector organisations. The evaluation has reviewed the effectiveness of the programme, its community reach and engagement and the impact on health and well being outcomes and reducing reoffending. This report provides the results of that service evaluation. It provides evidence of the difference that this unique service model has made to many Service Users, families and communities over the last 2.5 years.

Section 2: Service Evaluation Approach

2.1 This Service Evaluation aims to provide an overview of the Opening Door service for the period December 2013 to June 2016: the first 2.5 years of its BIG Lottery funded service. The evaluation aims to:

- Demonstrate the uptake of these activities and challenges around this
- Evidence the views and perceptions of Service Users, staff and stakeholders in the community about the Opening Doors services
- Set out its approach to future development and working with Service User group and families
- Provide an outline of the proposed future project – Opening Doors 2.

2.2 The service review has used 2 primary sources of evidence:

- **Quantitative Data Sources:**

As ICC has received funding from a variety of grant makers (Big Lottery, Irish Government Emigrant Support Programme, Liverpool City Council, Wirral Borough Council, and Charitable Trusts) it is required to complete various monitoring systems both paper based and electronic. Service User statistics are collected and collated on a weekly basis and presented as applicable to these organisations. They are also reported to regular bimonthly Management Committee Meeting for review.

- **Qualitative Data Sources: Consultation with Service Users, Staff and other Stakeholders**

Throughout the 2.5 years of delivering Opening Doors and more recently over the last 2 months, a range of surveys with Service Users and stakeholders in the community have been undertaken to find out their views about service provision and to identify how they would like to see the service develop. The majority of these have been undertaken by LCVS and the remainder carried out by Senior Management staff at ICC. Consultations with Service Users also identified their views about any impact and behaviour change that they think has been brought about by their involvement with Opening Doors. Focus groups have been held with Service Users to hear more about their views of ICC and how they would like it to move forward. Consultation with stakeholders has included partners in the Criminal Justice System, housing managers, Multiple and Complex Needs Provision services and has been carried out through a series of online surveys and one to one interviews. Their views have been sought on the need for Opening Doors, the added value that it provides and its impact both for Service Users, their families and partner agencies.

Section 3: Programme Delivery and Impacts

3.1 Programme Delivery

ICC has been successful in meeting and exceeding its BIG outcome targets for this large scale programme delivered through the Opening Doors programme. Please note that the Year 3 figures are based on 6 months of delivery to June 2016.

Opening Doors BIG Outcomes:	Change Indicators:	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3 (first 6 months)*	
		Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual
Service Users will have improved physical and mental health	Number of people on release registered with GP	60	113	60	173	60	136
	Number of people who will receive support with drugs and alcohol	60	72	60	103	60	104
Service Users will have improved confidence, self esteem and chances of employment through education, training, volunteering & employment during sentence and/or on release	Number of people who will engage in education or training on release	50	13	50	71	50	62
	Number of people who will take up education, training or employment opportunities whilst in prison	70	100	70	103	70	90
Number of people who have not re-offended in a six month period leading to stability, improved quality of life and employment chances	Number of people who have stable accommodation and finance	50	61	50	120	50	130
	Number of people who will have planned resettlement programme on release	70	103	70	141	70	112
The relationships between Service Users and their families will improve or be maintained resulting in improved emotional health and reduction in isolation and social exclusion	Number of people made aware of assisted prison visit scheme	75	105	75	173	75	100
	Number of people who will have made at least 1 contact with family	100	99	100	170	100	134

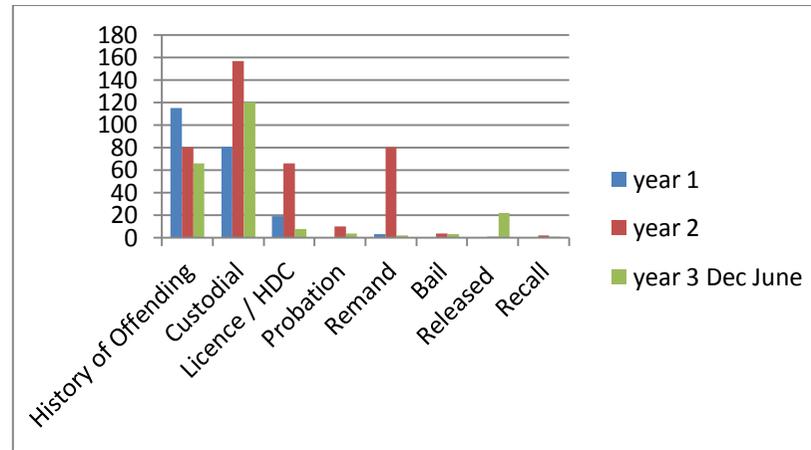


Figure 1: Criminal Justice Status of Service Users Years 1, 2 and 3 (6 months to June 2016)

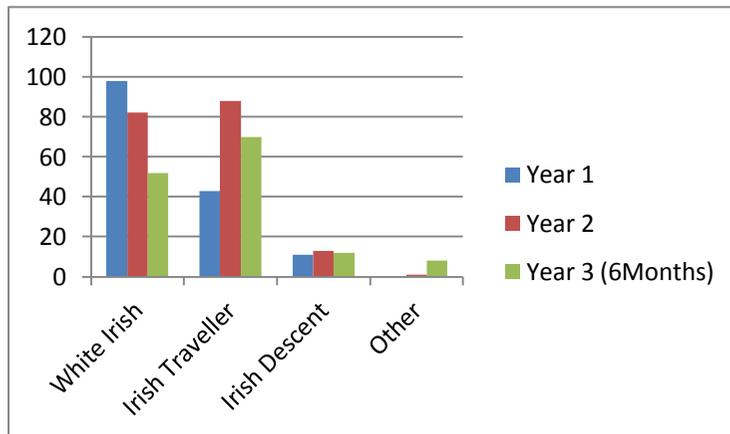


Figure 2: Ethnicity Profile Years 1, 2 and 3 (6 months to June 2016)

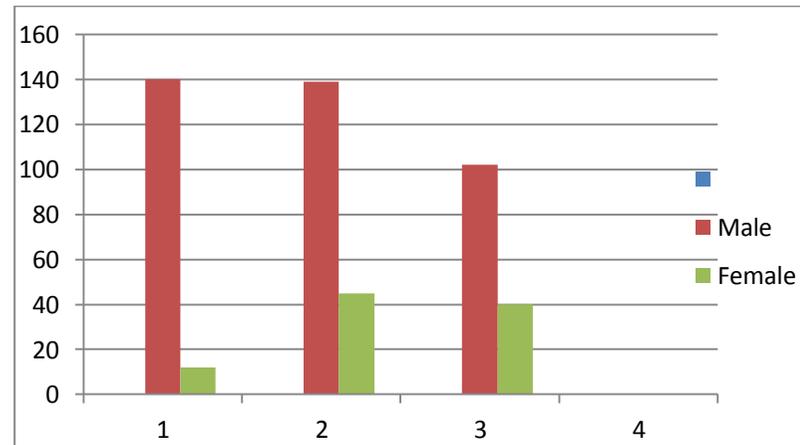
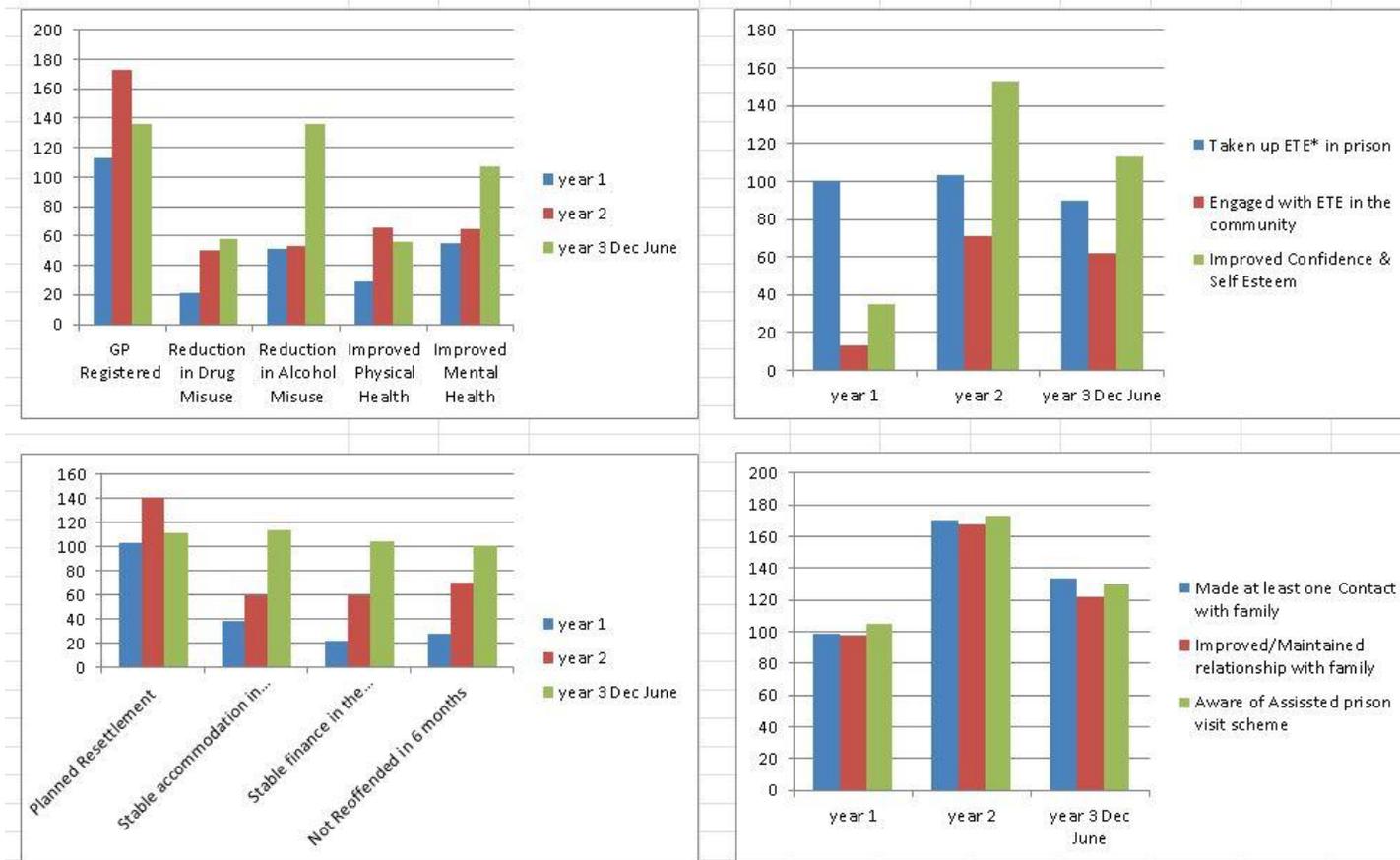


Figure 3: Gender Profile Years 1, 2 and 3 (6 months to June 2016)

Figure 2: Increase in the numbers/proportions of Irish Traveller Service Users accessing the service over the period of the Programme has been recorded and this is set to increase again by the end of Year 3. **Figure 3:** An increase in the proportions and numbers of women Service Users engaging with the service over time has also been recorded and ICC has developed its proposals to be able to facilitate delivery of a Drop-In service at HMP Styal – a women’s prison.

Figure 5. Opening Doors Service Outcomes – by Year 1; Year 2; and Year 3 (6 months to June 2016 only)



3.2 The Impact of Service Delivery

To identify Service Users' views of the Opening Doors service delivery in for the first 2.5 years of its delivery, and the perceived impacts on them, a range of surveys and focus groups have been undertaken with participants to get their views and opinions about these, and how they think the service should go forward.

Further consultation has also been used to develop the proposal ideas with service stakeholders locally and with ICC staff and volunteer members. A questionnaire survey approach was employed as well as focus groups. The majority of these have been undertaken by LCVS and the remainder carried out by Senior Management staff at ICC.

This section outlines the results of these consultations. It should be noted that a key barrier in this impact measurement is the huge restriction on paper based survey work with offender Service Users in prison settings, the impact of very low literacy rates and the fact that on-line or electronic surveys cannot be used with these groups. LCVS and ICC are therefore pleased with the levels of survey completions in light of these barriers.

3.2.1 Service Users Community Survey – January – September 2016 – 102 Responses

Participants identified their main reasons for using Opening Doors and these included the following:

- To get help with specific issues related to my family members case
- To talk to support staff about practical ways of supporting my family member in prison
- To speak to someone who understood my situation
- To get emotional support through this difficult situation

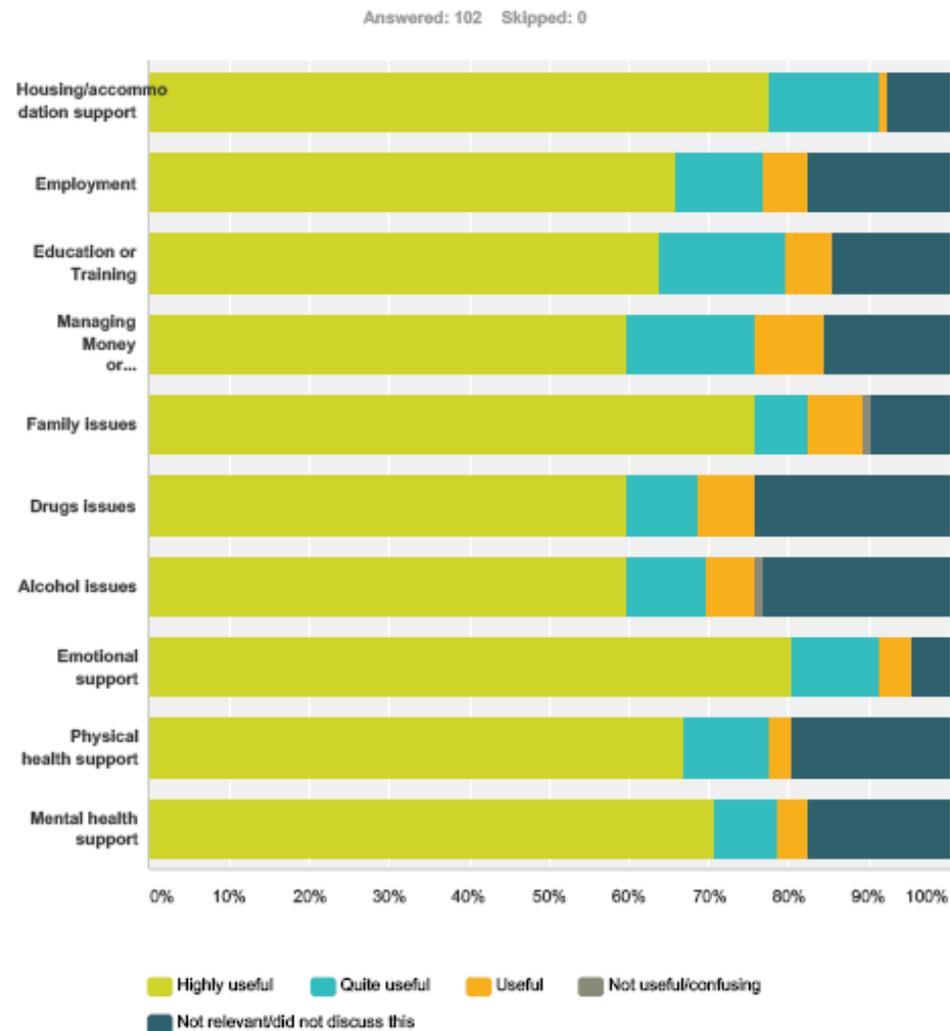
What Impact Have Opening Doors Activities Had on You and Your Family?

In terms of views about the service model, responses highlight the very high levels of satisfaction with the current model across a wide range of reported outcomes including the working practices of ICC staff, ethos, and the motivational impact of approach:

Service User Perceptions of Service Delivery (102 responses):

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not relevant at this stage	Total
I feel my key worker and I work well together	87.25% 89	10.78% 11	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	1.96% 2	102
My key worker is usually able to answer all my questions about support/help/advice I need	78.43% 80	19.61% 20	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.98% 1	0.98% 1	102
My key worker tries to inspire me to do well	82.35% 84	16.67% 17	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.98% 1	102
The support from my key worker has made me less likely to offend	71.57% 73	19.61% 20	4.90% 5	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	3.92% 4	102
My key worker has encouraged me to remain in contact with family and friends	78.43% 80	13.73% 14	3.92% 4	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	3.92% 4	102
Support from my key worker has helped me to sort out most of the problems that made me offend	69.61% 71	16.67% 17	6.86% 7	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6.86% 7	102
My key worker linked me into other services or support	78.43% 80	16.67% 17	0.98% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	3.92% 4	102
My key worker's support has provided me with new opportunities for the future	74.51% 76	17.65% 18	3.92% 4	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	3.92% 4	102
My key worker tries to motivate me to complete programmes/training/courses	77.45% 79	12.75% 13	2.94% 3	0.00% 0	0.98% 1	5.88% 6	102
My key worker has talked to me about what I have learned on recent courses/programmes	74.51% 76	14.71% 15	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.98% 1	9.80% 10	102

Service Users were asked how useful they had found various forms of support from the project workers and found large scale support for most elements, especially family linking/support, accommodation advice and emotional support:



Similarly, in terms of impact, Service Users reported very high levels of impact on physical and mental health, self esteem and relationships with family:

- 85% reported that their physical and mental health had improved since engaging with Opening Doors
- 83% had grown in self confidence and self esteem
- 85% said that their social skills i.e. the way that they deal with other people had greatly improved because of engagement with the service
- 92% reported that the relationship with their families had improved and that they had peace of mind knowing that ICC staff provided a vital communication link often across two countries

100% of participants either strongly agreed or agreed that:

- They got a lot of support from staff which helped them cope better with their situation and that access to this support is/was a lifeline which they couldn't access elsewhere.
- The staff really understand the problems families left at home have when someone is on remand
- Nowhere else offers this type of support

Survey Respondents commented:

'ICC makes contact with family members, keeping relationships strong'

'Help with health issues: I was very let down by nursing staff in prison, I was dealt with with suspicion and no respect and my mental health was totally ignored by prison staff'

'ICC found me a good flat, set up courses for me; without it I don't know where I would be - I've come so far'

'My application for release on tag (HDC) was turned down because I'm a Traveller. ICC got involved and explained to prison that I do live in a trailer but it's on a Traveller site where HDC's have been used before. ICC's influence meant that I can be home soon with my family'

'I have a brain injury: I trust ICC; they go to appointments with me as I can't process information very well'

'Without ICC I wouldn't be anyone, the man has been put back into me like before everything happened'

'ICC supported me and my husband whilst we were in custody. We have now been released on tag which ICC supported. ICC has been very supportive. Many other people could do with the service they provide and their help'

'Without Opening Doors I would still be in jail, on the run or dead'

'I have lost my son and my mum and their deaths have affected me greatly. ICC understand that their anniversaries are difficult times for me and they are there for me as always e.g. ICC staff made sure I could go to the chapel on those days when in prison.'

'ICC keep in touch with my brother and sister back home so they know where I am and that I am doing okay which is a great relief for them.'

Participants at the Focus Groups reinforced the findings of the community survey:

In July and August 2016, a total of 24 Service Users attended one of 4 focus groups held at the ICC Centre and within prisons. Focus group participants commented of the service:

'Without Opening Doors coming in we would be up against a brick wall'

'Opening Doors is our Voice. It makes us feel more confident that things will get done. It's our on-going support'

'Having a voice on the outside making contact with family, solicitors and probation, fighting for our needs'

'Irish and Irish Traveller people are segregated in prison, the loneliness is terrible. Opening Doors has connected us, so I now know other people are here'

'When ICC delivers Drop Ins and the Diversity Officer is present, then more notice is taken and action is followed up by the prison'

When asked about their likes and dislikes about the Opening Doors service they commented:

Likes:

- The respect shown by staff, they listen, they care
- They do what they say they will do

Dislikes:

- Sometimes in the office based drop in there are different staff, I understand that it's a small team and Sally or Julie Ann are often out at the prisons or in court. But I know I can always make an appointment to see them.
- More prison Drop In sessions needed
- The prison can make it difficult for staff to make appointments to see me: not ICC fault, it's the system.

When asked how they rated the Opening Doors Service:

100% respondents stated that the advice and support they received from Opening Doors was either very good (93%) or good (7%)

When asked how they would feel if Opening Doors was no longer around:

'Devastated....it has been my rock and continues to be'

'Where else will I go? Many doors are closed to people like me'

'Prisons are like the wild west, scary places. ICC makes it bearable'

'Without ICC support who will care.. I would be back in prison'

'Service needs to continue for Irish people and Irish Travellers'

3.2.2 Service Users' Family Members: Views and Perceptions

One particular unexpected outcome of Opening Doors which was evident from Year 1 relates to the high levels of satisfaction around support in dealing with family issues. The service was refined at the end of Year 1 to ensure that Opening Doors responded as effectively as possible to the wide variety of support needs related to the families of Service Users. Family members were asked through telephone interview surveys and face to face discussion for their views on the services offered throughout year 2. More recently over the summer 2016 we interviewed 10 family members who commented:

'The support staff always deliver what they promise - the quality of the service is very high. They helped us have a better understanding of the justice system like courts, sentencing and custody so we could best support my brother'.

'I do not have a history of offending however ICC has supported my father and us as a family following his imprisonment. I do not know what we would have done without their help - they have really helped us through the ordeal and are still currently doing so. I am so grateful for the support I would not change a thing'.

'I can't put in words how much Sally and the team at ICC has done for me over the last few years. The support they give us all is so important so many doors are closed to people like me we need support like this so we can make good changes in our life'.

3.2.3 Stakeholder Views and Perceptions: Current Service Provision

A further stakeholder survey was conducted with ten local service partners in summer 2016. Partners' responses highlighted the high levels of support for current activities delivered by ICC and for the new proposal for the next three years. When asked about their views on the existing service, the responses were overwhelmingly positive – in relation to both operational delivery and strategic partnership working.

Operational Partners:

ICC works with many service partners – both within prison settings and in terms of resettlement support work in the community. Operational Partners – working in both prison and community settings - commented:

'ICC offer easy to access friendly service where staff are professional and get back to you promptly'

'HMP Altcourse is a Welsh prison and without ICC two particular prisoners would have been released from prison to Wales, to a very unfamiliar area with no support mechanisms and far from family and home and support. They would have had to present as homeless as they had no local connections. Resettlement team at HMP were not taking any responsibility for these men: one Service User was a wheelchair user'.

'ICC intensive support staff liaised and did a 'lot of running round', with probation and families in Ireland making arrangements for Service Users to serve licence conditions in Ireland. ICC staff offered continued support and reassurance during very worrying time; they researched and arranged travel through partnership with probation'.

'Irish and Gypsy Traveller communities are very isolated in prisons and don't feel they have a place or are appreciated.... In our experience our partners at ICC do the following: Provide that sense of home, of community of 'belonging'; they promote a restorative approach based on building trust relationships – and not least they promote a problem solving, 'fixer' rehabilitative culture'.

'Important elements of Opening Doors: welcoming, smile, open door, flexibility, leadership, community hub'.

'Opening Doors provides a sense of belonging, helps people settle/adjust to life in prison, reduces isolation, builds confidence and skills, gets things done i.e. volunteering opportunities, passports, accommodation'.

'For Irish and Gypsy Traveller prisoners knowing they have a regular group (Drop In) reduces this isolation and improves confidence and sense of belonging and knowing there is ongoing support during sentence; this helps a lot'.

'Literacy is a big challenge and ICC helps in filling out forms, explaining paperwork dealing with queries large or small, and very often small things without support grow into huge overwhelming things'.

Strategic Partners: key strategic partners were also consulted – Waves of Hope in Liverpool, Embassy of Ireland Consular Services and the Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas. All have provided letters of support (Annex 2) for the existing Opening Doors programme and for these proposals.

Gary Morris, Programme Director of Liverpool Waves of Hope commented:

Liverpool has the second highest prevalence of Multiple Needs in the Country (Lankelly Chase) and Liverpool Waves of Hope is the Big Lottery funded Fulfilling Lives project set up to engage the most difficult, entrenched and chaotic people in the City. A significant part of the work we do is to work with agencies across the City to ensure that our learning from what works and what doesn't in a multiple needs context is both disseminated and implemented to delivery systems change for this cohort of people.

ICC has and continues to make a valuable contribution not only to the service delivery for Multiple Needs in the City but also to the development of the Waves of Hope model, its strengths and weaknesses and the assumptions underpinning it, for example ICC have made a strong case to Waves of Hope for ensuring the widest possible access to workforce development activities for staff working with people with Multiple Needs in the City.

The work done by ICC in the specific areas of Criminal Justice and BME supports Waves of Hope and the wider Multiple Needs Community in the City by identifying, supporting and ensuring a no wrong doors approach for specific groups of people who frequently do not get access to the support they need both in the short term and in the longer term. In this respect ICC are a valued and trusted Partner to the Liverpool Waves of Hope Project.

October 2016

Head of Consular Service at Embassy of Ireland Noeleen Curran commented:

I spent a day with the Opening Doors team in my role as Head of Consular Services at the Embassy of Ireland. We visited two North West Prisons and met Service Users who are resettling in Liverpool. The knowledge, skills and dedication of the team in supporting people who are in prison in the UK is strongly evident as is the huge difference the service can make to people's lives.

October 2016

Fr. Gerry McFlynn from the Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas stated:

The Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas (ICPO) has had a working relationship with Irish Community Care (ICC) for several years now. A large part of our work involves visiting prisoners throughout the country, helping and supporting them in a practical way and liaising with their families both here and in Ireland. Where the ICC helps is in visiting six or seven prisons in the Merseyside region on a regular basis and liaising with our London office on issues like repatriation, prison transfer, financial help etc. This partnership model is the most important we have and contributes hugely to our outreach work with prisoners and their families. We greatly value this form of partnership working and dearly wish we could replicate it throughout the country!

October 2016

When asked how they would feel if Opening Doors ceased to operate, partners commented:

'It would have a huge negative effect, very limited services available, immediate impact and longer term impact on families, individuals and huge emotional impact across generations, creates bitterness, mistrust with the system, challenging the system, risk taking behaviour, cycle of 'back to jail'.

'Criminal Justice System would lose a crucial strand of rehabilitative service support. Other prison staff e.g. Diversity leads greatly value ICC input, that wider connection and community'.

3.2.4 Service Development Proposals for 2016 onwards – Perceptions

Throughout all consultation work Service Users and stakeholders were informed of ICC proposals for the next 3 years and asked their views about the content and format of the proposed programme. Respondents wanted to see the existing full programme continue in its current form – enjoying both the variety provided, but especially valuing the holistic nature of the service offer.

In addition respondents were asked in 4 focus groups held in July/August 2016 (20 participants from HMP's Thorn Cross and Liverpool and 4 participants from ICC centre) what they felt were still big barriers in the Criminal Justice system for service user target groups despite Opening Doors activities over the last couple of years. They identified the following barriers:

- Ongoing prejudice and racism from staff and other Service Users;
- That they know that many potential Service Users are afraid to identify as Irish or Irish Traveller/Gypsy Traveller in prison settings;
- That they are not recognised as a Foreign National prisoner in a practical sense by staff, and therefore not afforded the rights and entitlements;
- The many who are still unable to read and write: ***'everything in prison begins with filling a form'***;
- The lack of family support due to distance; the Assisted Family Visit Scheme is UK based only (so Irish families cannot access it);
- Not knowing how the prison system works as they are often from a different country, where services and access to them is very different;
- Difficulties in getting National Insurance Number – cannot be accessed until release – but required to access accommodation;
- The process of being released into an unfamiliar area - often a new country with different systems and procedures, far away from family and support networks is a massive barrier to effective resettlement.

Section 4: Taking the Opening Doors Service Forward

The Opening Doors service review has supported ICC in the development of a plan to ensure the organisation is fit for purpose and can meet the needs of its' communities. Consultation has been extensive and supports the development of networks operationally and strategically, especially with the Liverpool Waves of Hope Complex Needs Programme (and its providers) and other commissioned services across the North West.

4.1 Staff and Volunteer - SWOT Exercise

Following the community and stakeholder surveys and as a training exercise with staff and volunteers, LCVS undertook a SWOT analysis in August 2016 to review Opening Doors service delivery and proposals for the future. The team put together a range of points to summarise their perceptions of the Opening Doors service:

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Internal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff team and senior managers have a wealth of experience, expertise and knowledge - highly skilled practitioners in the workforce • Added value in terms of community engagement and empowerment of vulnerable people • Excellent value for money for commissioners and funders • Opening Doors support is holistic, personalised and culturally appropriate – tackles a wide range of complex issues • Excellent track record for delivering projects locally, regionally and with Ireland • Innovative/proactive in service model approach and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensive, holistic staff support roles requires careful management re targets/input • Reliance on grant income – multiple income sources being developed • Project being delivered within a context of systems' failure within the prison sector – continual churn of Prison Service staff and 23 hour lock-downs presents continual challenge to Opening Doors delivery • With this, restricted networking with other voluntary sector organisations because of intensity of service • Until recently, restricted strategic engagement due to lack of time due to great changes to the organisational and staff systems operating around the CJS over this period

delivery

- Strong board of trustees
- A building which is both accessible and welcoming
- Good systems, policies, procedures and finances established over a long period of time
- Good at partnership working and strong community association and support
- Great relationships with current Service Users and family members.

Opportunities

Threats

External

- Community wide there is an increased understanding of requirement for culturally sensitive services and move in commissioning towards more inclusive service delivery
 - Influencing of policy makers/criminal justice system to roll out this best practice/service model to other prisons– to the largest group of Foreign Nationals in English prisons. Opening Doors is an innovative and responsive service model which is highly transferable to other highly excluded groups in prison and community settings
 - The CJS operating context has in the last year identified the need for such service models: Lammy Review [Lammy-review](#); and the Slade Report [Slade Report](#)
- Current legislative changes in England which may prevent Irish Nationals from returning to Ireland on release and may mean they have to remain in local area for 12 months following release.
 - Ongoing failure of BAME equalities research to recognise and include Irish and Irish Travellers as a distinct ethnic group in current government funded equalities work (Lammy Review)
 - Commissioners’ misconceptions that mainstream service providers are able to offer fit for purpose support for very specific ethnic groups such as Irish.
 - Lack of on-going support for this service model means break down of relationships with prison governors, staff and Service Users/families.

4.2 Priority Issues and Actions – Proposals for Opening Doors Phase 2

Based on this and the consultation results, key actions have been identified to inform the outline of a future programme of activities to be delivered by a second phase of Opening Doors by ICC:

A. One to One Holistic Support Package – in Prison and Community Settings

What is the Evidence of Need for this One to One Support Package?

Project staff consultation as well as consultation with Service Users, families and partners highlights that currently:

In Prison Settings there are:

- Massive levels of hate crime against Irish and Irish Travellers in the Criminal Justice system
- Lack of statutory provision – no standard equalities/diversity support services across all prisons
- Huge churn of prison staff members
- Barriers to building up trust with prisoners
- Extensive lock-downs (up to 23 hours per day) within many prisons, which prevents prisoner access to basic education sessions and one to one support
- Many short notice transfers of prisoners to other prisons which makes service delivery more complex
- High levels of non-disclosure of ethnicity by Irish/Irish Travellers due to fear of hate crime within prisons
- Real challenges dealing with 3 categories of prisoners including high risk cases – resulting in very complex cases/long term issues
- Very high levels of illiteracy amongst existing and potential Service User groups (see below)
- Written word is still the basis for Service User communication within prisons, with update notices used each evening with them being put under cell doors to inform prisoners of meetings/programmes – very difficult for those with literacy issues
- Unsuitable education provision which does not take account of the Irish and Irish Travellers as cultural groups – for example English speaking Irish Nationals being included in ESOL/literacy lessons with non-English speaking prisoners – leading to lack of engagement and progress for all

- Lack of equity for Irish foreign nationals in securing free phone call time to Ireland to families
- Access to meeting space as provided for other ethnic groups with prison settings

In Community Settings:

- Service cuts and absence of basic welfare support systems means that one to one support is essential for all Service Users being released – with technical/legal barriers (see below) compounding the clear austerity issues at play
- The interpretation and changes in relation to legal systems is making case work very complex and time consuming:
 - Rejected applications for ‘tags’ (HDCs) for someone leaving prison to return to static mobile home
 - Confusion and lack of clarity around the newly introduced Post Sentence Supervision Orders (PSSO’s) – which even after the shortest sentence for a minor or first offence (may be 3 weeks) now require foreign nationals (including Irish) to remain in the UK on a 12 month post sentence supervision after completing sentence. This currently includes those who may have been in Liverpool on a short weekend break and sentenced to Drunk and Disorderly/Aggressive behaviour offence – rendering them unable to return to Ireland.
 - Lack of provision of National Insurance numbers prior to/or on immediate release from prisons making access to services and accommodation even harder.

Opening Doors 2 Proposal

- Continue with ICC’s intensive, frontline support service: in prison and community settings including support at women’s prison HMP Styal
- As an integral part of this support service, to continue to advocate and influence services within prison and community settings - to challenge current service delivery which is not fit for purpose and which is perpetuating prejudice and lack of cultural awareness within service organisations – both at an operational and strategic level

B. Functional Literacy Package:

What is the Evidence of Need for a Literacy Support project element?

Prison services are generic: they provide a standard service to prisoners and this is based very largely on the presumption that all prisoners have basic, functioning literacy skills. For many Irish and Irish Traveller prisoners, this is **NOT** the case – Opening Doors’ project officers and many of the Service Users confirm extremely high levels (probably a majority) of this ethnic group do not have the skills to:

- Complete or comprehend the registration/paperwork on arrival at prison requiring next of kin/family contact information which facilitates visits and communication with family members/other services – they are immediately at a disadvantage and many are resistant to declaring low literacy issues
- Many will not declare or register as Irish or Irish Traveller on arrival due to perceived hate crime and violence within the prisons from staff and other ethnicities (e.g. prisoners at a North West prison location which experienced a fatal bombing by the IRA in the 1990s will not declare their ethnicities for fear of local prejudice).
- Read the written notices from prison officers which are put under cell doors nightly to inform individuals of appointments/activities and other education options happening the next day. Often they share with other Irish and Irish Traveller prisoners who also have no or low literacy skills.
- Participate in standard, mainstream education programme provision within the prison – as these do not meet their needs as they require first stage support in reading and writing skills. The same was found for IT classes where one Irish prisoner was unable to switch the computer on and took out his frustrations by smashing the key board – first stage, culturally sensitive sessions need to be developed – tackling literacy as a priority

Opening Doors 2 Proposal: ICC recognises and has adapted support delivery approaches to these literacy barriers. It wants to develop the Opening Doors’ service model further by:

- Developing and delivering a culturally sensitive literacy skills education package, targeting those most in need, through an appropriately designed course (based on the Shannon Trust Reading Plan) for delivery in prisons with Service Users.

- Starting to focus its lobbying and influencing for systems change in generic prison services related to literacy barrier issues – communication methods between prisoners and the prison service are not currently fit for purpose for a majority of all prison inmates and creating huge barriers to rehabilitation or inclusion in activities – especially within ethnic groups in which illiteracy is higher than the average.

C. CARA (Gaelic for Friend) Penfriend Project - Growing Volunteers/Service User Involvement: peer to peer mentoring/support linked to ICC activities:

What is the Evidence of Need for the CARA project?

Volunteering is integral to the way ICC operates and vital to its approach to resettlement of Service Users– it has a well-developed volunteer support management process in place. ICC supports volunteers through access to training programmes and regular, structured supervision and management.

Focus groups, one to one discussions and survey work all highlighted that very high levels of social isolation within prisons are being compounded by the crisis of services within them – with lock-downs, lack of access to education and work programmes and the churn and transfers affecting both prisoners and staff. Many Opening Doors Service Users are transferred at very short notice to prisons outside the North West and this means their relationships with other prisoners and with staff are short-lived. This is leading to very high levels of mental ill-health and social isolation.

Opening Doors 2 Proposal:

- Develop a volunteering offer to members of the Service User community and region wide in terms of targeted groups – and investigate new options for peer-to-peer support and mentoring roles for Service Users past and present.
- Proposing the development of a new CARA pen-friend service which will support social isolation, lack of engagement and literacy issues. ICC want to involve as many volunteers as possible with this to provide a high impact volunteering opportunity which all participants can recognise as having real value and impact.

4.3 Summary Activities Plan for Phase 2 of Opening Doors - designed to meet the needs of a wide range of prisoners/those released/on licence:

Activity	Target group	Details	Evidence of Need?
A. One to One Support Service			
- Prison Based	Prisoners – Cat A, B and C prisoners - all prison settings at: Altcourse, Liverpool, Thorn Cross, Kirkham, Styal prisons	On-going case management provision through skilled staff x 2 full time posts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 years performance management • Monitoring/feedback from Service Users, family members, service providers.
- Community Based	In Community - for those on release and on licence from prison – at ICC Centre in Liverpool In Community - for those on release and on licence to other UK areas and Ireland	1:1 holistic support for those released from prison – support/active referral accessing health, accommodation, welfare benefits advice, substance misuse support, and bridge building with families. Employability support. 1:1 holistic support linking in to partner agencies in UK/ Ireland who can offer appropriate support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICC - 3 years of performance management • Monitoring/feedback from Service Users, family members and other service providers.
B. Literacy Programme			
	In Liverpool Prison	Development and Delivery of Literacy Support Package by Education Officer (full time)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One to one discussion with Service Users; Focus group discussion • National research
C. CARA Pen friend Service			
	Prison/community – available to prisoners across England	Include volunteer support as key delivery agents – managed by Education Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus groups with prisoners • Survey research with families

Section 5: Conclusion

The experience of Irish Community Care in delivering Opening Doors over the last 2.5 years - with the support of BIG Lottery - has been both challenging and productive. The outcomes of this review process have highlighted the strengths of the Opening Doors service model as:

- A service which is founded on a strong grass-root, community based approach – through which high levels of trust from Service Users and their families underpin this strong engagement and relationship building.
- Firm strategic and operational networks across the North West, nationally and with Ireland - which support the delivery of this customised service offer – in both prison and community settings.

ICC is in a strong position to be able to continue to offer existing and potential Service Users a coherent and enhanced service offer, which is based on detailed understanding of their needs. Operationally, the Opening Doors service model has excellent potential to:

- improve the well-being of Service Users within both prison communities and in community settings through a co-ordinated offer and a range of inclusive activities
- raise awareness of the lack of culturally sensitive services in prison settings which are making rehabilitation even more challenging for Irish and Irish Traveller/Gypsy Traveller Service Users
- expand the range of services and deliver to Service Users across both prison and community settings; and
- ultimately, offer a route towards independence, a decent quality of life AND sustained well-being for Service Users and their families.

Strategically, ICC has the opportunity to promote and replicate the Opening Doors service model – to ensure it is sustainable in the current climate and to further develop relationship building and contribution to wider CJS programmes: locally i.e. Liverpool Waves of Hope Complex Needs Programme; nationally i.e. Transforming Rehabilitation and the 2016 commissioned Lammy Review; internationally i.e. Global Irish Diaspora Policy, Embassy of Ireland Consular Services and Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas.

In summary, ICC has huge potential - through the Opening Doors service model - to consolidate, sustain and strengthen this offer, as a unique, culturally sensitive service which makes a real and lasting difference to people's lives.

Annex 1 – ICC Opening Doors Case Studies

John is 74 years old and has been supported by ICC for many years. He has 4 daughters and 2 sons and was widowed 20 years ago. Many of the family have used the services of ICC over the years through advice and signposting, including support with welfare benefit advice.

John first entered the criminal justice system in 2009 when he was arrested. Following the outcome of his trial John received a 5 and half year custodial sentence in 2011. Going into prison on any occasion is difficult but for John it was his first time and at 70 years of age and with several health conditions this was extremely difficult for him and his family to come to terms with. John has since been released from prison and is currently on licence within the community. He lives alone, with the support of his family members.

His sentence was served in a number of prisons including Walton, Oakwood and Shrewsbury. As a result it was difficult for his family members to make visits on a regular basis. In this way, his visits from Opening Doors project worker Sally were important to him as he had restricted access to phone calls to them. Sally proved to be a vital link between him and his family members. She updated his children about his health/sentence and the moves between prisons. She also assisted with sorting out visiting orders for family members.

ICC have continued to support John since his release and still conduct regular home visits to advise him and his family. A key element of this support has been in applications for welfare benefits including pension credit and DLA – supporting John in getting back into the system on his release and since then. He has received support from various ICC support workers and feels he can trust them, and that they have a clear understanding of his and his family's circumstances. He regularly contacts ICC for support and advice in budgeting, paying bills and sorting out any welfare benefit changes.

More recently he has received support in sorting out a mobility car – after experiencing a delay of 6 months. ICC supported him through chasing the car order with the garage. He now has more independence through access to the car and his quality of life has improved greatly. He was also supported in accessing WARMFRONT services, replacing his boiler. Over the last 6 months he has been visited on a weekly basis by an ICC staff.

John commented...*'they have helped me rebuild my life – they are always there for me and always have been for my family...I couldn't cope without them'*

Mark is 50 years old and was supported by Opening Doors staff since 2013 in HMP Kirkham and HMP Thorn Cross. Mark was the Irish representative on the Equalities Committee at the prison. He was 'working out' i.e. doing his volunteering at ICC – doing a day a week painting and decorating there – with project staff collecting and dropping him off at Thorn Cross.

Opening Doors team supported Mark over time with issues around contacting his family and sorting out a passport for him, sorting this through the Probation Service.

He always attended the fortnightly drop-in sessions at Thorn Cross and enjoyed the camaraderie there. He completed the peer mentoring course and used these skills when attending the drop-in service and providing support to others. Again, Mark identified one of the key problems for our communities is the lack of literacy skills of many of the Irish prisoners. As a representative of ICC in the prison, he always made contact with the new incomers to the prison, and believes there is prejudice against these prisoners – often articulated through the delays they experience in responses to any requests to prison management.

Mark's parole hearing supported by ICC references, continued support and testimonials was successful; he has been released with excellent supported accommodation secured, income maximised, and access to training and reconnected with family. Mark is settling well in the community and continues to access ICC. He continues to volunteer with ICC.

James is a 40 year old Irish Traveller. He says that ICC is 'like a voice that we've never had'

He met Opening Doors staff in summer 2015 – and says he 'has never known any other input like it'. He attends every drop in meeting and through his support from project staff has been able to ensure that he has been able to access Irish magazines and post as OD staff send them in to him. He has also been able to make phone calls to Ireland to contact family members. He has had a range of probation service issues – problems with a range of false allegations. These issues have prevented him from going on any 'work outs' (volunteering). ICC has played a key role in advocating for James in sorting these issues through contact with solicitors. They are able to act as a key intermediary in tackling these problems, and without them he believes he would have had 'doors shut in my face...if ICC wasn't here it wouldn't be done.'

James informs all new Irish arrivals of the regular drop in support sessions run by ICC. He commented: *'without ICC in here, there would be a lot more problems going on...a lot more doors are closing in our faces like they were before ICC started here. I feel a lot more relaxed to bring up issues with the prison officers, knowing ICC has been able to raise the issue with them beforehand...they are fighting our corner on everything.'*

James's probation issues have now been resolved and he is working with project staff to identify and progress his 'work out' for the short term:

'I feel happy that ICC's here....without them there would be a lot more problems. They can get the answers we need and can get to the key people in here. When we put applications in – it takes us a long time to get any response.'

He sees ICC as a key problem-solver for the Irish community at the prison – similar to the Imam who comes in to support the Muslim community.

James is 28 years old and has spent most of his adolescent life in and out of prison following his drug use and offending behaviour. Currently an IPP (Imprisonment for Public Protection) prisoner he has completed 8 years of his sentence. Opening Doors staff member Julie Ann first engaged with James at HMP Risley when he was referred by the prisons drug and alcohol team. He was taking methadone and stated that drugs had 'ruined his life'. He had hoped that he would be accepted for parole and would have the opportunity to attend rehab.

Julie Ann has provided intensive support in relation to his parole, rehab referral and offered emotional support during methadone withdrawal which he described as 'hell'.

She helped James secure a place on the Thomas Project which is the next step on his road to recovery. The Thomas Project is a residential rehabilitation unit in Blackburn that delivers a range of holistic recovery focused services. Having a place secured prior to his parole hearing, put James in a better position and he was accepted for parole. James has been on the programme for 3 months and has made fantastic progress and is firmly on the road to recovery. He is engaging extremely well and is currently on stage 4 of his 6 month programme. Within his short time on the Thomas Project he has become a peer mentor and supports other Service Users and regularly takes them out on his own as he is now a trusted resident. James is keen about health and well being and wants to work in this field in the future. He regularly takes the other Service Users to the local swimming pool and encourages and motivates them to do other activities that will improve their general well-being. James has also become the kitchen manager and runs the kitchen and supports with training other residents on food preparation which they then cook for everyone.

After years of no contact with his family, James has also rebuilt relationships and has regular contact and weekend visits. His family are very supportive and are extremely proud of James and his achievements.

He still has a long road to go on his journey to recovery. However, he is now more optimistic than ever that he can lead a life away from offending and drug use. Opening Doors will continue to support James throughout this journey, through visits, letters, telephone as well as liaising closely with staff regarding his progress.

Annex 2: Letters of Support

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