

# THE WELCOME DIRECTORY



## WHAT NOW?

So what now? Faith communities can offer a spiritual home, a friendly community of steady and supportive relationships as well as appropriate practical assistance to people leaving prison.

This third session will help you to imagine what kind of support your own faith community might offer someone. You will also be invited to think about how you can join with other faith communities and supportive agencies in your area to share resources and to encourage one another.

2016 VERSION



SESSION THREE



## Session three facilitator notes: what now?

Welcome to this third and final session which creates the space to begin to answer the question: *what are we going to be and do together in response to all that we have learned and experienced?* In session one and two we saw how faith communities can provide a spiritual home; an open community that provides steady and supportive relationships as well as offering appropriate practical assistance. The faith communities beyond our prison gates can really help someone leaving prison to make a new start. But how?

This third session will help us to imagine what kind of support our community might offer. We will also think about how we might join with other faith communities and supportive agencies in our area to share resources and to encourage one another in the work.

### The 'National Bank of Virtue'

As we engage with the issues of crime, punishment and restoration we must somehow hold justice and compassion in balance. Faith communities have an opportunity to demonstrate what this difficult task actually looks like in our everyday lives. The following quote was given more than one hundred years ago, but is every bit as relevant today as it was then. It describes the stored up virtue of a nation, a 'virtue bank' if you will. **Read the quote out loud.**

*"We must not forget that when every material improvement has been effected in prisons, when the temperature has been rightly adjusted, when the proper food to maintain health and strength has been given, when the doctors, chaplains and prison visitors have come and gone, the convict stands deprived of everything that a free man calls life. We must not forget that all these improvements, which are sometimes salves to our consciences, do not change that position.*

*The mood and temper of the public in regard to the treatment of crime and criminals is one of the most unfailing tests of the civilisation of any country. A calm and dispassionate recognition of the rights of the accused against the state, and even of convicted criminals against the state, a constant heart-searching by all charged with the duty of punishment, a desire and eagerness to rehabilitate in the world of industry all those who have paid their dues in the hard coinage of punishment, tireless efforts towards the discovery of curative and regenerating processes, and an unfaltering faith that there is a treasure, if you can only find it, in the heart of every man (sic) - these are the symbols which in the treatment of crime and criminals mark and measure the stored-up strength of a nation, and are the sign and proof of the living virtue in it." (Winston Churchill, HC Debates, Col. 1354, 20th July 1910)*

**Discuss this question as a group for five minutes: Is the 'National Virtue Bank' in surplus or deficit? Why?**

## Unlocking the second prison.

*“As I walked out the door towards the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew that if I didn’t leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I’d still be in prison.”*

Nelson Mandela

*“Change happens when we treat people as people with whom we build relationships. Investing time, energy and resources in the individual offender can lead to the kinds of transformation and reconciliation that other rehabilitation programmes could never achieve.”*

The Most Revd and Rt Hon Justin Welby, The Archbishop of Canterbury at an event at Brixton Prison, 2015.

The Welcome Directory is trying to help faith communities to unlock the second prison. This second prison holds people captive in two distinctive ways. The first way describes the person who leaves prison but continues to carry a heavy burden through the prison gate. Perhaps they have not been able to forgive themselves for what they did in the past or they continue to sabotage their new freedom by living as if they were still convicted of a crime. As Nelson Mandela taught us at Robben Island, you can leave prison but continue to be held captive if certain attitudes aren’t left at the prison gates.

The second way has to do with how society often continues to punish a person after they are released. This can happen in any number of ways; by rejecting job applications or denying people access to training courses, and even excluding people from communities or activities because of past crimes. These are some of the more obvious ways in which this imposed second prison works. Judges and juries sentence people, but once a sentence has been completed the general public should not take it upon themselves to continue to punish someone.

The Archbishop of Canterbury said that *“change happens when we treat people as people with whom we build relationships.”* This is the truth at the centre of all The Welcome Directory is attempting to do. Faith communities can play a significant role in helping our society to unlock the second prison and throw away the key and it starts with us.

**As a group, have a conversation that begins to answer the following question: how can we help to unlock the second prison? ‘People transform themselves, we either facilitate it or hinder it.’ What do you think about this statement? How can faith communities help or hinder personal transformation? What are the strengths we possess as a community to help unlock the second prison?**

## What are the key hopes of resettlement?

A person leaving prison has the same needs as every person and making these things accessible will not only help them to resettle but reduces the risks of reoffending. As one manager of an Offender Management Unit said, *“a person leaving prison needs somewhere to live, someone to listen, something to do and a job.”*

We all need a place to call home, friends, activities and something meaningful to invest our time in which pays us back either financially or in other ways. Their needs are no different from our own needs but the stigma of a prison sentence just makes accessing these simple and basic things that much harder, which makes reoffending a real possibility, sometimes even the only viable option. Though prison is not glamorous it does provide a place to live, friends, activities and for many, a job. You can understand then that for many people, prison is the most stable and safe environment they have ever known.

## Transforming Rehabilitation

For a very long time, reoffending rates have been very high. Since May 2015 far reaching changes have sought to transform prisoner resettlement with the goal of reducing reoffending rates. Responsibility for low and medium risk people has now passed from the probation service to voluntary and private sector providers who are commissioned by regional Community Rehabilitation Companies. There are 21 Community Resettlement Areas that cover the whole of England and Wales. Those who pose a high risk to the public will be supervised by the National Probation Service.

The prison estate in the UK has designated more than 80 prisons to be resettlement prisons. The idea is that in most cases, prisoners will spend the final three months of their sentence in the region they are to resettle into. This means that links formed between faith communities and resettlement prisons have even greater purpose under the new arrangements. Whereas before, recommending a faith community upon release was a guessing game aided by Google, now prison chaplains have a chance to get to know the communities they recommend. Resettlement prisons will provide an opportunity to focus upon the practical arrangements for each prisoner upon release. The resettlement prisons are grouped in various geographical regions and a Community Resettlement Company will manage the induction and release process and coordinate the various agencies that will play a part in sorting out accommodation, training and employment for each prisoner as well as other essential services.

**On your activity sheet there is the information given to each prisoner held in a resettlement prison. Read it through together so that you understand the process.**

## How can faith communities get involved?

The exciting thing about Transforming Rehabilitation is that third sector organisations and faith communities are invited to play a role to support those leaving prison to thrive and lead a great life. The National Offenders Management Service has developed seven pathways to reduce reoffending. For the rest of this session we will explore the various pathways together and consider the question: *how might our faith community support and add extra value to the work?* There is a simple overview of each pathway followed by a simple idea to get you started and a possible next action that will help you explore opportunities. Remember, faith communities are not being asked to provide housing, training, employment, alcohol and drug rehabilitation, keep families together or offer therapy for mental health issues, though many faith communities do offer these services. We simply want you to consider the pathways and imagine how you can support and even add value to these pathways in your local area. There is great value in just being aware of the kind of support that people leaving prison often need upon release and being able to point them in the right direction.

### Accommodation and support

It is estimated that stable accommodation upon release can reduce the likelihood of reoffending by more than a fifth. Stable accommodation also provides the vital foundation for a range of other support services as well as for gaining employment.

**Idea: perhaps your faith community could help make a house a home. How might you do that?**

**Next action: find out if there are any housing organisations working with people leaving prison in your area who are open to and would benefit from the input of volunteers. For example, Shelter.**

### Education, training and employment

There is a strong correlation between offending, poor literacy, language and numeracy skills and low achievement. Many offenders have a poor experience of education and no experience of stable employment. Developing skills and having a job can reduce the risk of reoffending by up to a half.

**Idea: perhaps your faith community could listen to someone read, help fill out a tricky form or travel with someone on public transport for the first week of a new job to help make the unfamiliar familiar.**

**Next action: find out if there are any education providers working with people leaving prison in your area who are open to and would benefit from the input of volunteers. For example, a basic literacy or numeracy skills centre.**

## Health

Offenders are disproportionately more likely to suffer from mental and physical health problems than the general population and also have high rates of alcohol and substance misuse. Nearly a third of adult prisoners were found to have emotional well being issues linked to their offending behaviour.

**Idea: perhaps you could provide a positive, stable and understanding community for someone with mental or physical health issues. Maybe you could invite someone to get involved in any sporting activities your community is involved in - football training or a walking group. Perhaps you could put together a healthy, nutritional and cost saving meal planner with someone and teach them how to prepare each meal.**

**Next action: find out if there are any health care providers working with people leaving prison in your area who are open to and would benefit from the input of volunteers. For example, mental health charities or disability support.**

## Drugs and alcohol

Around two thirds of prisoners used illegal drugs in the year before imprisonment and intoxication by alcohol is linked to 30% of sexual offences, 33% of burglaries, 50% of street crime and about half of all violent crimes.

**Idea: perhaps your faith community could provide a positive experience which is not alcohol and drug dependent by providing alternative activities to participate in.**

**Next action: find out if there are any substance misuse organisations working with people leaving prison in your area who might benefit from using your building. For example, Narcotics Anonymous or Alcoholics Anonymous.**

## Finance, benefits and debt

Ensuring that people leaving prison have sufficient lawfully obtained money to live on is vital to their rehabilitation. Around 48% of prisoners report a history of debt, which gets worse for about a third of them during custody and about 81% of offenders claim benefit on release.

**Idea: perhaps your faith community could help someone to budget or provide activities that are low cost.**

**Next action: find out if there are any organisations supporting people with debt issues who are open to and would benefit from the input of volunteers. For example, credit unions.**

## Children and families

Maintaining strong relationships with families and children can play a major role in helping prisoners to make and sustain changes that help them to avoid reoffending. This is difficult because custody can place added strains on family relationships.

**Idea: whilst in prison, perhaps your faith community could offer lifts to family members so that they can sustain their relationships whilst in prison. Of course, offering a lift is just the start of other creative ways in which faith communities can support families.**

**Next action: find out if there are any organisations supporting families in difficulty who are open to and would benefit from the input of volunteers. For example, parenting courses.**

## Attitudes, thinking and behaviour

Prisoners are more likely to have negative social attitudes and poor self-control. Successfully addressing attitudes, thinking and behaviour during custody can help to reduce reoffending.

**Idea: perhaps your faith community could provide a positive social environment which provides new attitudes, ways of thinking and behaving.**

**Next action: find out if there are any organisations that provides mentoring for people leaving prison in your area who are open to and would benefit from the input of volunteers. For example community chaplaincy organisations.**

## Ordinary things, extraordinary love

We hope that you can see that there is much that a local faith community can do together to create a supportive environment for someone leaving prison. Each community will be able to offer something different, something that is distinctive and special and we hope that you were able to begin to imagine some of those things together.

In the first session, we learned that the most important thing that a faith community can offer someone leaving prison is a place to belong; normal relationships. Whereas, Community Rehabilitation Companies can offer practical support, they cannot offer friendship - the slow pace of community. Maybe it is this special quality that offers purpose and meaning which then helps to make sense of everything else. Many of the things that are going to help someone leaving prison to settle are everyday ordinary things. Faith communities have the opportunity to show people what doing those ordinary things with extraordinary love looks like. That is the gift that faith communities can offer and it will make all the difference.



## Imagine it through exercise

Imagine that someone is just about to leave prison and after looking through The Welcome Directory with a prison chaplain they have identified your faith community as somewhere to visit upon release. After they have been released they step through your doors and hopefully meet a Welcome Directory Champion, someone they might have already met or had contact with. What now? How are they going to become a part of your community? How easy is this going to be? Imagine it through from the point of view of the person leaving prison and also from the perspective of the community and see what you discover.

**You might want to encourage some role play if the group agrees that this is helpful.**

## When you think about prison what goes through your mind?

Spend up to five minutes responding to the following question. You might want to write words, draw pictures, doodle or create a mind map to mark your where you are now. Whatever is meaningful to you, use the time and space to record where you are at now.

**When you hear the word “prison” or “prisoner” what thoughts, words, pictures or phrases come to mind?**

**If you are able, discuss your responses with the group. *What has changed in you during these three sessions?***

## Taking things further

This is not the end, it is just the beginning. These three sessions have prepared you to begin but there is so much to learn and experience, so many stories as yet to tell, so many organisations that can support you and there are other faith communities you can grow alongside and others you can encourage to become a Welcome Directory Faith Community. We hope that the Welcome Directory sessions have inspired you to take things further.

Depending upon your temperament and interests there are various ways to continue learning. There is further reading, further resources other than books and great organisations who work locally to you. However, the best way to learn is to get stuck in together and give it a go.

## Thank you

For a long time we tried to come up with a different title for The Welcome Directory, but we decided that *welcome* is a good word. Welcome is just there... available... it doesn't force itself... it just is. An open community bound together by faith and always ready to respond,

always prepared to accept and help others and welcome them into that community for a short time or a long time.

As you try to establish this work, you will no doubt get it right and you will get it wrong, it is okay and part of the process. After all, standing alongside someone in their own failure is all part of rehabilitation. But whatever happens along the way, we establish this work together, as faith communities who offer hope, the chance of renewal, of new beginnings; for the person who has just left prison, for the faith community and for our wider society. We have an opportunity to invest in the 'National Bank of Virtue'.

Thank you for participating in the Welcome Directory awareness raising sessions. We hope that they have offered you good information, inspiring stories, powerful experiences and a challenge that will transform both you and your faith community.

**Please remember to register  
your faith community!**