Good Faith Partnership

A Heart for Justice: Faith & the Prisons System

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Executive Summary

Faith has played an essential role in the criminal justice system in the UK for centuries. And yet, in recent decades, the role of faith and faith-based initiatives has often been overlooked and under-appreciated. This report contends that the time is ripe to redress this, and to focus attention and resource on the positive impact that faith can have at every stage of the criminal justice process – before the Gate, behind the Gate and beyond the Gate.

Our research, conducted over the last two years, has investigated the contribution of a wide variety of faith actors and faith-based initiatives working in different parts of the country. We have found that:

- Faith communities and faith-based initiatives can play a crucial role in working 'upstream' of the criminal justice system, reducing risk factors and supporting those most likely to end up in prison.
- Prison Chaplains play a vital role in pastoral support within prisons, and the Covid Pandemic highlighted the value of this role in new and important ways.
- Making better links between experiences of faith within Prison and faith-communities 'beyond the Gate' can help support desistence and prevent re-offending, and the re-nationalisation of the Probation Service presents a unique opportunity to rebuild and deepen these connections.

The report makes a number of key recommendations for how faith could play an even-more positive role in the criminal justice system in the future, including:

- Police and Crime Commissioners should work through Violence Reduction Units to establish Faith Alliances along the model pioneered in the West Midlands
- Multi-faith Chaplaincy should be given greater prominence and profile within the Prison system through the expansion of training and induction processes for staff.
- The newly-nationalised Probation Service should focus on faith as a protective factor in supporting desistance, and work with partners to establish more robust links between Chaplaincy and faith-based initiatives within Prisons and Community Chaplains and other programmes for ex-offenders.

We believe that the adoption of these and other recommendations could lead to a renaissance of faith within the criminal justice system in the UK, with significant potential benefits not just for those within the system but for wider society as a whole. At a time of significant pressures within the prisons system, and of struggle and uncertainty in the country more generally, this represents a unique opportunity to unlock the positive power of faith for the benefit of all.

Recommendations

The aim of this research project is to inform and equip efforts to enhance the impact of faith in the criminal justice system. With this in mind, we offer clear recommendations here, based on our findings, for the government, policymakers, the prison and probation service, faith-based organisations, faith institutions and local faith communities. It is our hope that each of these stakeholder groups will welcome our recommendations, and take them forward as necessary.

Our proposals require partnerships, funding, and political will. Moving forward requires a clear commitment from all parties involved in order for real progress to be made. Despite our focus on Christianity, our research has shown that the impact of faith on those before, behind and beyond the prison gate is not limited to a particular denomination or approach, but is widespread, through education, pastoral care, advocacy work and practical support. The impact of this work is multidimensional, and our recommendations form the basis of working towards a more inclusive and holistic criminal justice system.

For the Government and policymakers

We recommend that:

- A Faith Alliance be established in every Violence Reduction Unit across the country, to replicate the work of the West Midlands Violence Reduction Partnership and to have dedicated resources to explore the role of faith in crime prevention. Furthermore, we recommend that the directors of all Violence Reduction Units receive faith awareness training.
- The Violence Reduction Toolkit for faith leaders and communities, produced by the West Midlands VRP, should be expanded and replicated in other areas. This includes trauma-informed training adapted to different faith communities and also features an online directory of faith resources in the region. Scaling this up and reproducing it elsewhere would help upskill and train faith leaders to respond to young people and the community in a culturally competent way with a clear focus on trauma-informed practice.
- The Government engage, support and resource faith communities to do more preventative work, particularly in regards to supporting vulnerable families. This could be achieved, for example, by prioritising faith-engagement within the rollout of Family Hubs.

For the Prison and Probation Service

We recommend that:

- The Prison and Probation Service publicly recognise and value the work of faith-inspired actors and grassroots faith-based organisations in this sector. We also recommend that the probation service conduct analysis on the number of faith groups and faith-based organisations it is in active partnership with, and seek to understand and break down any barriers to effective engagement.
- All prison staff receive training not just on the formal services offered by the multifaith chaplaincy team but also on the pastoral approach and value of chaplaincy and the ways in which faith and spirituality can act as a protective factor against recidivism. This could be incorporated effectively into the induction for new prison staff and, for current staff, chaplains could run professional development sessions where current prisoners discuss their experiences with the chaplaincy team.
- All probation staff receive training on the ways in which spirituality and being involved in a faith community can act as a protective factor against recidivism. For new probation staff, we suggest this could be done effectively by including awareness to faith as part of the induction programme. The Welcome Directory also offers a training package, the Prisons Awareness Course, which explores what it means to welcome people leaving prisons into a faith community, which we recommend be offered to all existing staff.
- The existing offering for Prison Chaplains in terms of professional development and public recognition be expanded, for example through a high-profile national awards ceremony for excellence and innovation in Prison Chaplaincy.
- Comprehensive sets of statistics on employed chaplains, vacancies in chaplaincy positions, chaplaincy usage and volunteers be collected and published regularly.

For faith-based organisations working in criminal justice

We recommend that:

- Multifaith practice in prison be reflected in community chaplaincy. This should be a formalised process, with community chaplaincy groups acting as a crucial link between chaplains in prison and those in the community. We recommend the introduction of a formal structure, so that prison chaplains create links with local faith groups/community chaplaincy groups for those released from prison to receive further help and guidance on the outside if they so wish. At present, there is a great disconnect between prison chaplaincy and faith groups in the community. We advise that the Community Chaplaincy Association should be in communication with each prison to support chaplains to begin to rectify this.
- A formalised group is initiated to connect similar organisations working beyond the gate together, so they can connect and learn best practice from each other. This might be helpful in the form of regular online and in-person events, where faith-based organisations can build connections and share best practice.
- The work of the Welcome Directory be expanded. This would help bring more prison leavers into local communities to spread their vision of helping faith communities become places where people who leave prison find acceptance, belonging and practical support. This could be funded by the probation service, as it supports those leaving prison.

For faith institutions and local communities

We recommend that:

- Faith communities seek to upskill and train their local leaders and congregations to understand the criminal justice system and effectively support those at different stages of engagement with it. Lived experience should be prioritised within this, for example programmes that provide paid opportunities to those with experience of the criminal justice system to share these with local faith communities.
- Places of worship recognise the resources they have for the benefits of young people and the community, and reach out to work in partnership with others to provide early intervention and support to those at the margins of society.
- Faith communities seek to promote prison chaplaincy as a vocational opportunity for clergy and lay leaders. Where possible, denominations should monitor levels of interest in prison chaplaincy, and explore opportunities to boost these through greater profile, recognition and funding for professional development.

Introduction

Until recently, every time you used a five-pound note, you were acknowledging the central role that faith has played in the criminal justice system in the UK, perhaps without even realising it. From 2002-2016, the notes bore the image of Elizabeth Fry, a leading Quaker social reformer and philanthropist in the early 19th century. Fry was known as the 'Angel of Prisons' for her work, which led to the introduction in 1823 of legislation to improve conditions in prisons. Her pioneering work on prison reform and rehabilitation was driven by her Christian faith and her contribution was significant enough to merit being one of the first women commemorated on British currency.[1]

Historically, then, the contribution of faith to prisons is notable and has been widely acknowledged. However, considering the contemporary criminal justice system, this is not always the case, with the role of faith-based organisations (FBOs) often overlooked and undervalued. While it is long established in statute and practice, we have identified a lack of research on the modern relationship between faith and the criminal justice system. This report is the conclusion of the Faith in Prisons research project, which has attempted to address this lack directly, studying the role of faith across the breadth of the criminal justice system in England and Wales today. It aims to inform and equip churches, FBOs and policy-makers to enhance the impact of faith in our prison system.

It focusses on faith-based interventions at three stages of the criminal justice system: 'Before the Gate' (crime prevention), 'Behind the Gate' (prison chaplaincy and in-prison support) and 'Beyond the Gate' (rehabilitation). The key question we have sought to address is:

> **What is the impact of faith in the criminal justice system in England and Wales, and how can we shape its future?**

Of course, the landscape of faith in the UK today is hugely diverse, and this diversity is reflected in the wide range of faith communities and FBOs engaging throughout the criminal justice system. A comprehensive analysis of all these groups was beyond the scope of this project, and so we focused primarily on the Christian tradition as the largest and most complex example of faith engagement in criminal justice.[2] The major exception to this was our analysis of prison chaplaincy, which operates in a multifaith context and where we have therefore sought to assess the impact of chaplains from a range of faith backgrounds. Whilst acknowledging the limits of this work, we believe that the section on chaplaincy is not the only element of this work which has implications beyond the Christian faith, as many of our findings are likely to be applicable in a variety of faith contexts. Ultimately, this project is not intended to be the final word on faith in the criminal justice system, but should rather be viewed as a constructive contribution to the larger ongoing conversation about the future of that system and the place of faith in modern life.

The report aims to inform the public policy debate both within faith communities in the UK and in government and civil service, offering recommendations that will enhance existing work in the field

1 Bank of England (2022). **Historical Women on Bank Notes**.

2 Wharton, R. and Bull, D. (2016). **Understanding Faith-based Charities**. New Philanthropy Capital.

and shape future policy. We have conducted primary research with prison leavers, prison chaplains, and staff members in FBOs working both before and beyond the prison gate, as well as drawing on existing literature. From this, we argue that there is a need for renewed focus on the role of faith in the criminal justice system, replicating good practice and building stronger partnerships.

The context

Faith has been a key influence in the criminal justice system in England and Wales for centuries, thanks in part to figures like Elizabeth Fry. It has been argued that the development of the modern prison estate was shaped by notions of Christianity and reform.[3] Writers including Michel Foucault observed how Christian practices of silence, religious instruction and work, which were thought to lead to penitence and reform, were implemented in early prison regimes.[4] Faith groups were among the pioneers of early forms of probation services in the UK and beyond.[5] Christians have historically been involved in prison and probation service, motivated by their understanding of the biblical mandate to care for prisoners, as expressed in verses like Matthew 25:36-37:

> *"I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."* [6]

The foundational role of faith in criminal justice is therefore clear, but has evolved over time; so too has the justice system itself and the challenges facing it. This research has been conducted during a challenging and turbulent time for the criminal justice sector, marked by the disruptive backdrop of Covid-19. The last decade has seen significant changes to criminal justice policy, including the introduction of Police and Crime Commissioners, the privatisation and renationalisation of the probation service and a recently promised £4 billion investment to create 20,000 new prison places.[7]

At the same time as these structural changes have taken place, the situation within British prisons has become more troubling. Safety in prisons has deteriorated rapidly during the past decade; 2021 saw the highest annual number of deaths in prison ever recorded, averaging more than one death a day, and a 28% increase in self-inflicted deaths from the previous 12 months.[8] Recorded assaults are also at a historically high level, and recorded incidents of self-harm in prisons are approaching the highest level on record.[9] The number of frontline prison staff was cut by 26% between 2010-17, and these cuts are no doubt a key factor behind the challenges faced by prisons.[10] Overcrowding also remains a significant issue across the prison estate, with almost two thirds of prisons affected.[11] And in recent years there has been an increased focus on the over-representation and unequal treatment

3 Hanley, N. K. (2014). Interrogating religion in prisons: Criminological approaches. *Intergraph: Journal of Dialogic Anthropology*. Volume 4. Issue 1. pp. 1-7.

4 Foucault, M. (1977) Discipline and Punish: *The Birth of the Prison*. London: Allen Lane.

5 Vanstone, M. (2004) *Supervising Offenders in the Community. A History of Probation Theory and Practice*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

6 This and all subsequent bible references are taken from the New International Version.

7 Ministry of Justice (2022). ***Thousands of new prison places to rehabilitate offenders and cut crime***.

8 Ministry of Justice (2022). ***Safety in Custody Statistics, England and Wales: Deaths in Prison Custody to December 2021, Assaults and Self-harm to September 2021***.

9 Prison Reform Trust (2022). ***Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile***.

10 Ministry of Justice (2018). ***HM Prison and Probation Service workforce statistics: September 2018***.

11 House of Commons Public Accounts Committee (2020). ***Improving the Prison Estate: Fifteenth Report of Session 2019–21***.

of Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority individuals within the criminal justice system.[12]

Against this background, the role and contribution of organisations seeking to work for good within the system has become an ever more pressing concern.

The research

The research was structured around three phases of the criminal justice system – described here as before, behind and beyond the gate – and this report is framed in the same terms. Across these three phases, we conducted semi-structured interviews, informal conversations and written questionnaires with over 60 individuals, including prison leavers, chaplains and staff from a number of faith-based organisations working in the sector. Researchers visited several of the organisations involved to observe their work first hand and engage with staff and service users there. We also convened an online roundtable of stakeholders with a particular focus on work beyond the gate, to hear their insights and test our initial findings with them.

The first is *Before the Gate*, where we explore interventions that identify and encounter individuals most vulnerable to being drawn into crime, and the work going on to prevent this. It explores factors we know from existing research can lead into crime, and provides insights from staff members from organisations working before an individual engages in the prison system.

The second phase is *Behind the Gate*, where we explore the purpose and impact of a multi-faith chaplaincy, hearing from both prison chaplains and prison leavers to understand its current challenges as well as opportunities for growth.

The third and final phase of the report looks at life *Beyond the Gate*, examining what churches and other faith-based interventions are doing in the provision of post-sentence care and rehabilitation for prison leavers. We hear from those working in the field to explore what more can be done for effective community engagement, and partnerships between prisons and FBOs.

While this report represents a major piece of research in an underexplored area, the timing of it during the Covid-19 pandemic has limited the extent of the work. Specifically, it meant we were unable to conduct research with people in prison and had to use online questionnaires to access chaplains. We therefore suggest that future research in this area is required to gain a more in-depth understanding of faith 'behind the gate' than we have been able to do here. As already acknowledged, we also recognise that future research might explore the diversity of religion or belief groups active in the sector, where we have focussed on Christianity.

The report ends with our recommendations, drawn from our analysis, to shape the future of the role of faith within the criminal justice system, providing evidenced ideas for future research, policy and practice. This report demonstrates not only that faith can act as a force for good across all aspects of the criminal justice system, but that the current context creates a key opportunity to recognise and promote its positive role. We believe that the time is ripe for a renaissance of faith in the criminal justice system in England and Wales, and in the final section of the report we set out a number of recommendations which we believe can make this possible.

It is our hope that this report stimulates a deeper reflection about the future direction of the criminal justice system, whilst simultaneously encouraging those within faith communities and beyond to contemplate how they might become involved in future work in this area.

12 For example the ***Lammy Review of 2017***

Before the Gate

> "If the church really stepped up, they could change the world. If every church in England stepped up and mentored one criminal or vulnerable person, there'd be no people left in poverty."

In examining the role of faith in the criminal justice system, we begin with those active 'before the gate' – in other words, interventions that identify and encounter individuals most vulnerable to being drawn into crime and work to prevent this. This chapter begins by contextualising this in terms of factors we know from existing research can lead to crime. It then explores the values and approaches of FBOs in this sector, from the earliest interventions through to those working directly before the gate.

The findings in this chapter are drawn from analysis of our semi-structured interviews with seven staff members from six organisations working 'before the gate', along with existing literature. While all the organisations featured in this phase of research were explicitly Christian in their ethos, we believe that many of the findings are relevant more widely and this is indicated where applicable. We have included case studies of several of these organisations at relevant points, with insights from all participants included throughout the chapter.

Setting the scene

Before exploring how FBOs can address crime prevention, it is important to look at the root causes that may lead an individual into criminal behaviour. It is clear from existing research that these factors are complex and often intersect, with no single risk factor alone guaranteeing an individual will fall into crime. However, we might categorise these factors into four broad groups: individual, social, family, and economic.[1] Where several of these factors intersect, there is a higher probability both of someone engaging in criminal behaviour and of them becoming a victim of crime.[2] It is vital to understand the nature of these characteristics in order to design community and social interventions that reduce these risk factors and therefore reduce crime.

1 Farrington, D., Loeber, R. and Ttofi, M. (2012) 'Risk and Protective Factors for Offending' in D. Farrington and B. Welsh (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Crime Prevention*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

2 Tanner-Smith, E., Wilson, S. and Lipsey, M. (2012) 'Risk Factors and Crime' in F. Cullen and P. Wilcox (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Criminological Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Early risk factors

The factors that may lead an individual to fall into crime often begin years or even decades before they enter the criminal justice system. There is a growing body of research showing the links between adverse childhood experiences and an increased risk of criminality[3], and scholars such as Martin Glynn have highlighted the potential for a 'pipeline' towards criminality which begins with marginalisation, then on to social disorganisation, criminality, gang/street affiliation, and finally prison/grave.[4] Accordingly, the work of FBOs to address and prevent crime also begins long before the prison gate is even in sight.

Adverse childhood experiences may include abuse, neglect, and other forms of household adversity such as parental, substance abuse or mental illness. Individually, each one of these experiences is seen to be connected to crime risks, but the occurrence of multiple occurrences compounds this. A study of prisoners in Wales found that over 80% of prisoners reported at least one adverse childhood experience and nearly half reported four or more.[5] In the same study compared with individuals who had no adverse childhood experiences, individuals with experience of four or more forms were 20 times more likely to have been incarcerated in their lives.[6] 41% of the prison population have observed violence in the home as a child and 29% have experienced abuse as a child (53% of women), compared with 14% and 20% of the population respectively.[7]

Furthermore, 50% of males under 21 who are engaged with the criminal justice system are care experienced, and 25% of all adult prisoners are care experienced.[8] The same pattern of negative correlation is observed between educational disadvantage and crime, highlighting how childhood and teenage experiences have demonstrably lifelong implications for criminal justice. Statistics collated by the Prison Reform Trust show that adult prisoners were ten times as likely to have regularly truanted from school; 59% regularly did so, compared with 5% of the general population in England. Almost half (47%) of adults in prison have no qualifications, compared with 15% of the working age population more broadly.[9] Over half (54%) of the prison population have children under the age of 18, compared to 27% of the adult population, and 19% of male prisoners are young fathers.[10]

Understanding the protective factors that can mediate the effects of adverse childhood experiences is therefore critical, as this can inform policy and practice to support young people and prevent crime in the long term. A single action, such as excluding a child from school, can have life-long consequences and is seen to "inevitably begin a process that can ultimately create a pathway for children to enter a criminal justice trajectory".[11]

3 Bellis, M.A., Hughes, K., Leckenby, N., Perkins, C. and Lowey, H. (2014). 'National household survey of adverse childhood experiences and their relationship with resilience to health-harming behaviours in England.' *BMC Med* 12, 72.

4 Glynn, M. (2013). *Black men's desistance: towards a critical race theory of desistance*. Ph.D Thesis. Birmingham City University.

5 Ford, K., Barton, E., Newbury, A., Hughes, K., Bezeczky, Z., Roderick, J., & Bellis, M. (2019). ***Understanding the prevalence of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) in a male offender population in Wales: The Prisoner ACE Survey***. Public Health Wales, Bangor University.

6 Ford et al (2019). *Understanding the prevalence of ACEs…*

7 Prison Reform Trust (2022). ***Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile***.

8 Home for Good (2022). ***Statistics***.

9 Prison Reform Trust (2022). ***Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile***, p.26.

10 Prison Reform Trust (2022). ***Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile***, p.29.

11 Anderson, C. (2017). ***Commission on Gangs and Violence: Uniting to improve safety***.

Building resilience in young people, their families and communities is therefore a critical factor in reducing crime and victimisation. Research shows that the most successful programmes in preventing youth offending are early intervention programmes which focus on family engagement.[12] These may include parenting support programmes, school-based programmes and home-visit programmes, all of which are often run by the third sector and, in particular, by faith-based agencies. Within this, religion is seen to be a significant protective factor. Harvard University researchers found that mobilising sources of faith, hope and cultural tradition can be a counterbalancing factor in helping young children develop resilience in the face of significant adversity, in turn reducing the likelihood of them engaging in crime later in life.[13] A literature review prepared for the Scottish government in 2018 identified religion as one of a series of protective factors against offending, noting its contribution to self-esteem and positive behaviour.[14]

Here, we note that not all faith-based interventions which have a positive impact in this space are intentionally focused on criminal justice. Some charities aim their work to address a particular root cause, a welcome by-product of which is reducing the associated risk of criminality; for example, a faith-based intervention that primarily addresses social factors like education, addiction or family breakdown will likely also have a positive impact on preventing crime for its service users and could reduce the likelihood of an individual entering the prison system, even where this was not the organisation's primary stated aim. Several of the organisations we interviewed for this phase of the research fit this description, working more broadly than the criminal justice sector but with an evident connection to it. For example, the work of Safe Families has demonstrably decreased the flow of children into the care system from families it supports by up to 16%,[15] which is a significant intervention in light of the fact that 24% of male prisoners and 31% of female prisoners had been taken into care as a child, compared with only 2% of the wider population.[16]

12 Children and Families Directorate (2018). ***Understanding childhood adversity, resilience and crime***.

13 Harvard Center on the Developing Child (2015). ***The Science of Resilience***.

14 Children and Families Directorate (2018). ***Understanding childhood adversity, resilience and crime***.

15 Safe Families (2022). ***About Us***.

16 Prison Reform Trust (2022). ***Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile***, p.61.

Case study #1: Safe Families

Safe Families is a charity that works with over 35 local authorities around the UK. It works with vulnerable families to “offer hope, belonging and support to children, families and care leavers”, primarily by connecting them with local churches and communities. Its work is based on a pioneering model from the USA, which was brought to the UK in 2012.

Over 5000 volunteers and 150 staff members work with Safe Families, from over 1,000 churches and community groups across the UK. They connect with over 1,500 families every year, benefitting almost 17,000 children and providing over 9,000 bed nights of hosting. In line with the impact of the model in the US, the charity’s work in the UK has led to a demonstrable decrease of the flow of children into the care system of between 9-16%. The vast majority of families are referred by local authorities, with other referral sources including GPs, schools, community agencies and self-referral.

Safe Families describes its core values as love; belonging; faith; empowerment; and humility, all of which are connected to the Christian ethos of the organisation. Expanding on these values, the organisation seeks to support people with hope, generosity and dignity; establish positive relationships of security and connection; enable everyone to reach their potential and thrive; and invest in strong and honest partnerships to help them do so. All of these values are underpinned by the basis of faith; the charity uses the language of ‘believing for lives transformed and in a God who can do more than we can ask or imagine’ to illustrate this.

Their work in partnership with local churches is critical to their role in early intervention – what we might classify as ‘before the gate’. Their mission statement notes that “the Church is God’s primary vehicle for community transformation” and that local churches are well-placed and willing to make a genuine and practical impact in their communities. They recognise the sensitivities around supporting children and families from different cultures and faiths, and volunteers are trained on equality and diversity. Volunteers are essential to their work, and can support in various ways:

- Family Friend: working directly with families and providing support to parents and children when they need it most, ensuring they feel less isolated.
- Host Family: opening their home to look after children, from several days to several weeks. This provides a regular break and space for families who are dealing with challenges.
- Resource Friend: providing or transporting useful items such as clothing or prams, and those with helpful skills such as cooking and gardening.

A programme director for Safe Families told us,

> *“Through our work, we have reduced the need for police involvement when diverting people away from the criminal justice system. By tackling issues early on and stopping children from going into care, Safe Families has a knock-on effect and stops others from becoming involved in the criminal justice system. By recognising the trajectory that young people are on, we can get involved and prevent this.”*

This is an important consideration for faith groups and FBOs working with children and families, who may not always be explicitly aware that their work has implications for criminal justice. For example, a survey of Anglican parishes in 2017 found that 86% were involved in supporting people experiencing family breakdown, through youth work, toddler groups and informal support.[17] This figure is only one Christian denomination but is indicative of the high engagement of local churches and faith communities with families and children's work. This is rarely done with the explicit aim of preventing crime but can contribute to this over the long term.

We therefore argue that more could be done to highlight how FBOs and faith groups working in a range of social contexts are contributing to the work of crime prevention, directly or indirectly. At present, some of this is accidental rather than strategic and thus increasing the connectedness of organisations in different parts of the sector could improve this.

Crime prevention and violence reduction

As demonstrated by the variety of sectors that FBOs are active in and the ways they interact with the criminal justice system, it is important to see before the gate interventions holistically. Across the faith sector and the public sector, there is a growing focus on crime prevention and violence reduction to divert people away from crime before they enter the prison system. Much of this active work in crime prevention is undertaken by FBOs and their various partners. In response to a government consultation on violence reduction strategy in 2019, one local government stakeholder emphasised that "there is a significant role for the wider voluntary community and faith sector in relation to delivering sustainable long-term outcomes for the vision".[18] This statement underpins our approach in this report, demonstrating what we have found to be the vital role of FBOs in tackling serious violence, through their work supporting those who are affected by the social characteristics that make it more likely for someone to engage in crime.

A significant element of this is a public health approach to crime prevention[19], which involves multiple public and social services working together to implement early interventions, to prevent people becoming involved in violent crime. This is an approach recognised by the World Health Organisation, which addresses violent crime in particular like an infectious disease, tracking and monitoring root causes to prevent it spreading. The UK government has adopted this approach to address violent crime as well as non-violent forms such as drug crime.[20] In 2018, the UK Government announced its Serious Violence Strategy, which acknowledged that tackling serious violence could only be done by involving a wide range of partners, agencies and non-governmental organisations, with a focus on prevention and early intervention.[21]

17 Church Urban Fund (2017). ***Church in Action Survey***.

18 Home Office (2019). ***Consultation on a new legal duty to support a multi-agency approach to preventing and tackling serious violence: government response***.

19 Local Government Association (2018). ***Public health approaches to reducing violence***.

20 House of Commons Library (2019). ***How is the Government implementing a 'public health approach' to serious violence?***

21 Home Office (2019). ***Consultation on a new legal duty to support a multi-agency approach to preventing and tackling serious violence: government response***.

As part of the government's commitment to a public health strategy in the area of serious violence, £35m of funding was provided to 18 of the police forces in England that are worst affected by violent crime, to set up Violence Reduction Units (VRUs).[22] These VRUs are partnership organisations, modelled on a pioneering national unit introduced in Scotland in 2005, which focus on improving outcomes for local communities by listening to their specific needs and codesigning interventions with them. In the Scottish model, homicide rates, serious assaults, robberies and knife possession offences all fell by around half between 2006/07 to 2014/15, and the number of common assaults declined by 26%.[23]

In the West Midlands, the VRU is known as the Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP) and is unique in including a Faith Alliance within its work; for this reason, we included it as one of the participant organisations in this phase of research. The initial model in Scotland did not include faith as a focus, making the West Midlands VRP particularly pioneering and of interest to us. The Faith Alliance aims to equip, enable and empower faith communities to understand and prevent violence. Crucially, it represents a commitment from local government in the West Midlands to dedicate resources and paid staff capacity to involving faith communities and engaging with them in order to effectively reduce violence. (See page 18 for a full case study.)

Fred Kratt, the Faith and Communities Navigator at the West Midlands VRP said:

> *"The Faith Alliance is a very inclusive space where people can talk from their own set of beliefs about how they would understand violence, and how they'd go about changing things. It's empowering that faith communities are given the opportunity to be themselves and it's important to understand how faith impacts questions of identity and purpose, but also attitudes to society and the community. It's good for us to provide staff from secular organisations with a way into faith communities, as it immediately breaks down the barriers and the mistrust of engaging with the public sector."*

Simon Foster, the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner also highlighted the relevance and value of faith to communities:

> *"Faith groups contribute so much to society, in so many different ways. I recognise that and want to ensure that we maximise the potential of faith communities to prevent and reduce violence – whether that be, for example, by providing resilience for young people, utilising the resource of volunteering or making community assets available."*

While public health approaches to problems like crime are widely used and understood by secular organisations and the public sector, we find that they also offer a bridge to faith-based work. Public health work involves whole-system, multi-agency collaboration which, if done well, should include faith communities. It can incorporate a spiritual or theological understanding of work, whilst being both accessible and credible beyond that. Further, a public health approach identifies risk factors (for example, addiction, childhood adversity or unemployment) and ways to mitigate against them. As outlined in the previous section, many FBOs work in this manner, often through interventions which come very early in an individual's life trajectory.

22 Home Office (2020). ***Violence Reduction Unit Interim Guidance***.

23 Home Office (2020). ***Violence Reduction Unit Interim Guidance***, p.7.

The ethos of faith

Having outlined different approaches to 'before the gate' work and the role of FBOs in this, we are now able to dig deeper into the nature of the unique value that faith-inspired interventions can have in crime prevention.

Not only do FBOs provide practical hands-on support, they also provide support in the sense of bringing a sense of community, family and belonging to those who may not have that, as emerged through our interviews. We observe that they are particularly well-placed and willing to provide early intervention through a holistic and intergenerational approach that builds identity and belonging, underpinned by a narrative of love, compassion and perseverance.

The existence of an organisational ethos rooted in faith was seen by our interviewees to be important. Christian organisations often articulate that their work is grounded in the theological narrative of forgiveness, which is at the heart of the Bible and of their faith. Most other world religions also have a concept of forgiveness as one of their key faith tenets, and we do not claim that Christian groups are alone in this. However, having a clearly defined belief system behind its work, derived from something bigger than itself, is a valuable and distinctive aspect.

As one participant reflected,

> *"Compassion is not a quality that is limited to Christians, but Christian organisations have a much more confident and comfortable narrative about the word love and are not scared to use it."*

One aspect of this are the values of restorative justice and peace building that are often central to their work. The idea of restoration is a very strong driver for many of the Christian organisations that we spoke to; in particular, the focus on strengthening and restoring relationships within families. Given how strongly the evidence shows adverse childhood experiences are a risk factor for crime, this work with families during childhood is especially vital.

This foundational added value of faith is also apparent in the working practices of staff members at Christian organisations, whether they themselves have a faith or not. Participants spoke broadly about the values of having a faith-based staff team, or at least a staff team who shared the same values, even if not all practiced a faith.

For some staff members who joined these organisations, part of the attraction was that it was a Christian organisation, where they were able to pray freely and talk about their faith motivations. Staff felt that this culture of openness around religion enriched both their workplace experience and their own spirituality. One senior manager felt it meant that "staff are able to bring their full self to work, which is really empowering for their individual faith journey."

A staff member at another organisation reinforced this:

> *"The great thing about [this organisation] is the devotion element, the vocational element, and the foundation's grassroots is so driven through people's love of God. The trustees will make incredible things happen and we believe it's out of their faith-based commitment, which is incredibly empowering to have at the base of the organisation."*

Case study #2: West Midlands VRP & Faith Alliance

The Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP) in the West Midlands is a partnership organisation that aims to reduce violent crime across the West Midlands local authority area. It draws together the expertise of partners from various sectors, including public health, criminal justice, faith groups, sports, education and policing to take a collaborative approach to violence reduction. Central to this is the recognition that violence and its causes are complex and multi-layered, and therefore tackling the root causes takes time and cooperation between organisations.

In 2019, the West Midlands authority received £3.37 million from the government to set up a VRP, bringing together specialists from different sectors to work alongside partnership organisations and local communities to reduce serious violence in the region.

The West Midlands VRP in particular recognised the huge impact of violence and faith communities and the shared concerns of faith leaders. This led to the establishment of a Faith Alliance within the VRP, the only one of its kind. This connects people of all faiths and none to build trusted relationships within and between communities, with a shared ambition of reducing violence.

The Faith Alliance brings together religious leaders and key partners, including grassroots organisations, the public sector, and private businesses. The founding members have invested real effort to understand different perspectives, and actively look for opportunities to work together, and share time and resources to achieve real results.

The Faith Alliance enables the VRP to work in communities across the West Midlands, giving a voice and empowerment to groups and individuals who typically lack it. Faith communities are themselves made up of people from varied backgrounds, with diverse skills and experiences, and as such are well equipped to build trust and have difficult conversations, and are able to be a beacon of hope for those experiencing challenging times.

The VRP aims to offer the Faith Alliance a route to influence the way in which secular organisations are reflecting and responding to the growing recognition that changes need to be made in order to ensure that all people feel the West Midlands is a safe place to live.

In partnership, the Faith Alliance and the VRP aim to:

- Increase both capacity and opportunity for the community to lead, inform and facilitate violence reduction interventions.
- Work to reduce the disproportionate impact of serious violence on certain demographics.
- Increase the cultural competence of professionals and organisations involved in violence reduction activity.
- Help faith organisations take practical steps to anchor violence reduction activity in the heart of their local community.
- Support communities to keep people safe and to look after each other.

By bringing different groups together, using evidence to inform decisions and producing guidance, advice and toolkits, the West Midlands VRP strives to build even more resilient and compassionate communities. It hopes to close the cracks in the system to prevent people from falling through. They look to build the alliances by replicating Faith Alliances in other VRUs.

This culture of faith at a leadership level is seen to have a trickle-down effect. Where leaders had a strong belief system, it became infectious, and the team having such a positive regard for all humans acted as a driving factor for the whole team in a way that some participants felt they had not seen articulated so explicitly in non-Christian organisations. A staff member at one organisation described how, if their work was not grounded in their Christian faith, the young people they work with would be given fewer chances. The idea that 'God is a god of second chances', for example, was reflected in the perseverance and persistent support given to the young people. This in turn leads to a greater likelihood of their work succeeding and the young people flourishing. Staff at another organisation told us that faith as their foundation enables them to provide long-term, resilient support for people, with an understanding that progress is not always linear.

We also heard from participants that this vision guides the practicalities of their work and their interactions with service users. It was felt that faith communities are instinctively drawn towards preventative and holistic work. This was attributed to a combination of churches' ethos and their nature as communities that organise and host multiple different types of activities, which gives them a freedom to have a preventative impact that other organisations that rely on project-specific funding may struggle to do. For example, due to social services having limited resources, they can only receive referrals once a concern is raised that is relatively serious.

However, to counteract this and encounter people as they struggle before it has escalated – in other words, to provide true early intervention – faith groups run activities like toddler groups and cafe drop-ins so that support is available to all whenever they need it.

Where statutory organisations may be constrained by bureaucracy or set criteria, FBOs may have the freedom to work how they want to and support people who would not meet the criteria for other organisational interventions. One participant put it like this:

> *"Because people don't have to get to a certain threshold for care, they are loved as soon as they come through the door. By contrast, non-faith-based early intervention is quite programmes-based and not as liberating as loving the people in front of you."*

For some participants, their faith guides their interactions with service users. Service users do not have to practice a faith themselves to access the services that these organisations provide, but even those who do not tend to appreciate and encourage discussions about faith:

> *"The young people appreciate the Christian thoughts and discussions, even though many are not Christians themselves. Many of those who are vulnerable to being drawn into crime haven't had the opportunity to debate and discuss big life questions, and these faith-based organisations and communities can drive these important topics."*

The practical value of faith

While faith is seen to be an important part of the culture and ethos of Christian organisations working before the gate, there is also a practical dimension to faith communities that is important. FBOs are often connected to local congregations, allowing them to work nationally while also having a presence at a local community level. The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Faith and Society acknowledged in a report in 2020 that "faith groups have vital resources which are crucial for community wellbeing, and which cannot be found anywhere else".[24]

24 All Party-Parliamentary Group for Faith and Society (2020). ***Keeping the Faith: Partnerships between faith groups and local authorities during and beyond the pandemic***.

In practical terms, this may mean that FBOs have access to physical buildings and a source of volunteers that non-faith-based organisations do not. There is a church presence in every community in the UK, with over 40,000 church buildings across the country, which play host to activities to benefit the wider community include food banks, drug and alcohol support clinics, crime prevention, housing and homeless support. The social and economic value of these is clear, as the House of Good report by the National Churches Trust noted.[25] It found that church buildings in the UK generate £12.4 billion a year in social value. For every £1 invested into church buildings, there is a social return of £3.74, showing a strong and positive return on any money invested into the church. It concluded that church buildings, which support over 33,000 social action projects, constitute a "ready-made network of responsive hubs who are already central to providing care and looking after the wellbeing of local communities."[26] Not every denomination or congregation has a physical building, and there continue to be challenges with falling attendance numbers for Christian churches in the UK, meaning that none of this should be taken for granted.

Another distinct characteristic of organisations with a faith basis is the social and spiritual capital represented by the communities they have links with, both locally and nationally. Faith communities offer a sense of belonging and family, along with a sense of identity, purpose, and resilience.

A youth worker at one organisation said that:

> *"Having a Christian aspect is powerful as lots of young people want to find a place of belonging and they can find this in the Christian community."*

This strong community, defined by love and a shared purpose, may stand in contrast to prior experiences of vulnerable young people, especially those who have experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences like encounters with the care system or family breakdown. Many people who are at risk of crime have complex needs, and face poverty of resources, poverty of relationships, and poverty of identity. Faith communities are equipped to support vulnerable individuals through participation and involvement in the community. The qualities that are necessary for successful early intervention work and are provided to many by faith communities can translate into policy through giving FBOs the means to expand their work, through funding, networking opportunities and profile. The church community has the potential to offer security to those for whom it has been lacking. It is therefore important to recognise the extensive resource that faith communities are and the role they have in supporting families and individuals across the country. To solve big issues, strong communities are needed, and the Christian community is very well-placed to contribute to this.

Conversely, in addressing more complex issues related to gangs and violence, specialist organisations are seen to be more effective than individual local churches, which may be small and lacking in resources for effective coordination.[27] This is reflected in the participant organisations we spoke to, many of which work in partnership with local churches but offer professional support to compliment the role that volunteers can play. Local churches may not have capacity to generate and operate new initiatives single-handedly, but are likely to work in conjunction with and be supported by others, in partnerships like those run by some of our participants.

25 National Churches Trust (2020). ***The House of Good: The economic and social value of church buildings to the UK***.

26 National Churches Trust (2020). ***The House of Good…***

27 Coleman, J. A. (2003) 'Religious social capital: Its nature, social location, and limits', in C. Smidt (ed.) *Religion as social capital: Producing the common good*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, pp. 33-47.

Greater awareness, greater connectedness

The role of the voluntary and faith sectors has been emphasised periodically by governments in recent decades, for example in David Cameron's 'Big Society' rhetoric. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has further galvanised this support, shining a light once again on the vital role of faith groups and their social action within communities.

In many areas, local authorities have strengthened their collaboration with faith groups during the pandemic. While these partnerships were often established by necessity in the crisis, they have been seen positively and thus are set to continue in the long-term. The APPG on Faith and Society found that 91% of local authorities described their experiences of partnerships with faith groups as very positive or positive, and 93% of local authorities surveyed thought that wider sharing of best-practice in co-production between faith groups and local authorities was very important or important.[28]

The APPG report concluded that:

> *"The pandemic has both significantly increased local authority partnerships with faith groups and opened up a 'new normal' in the relationships between them: a civic and policy space characterised by relationships of trust, collaboration and innovation in which local authorities function more as enablers towards faith communities, rather than commissioners, funders or regulators."*[29]

Our own research also supports these findings, with one participant saying that:

> *"People have seen the response that churches had during Covid-19, such as with the food banks. There's now an awareness from local authorities that there is huge value to including faith communities in these conversations."*

This increased awareness and positive recognition from local authorities is significant, especially for smaller organisations and faith communities with often limited resources. FBOs and faith communities have credible solutions to tackle some of these community challenges, along with physical spaces to host this work. In the aftermath of the pandemic, it is particularly important to act on this now and secure funding for churches and FBOs as they continue to support vulnerable people in the community, especially those with the social characteristics that make it more likely that they will be involved in crime. One local authority stakeholder acknowledged this in their contribution to the APPG report, saying that:

> *"Fundamentally, more funding is needed to continue to support, encourage and grow the relationships between faith, civil society and the wider community… If we want to keep engaging with faith organisations in a wider and more productive way, we must be able to support growth in their infrastructure, social value projects, leadership, inclusion and in the models and mechanisms that exist to nurture support."*[30]

28 APPG for Faith and Society (2020). ***Keeping the Faith....***

29 APPG for Faith and Society (2020). ***Keeping the Faith...,*** p.5.

30 APPG Faith and Society (2020). ***Keeping the Faith...,*** p47.

FBOs typically have a strong network to draw on in recruiting motivated volunteers from congregations, which makes it possible for them to resource outreach work and support vulnerable groups. However, a more open and mature approach to faith is needed within the public sector, along with a willingness and openness to engage with FBOs. Historically, the issue of proselytism has often been raised in connection with public funding of faith-based charities, but research by Theos suggests this is largely unfounded and such concerns are diminishing.[31] This was echoed by the findings of the APPG's survey, which found that only 3% of local authorities had concerns about proselytism in the context of partnership working during the pandemic.[32] One participant from a small FBO told us:

> *"Lots of faith-based organisations shy away from being outwardly open about their faith for fear of how the public sector will address them, but building trust can lead to long-term partnerships."*

We believe that the post-pandemic climate of public policy is right for continued partnership between the public sector and FBOs. Participants spoke openly and positively about the partnerships they held with other similar organisations, both faith-based and secular. Successful partnership and collaborative work with both local authorities and other organisations, we heard, should begin with mutual understanding and relationships of trust. For example, understanding what an organisation does and what it does well, being open-minded, not being competitive about funding and recognising each other's strengths. Partnership working may also entail stopping an activity in order to enable another organisation to do it better, while specialising and extending other aspects of your own work. This might mean, for example, signposting an individual to other secular or faith-based organisations who are better placed to help an individual.

It is important for different sectors to work together to achieve positive outcomes and support their communities. For example, the police building connections with local FBOs who work with young people, in order to develop good relationships, or going into local churches to ask what issues they are facing and how they can be of assistance. One participant organisation, which works primarily with young people, is part of a local children's partnership where staff meet with police and youth offending teams once a term so all parties can update each other on their work. It is vital that these relationships are kept open from the top level. Additionally, police could facilitate group sessions with ex-offenders, so that young people can hear from outside groups.

As outlined already, activity 'before the gate' should be holistic in nature, with not all contributory agencies directly involved in the criminal justice system. One participant stressed the need to advocate for better working between the education system, the benefits system and local authorities as well, not just between similar organisations. A holistic approach is needed to support individuals at risk of crime, and it is much more efficient to pull together resources, creativity, networks and innovation when working alongside others with the same goal.

31 Bickley, P. (2005). ***The Problem of Proselytism***. Theos Think Tank.

32 APPG Faith and Society (2020). ***Keeping the Faith...,*** p.23

A clear example of the benefits of partnership working is demonstrated by the Faith Alliance within the West Midlands VRP (see case study on page 18 for full details). The Faith Alliance is aiming to build an accessible directory of FBOs across the West Midlands who are offering a multitude of services to support the vulnerable in their communities. They want to bridge the gap between regional and local communities, capture what is going on in local communities, and feedback and scale up this best practice into other regions so others can learn and benefit from it. Additionally, they are looking to build on the good work that local groups are doing already and connect them to each other across the region. Other regions and local authorities could learn from the work of the West Midlands in this regard and seek to emulate it.

Challenges

Whilst there have been opportunities for FBOs to step up their work during the Covid-19 pandemic, it would be remiss not to acknowledge the significant challenges this has posed to organisations working across the criminal justice system and with vulnerable individuals 'before the gate'. Practically, it meant changes to the types of services they could provide and the personnel who could be involved. The pandemic has had an impact on volunteer infrastructure, in particular for smaller organisations where up to 95% of the staff are voluntary.

After lockdown, it became extremely difficult for them to restart various projects again, with some voluntary groups still not yet working at the same scale as they were pre-pandemic. Some projects were often reliant on key volunteers and where these key people had left, there was also a lack of adequate resources to train new volunteers from scratch to take projects forward. Many acknowledged that this came on top of a series of already challenging circumstances including public sector cutbacks, services closing, and key individuals leaving and changing jobs.

One participant admitted this was challenging in seeking to rebuild post-pandemic, without the same organisational resilience that statutory groups might have:

> *"How does a tiny charity like us lock horns with huge public sector organisations and not over-promise and let people down?"*

We heard that for many participants, their organisation's support, services and resources had to be delivered online during the lockdowns, where it became difficult to connect with service users and volunteers in this way. One participant noted that this was not always ideal for their teenage service users, who much preferred the face-to-face relationships and personal dynamic which is hard to recreate via Zoom and "missed the intimate connection". Online sessions proved challenging for logistical reasons, including connection issues and lack of devices, which were particularly acute given that the young people many of the organisations work with are from lower socioeconomic groups.

Some of the other challenges participants spoke about were not directly related to the pandemic. Some organisations also spoke about how the public sector often talks about the need to move from acute to preventative work, but can struggle to put that into practice. For example, it was felt that it can be difficult to build the case for early intervention when there are so many other issues needing to be addressed, often more acute or immediate than long-term strategic work.

Similarly, whilst early intervention and preventative work can be delivered by secular statutory services, interviewees highlighted that there are groups of people who are nervous about engaging with these services because of concerns about how they would be treated; for example, individuals from particular ethnic communities. This was emphasised by a recent Demos report, which argued that responsibility for crime prevention should not fall solely with the police, and highlighted the role for whole community interventions and relationships particularly with hard-to-reach groups.[33] In response to this, the Demos report proposed a new local authority-based crime prevention service, where workers would "strive to identify and build relationships with key stakeholders who have a particular level of authority and knowledge in the area", explicitly including religious leaders in this bracket.[34] We would echo this suggestion.

Growth of a small organisation can also be challenging; as organisations grow, it is important to focus on how to maintain those core values of building communities and people belonging. In terms of being funded, one of the challenges for FBOs who receive financial support is that local governments have very inconsistent access to knowledge of what funding they are going to get and they often don't know definite budgets in advance.

There are also challenges with measuring the impact of crime prevention, especially early interventions which are tangential to criminal justice. For example, you cannot predict exactly which individuals will go through the criminal justice system, or prove conclusively that someone would not have gone to prison if not for the intervention. However, it is still useful to focus on 'upstream' faith-based interventions, such as fostering, mentoring and supporting students at risk of exclusion.

As well as issues of impact measurement, partnership working on crime prevention can sometimes be frustrated by the different languages used by faith-based and secular organisations. Thus, we want to highlight the importance of using a public health approach to crime prevention, as it can act as a common language which can be understood and accessible by all parties. Although there are multiple ways to reduce the incidence of violent behaviour, a public health approach is being increasingly discussed and implemented, using evidence-based practice to reduce and prevent violence in local communities in a way that is open to the contribution of all.[35]

33 Dawson, A., Stewart, A. and Mackenzie, P. (2022). ***Move on Upstream: Crime, prevention and relationships***. Demos.

34 Dawson et al (2022). ***Move on Upstream…,*** p,26.

35 Local Government Association (2018) ***Public health approaches to reducing violence***.

Behind the Gate

"Chaplaincy is the heart of the prison, where humanity still exists." (Prison leaver)

While FBOs are demonstrably at work 'before the gate' in crime prevention in various guises, it is also the case that people of faith throughout history have actively engaged with the prison system itself, working 'behind the gate' both in prison reform and through pastoral support for prisoners. It is this latter aspect – pastoral support, specifically that of the prison chaplaincy service in England and Wales – that we focus on in this chapter.

Contemporary academic research into prison chaplaincy is limited, and a large proportion relates to the USA, where practices and systems are different to those in English and Welsh prisons.[1] In particular, there is a lack of extensive research into the impact of chaplaincy on prisoners both during and after incarceration, or on its impact on prisoner reintegration. This is true of other forms of chaplaincy more widely than those working in the criminal justice system, as Ben Ryan acknowledged in his 2015 Theos report: "the expansion of chaplaincy has received relatively little empirical research, but provoked a fair amount of fascination and reaction."[2]

Whilst it was our initial intention to contribute to these substantive gaps in the literature regarding chaplaincy, the difficulties of data gathering during the Covid-19 pandemic have limited the extent to which we have been able to do so.

We were unable to conduct research with people currently in prison, so we conducted semi-structured online interviews with 12 prison leavers to find out their experiences of chaplaincy during their stay in prison, to unpack the evidence of chaplaincy impact to their service users. We also conducted an online survey of current chaplains, which included questions about their experience of the pandemic as well as the longer-term challenges and opportunities of their work. Given the context in which we were working, our analysis in this chapter focusses primarily on how the pandemic affected prison chaplaincy. We contend that it brought to light many underlying aspects of the work and crystallised some of the latent challenges. The findings and recommendations are therefore highly likely to be of wider relevance beyond the particular pandemic context.

At this point, we would also like to acknowledge that this report does not address or discuss religious extremism in the context of prison chaplaincy. This should not be taken to mean that we do not consider it important. Others have rightly focussed on this issue and studied it in depth.[3] However, given the restrictions of Covid and the limitations of our data as a result, we have deliberately steered clear of this highly sensitive and nuanced topic, as we deemed it eminently possible that we might do more harm than good by exploring it at a superficial level.

1 Beckford, J. and Gilliat, S. (1998). *Religion in Prison: Equal Rites in Multi-Faith Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

2 Ryan, B. (2015). ***A Very Modern Ministry: Chaplaincy in the UK***. Theos Think Tank, p.8.

3 Brader, C. (2020). ***Extremism in prisons: Are UK deradicalisation programmes working?*** House of Lords Library.

Setting the scene

Prison chaplains and faith services play a fundamental role in prison life and contribute to the vision of the prison service "by supporting those in prison to find hope and meaning, and to bring about changes in their lives which will enable them to reintegrate successfully back into the community."[4] In England and Wales, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is responsible for prisons, probation and youth custody; HMPPS also recognises the key role of spiritual support for individuals within the criminal justice system.

Specifically, HMPPS Chaplaincy and Faith services, which is led by the Chaplain General, supports and advises the delivery of faith and pastoral care to prisoners. The Chaplain General has a multi-faith team with a remit that includes advising government ministers and officials on policy decisions that have a religious or faith dimension. The team are also responsible for recruiting and training chaplains to meet the religious needs of those in prison, including prison staff, to "offer a pastoral ministry to all in times of both crisis and joy".[5] Prison chaplains have a unique opportunity to inspire change in prisoners through their pastoral and spiritual guidance, as well as providing practical support to encourage desistance and support reintegration back into the community.

The presence of faith 'behind the gate' has been a common theme of the modern prison system since its inception. For Christians, this stems from the biblical imperative to care for the prisoner – expressed in bible verses like Matthew 25:37, "I was in prison and you visited me" – and has taken the form of pastoral work and prison reform. The role of the chaplain has long been fundamental to this; there are accounts from as early as the 1840s of the comfort and support provided by members of the clergy to inmates.[6] An anonymous account published in 1878 described the "encouraging, really sweet words of comfort" offered by the chaplain during their prison sentence.[7]

The role and significance of the chaplain has shifted over the years; the Prisons Act 1952 enshrined in law the statutory duties of prison chaplains in their role to support and serve the religious needs of the prison population, and was updated almost 50 years later in the Prison Rules 1999. Both these pieces of legislation recognise that chaplains can be instrumental in guiding prisoners through new and existing faith journeys, and enabling them to find hope both in prison and following release. The nature of the chaplain has also evolved. Originally, they were predominantly ordained members of Christian clergy. However, as society has become more diverse and multicultural, so too has the representation of it within the prison system. Prisons now have multifaith chaplaincy structures, staffed by lay and ordained individuals, paid and voluntary, from multiple religions and belief groups.

Prison chaplains are uniquely placed to shape the experiences of prisoners, even beyond their sentences. As one participant expressed, chaplaincy offers "an opportunity to change direction and have a new image of self for the future". It is important therefore to try to understand their role and potential to promote and influence desistance from crime.

The most comprehensive contribution to this understanding in recent years in the UK was conducted by researchers at Cardiff Centre for Chaplaincy Studies, who studied the contribution of a multifaith prison chaplaincy to the contemporary prison service.[8] They identified the primary pastoral role of

4 HM Prison and Probation Service (2020). ***Framework for Anglican Prison Chaplaincy 2021-24***.

5 HMPPS (2020). ***Framework***…, p.7.

6 Marland, H. (2017). ***Prison Chaplains***.

7 One Who has Endured it (1878). *Five Years of Penal Servitude*. London: Richard Bentley & Son, pp.10, 20, cited in Marland (2017).

8 Todd, A., and Tipton, L. (2011). ***The Role and Contribution of a Multi-Faith Prison Chaplaincy to the Contemporary Prison Service***. Cardiff Centre for Chaplaincy Studies.

prison chaplains; providing individual support to prisoners regardless of their beliefs, and particularly in times of personal crisis, for example after bereavement. What might be considered the more traditionally 'religious' aspect of their work – religious support and facilitating opportunities for worship and education – was seen as secondary to this pastoral dimension.

One chaplain interviewed by Todd and Tipton emphasised this, saying that

> *"If the prison service said to me, 'the only thing you should be doing is the religious side of things on a Sunday,' I think I'd quit prison chaplaincy as I think the pastoral work is, ironically, more deeply sacramental."*[9]

A broader account of the chaplain's role is provided by Opata, who described chaplains as providing a ministry of presence through giving attention to the spiritual needs of prisoners.[10] This could involve assistance in dealing with grief, emotional trauma or other personal matters and to simply provide genuine human contact, with a challenge "to bring hope and light into darkness."[11]

As of June 2022, there were 382 prison chaplains employed by HMPPS (full-time and part-time)[12]. This does not include chaplains paid sessionally, those working in the private prison estate, or those who are unremunerated. Todd and Tipton estimated in 2011 that there are a further 700-800 chaplains serving in these ways, representing a wide range of faiths and denominations, along with an estimated 7000 volunteers across 117 prisons in England and Wales.[13] According to the most recent published data, the prison population is 82,161 prisoners as of 4th November 2022.[14] The most recent estimates of the total numbers of chaplains are now over a decade old and we therefore recommend that the prison service should provide a regularly updated version of these statistics, including chaplains of all religions and employment statuses. Furthermore, information on the religious affiliation of chaplains is not published, which we consider to be necessary.

A significant proportion of the prison population (68%) identify as having a faith, with chaplains and volunteers supporting these individuals in particular. Of those identifying as having a faith, 66% are Christian, 25% are Muslim and the rest are made up of other faith groups.[15] In 2019, Robert Buckland, then the Minister of State for Prisons, acknowledged in his response to a written question about the numbers of chaplains and prisoners of different religious groups, that:

> *"Chaplaincy plays a critical and unique role in the work of prisons and life of prisoners. It provides not only faith advice but pastoral care in support of [HMPPS's] commitments to decency, safety and rehabilitation."*[16]

As already acknowledged, both the Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing changes to government criminal justice policy have had implications for prisons. In February 2022, the government announced plans to create 20,000 new prison places, alongside the intention to reverse previous

9 Todd and Tipton (2011), ***The Role and Contribution***…, p. 21

10 Opata, J. N. (2001). Spiri*tual and religious diversity in prisons: Focusing on how chaplaincy assists in prison management.* Illinois: Charles C Thomas.

11 Opata (2001). *Spiritual and religious diversity*… p. 251.

12 Ministry of Justice (2022). ***HM Prison and Probation Service workforce statistics, March 2022***.

13 Todd and Tipton (2011), ***The Role and Contribution…,*** p.9.

14 Ministry of Justice. (2022). ***Population and Capacity Briefing for Friday 22nd April 2022***.

15 Ministry of Justice (2022). ***Offender Management Statistics Quarterly, October to December 2021***.

16 Ministry of Justice (2019). ***Prisons: Ministers of Religion: Question for Ministry Justice***.

policy and renationalise the probation service.[17] These challenges will inevitably stretch the capacity of chaplaincy departments, but may also provide an opportunity for engaging more closely with the religious needs of prisons and their staff in a time of change. It is a context in which the role of chaplaincy could become even more prominent in the prison system.

Religion in prison

There is a significant body of research that has shown that prisoners who engage with religion during their sentence have lower rates of recidivism.[18] In particular, the work of Shadd Maruna has found that long-term desistance from crime involves measurable changes in personal identity, often prompted by experiences or practices within prisons or with prison staff.[19]

Research also shows that the relationships between prisoners and chaplains, voluntary sector practitioners and other non-custodial staff can significantly affect the experience of a prison sentence and its outcomes in terms of desistance from crime.[20] These relationships with non-custodial individuals, especially chaplaincy teams, are seen to be valuable for the emotional wellbeing of prisoners, and are distinctive from those with custodial staff, as we found in our interviews with prison leavers. This is not to suggest that either custodial or non-custodial staff have a homogenous attitude towards prisoners, but research substantiates the idea that non-custodial staff have particularly distinct relationships with prisoners that allow them to be free "to explore identities beyond that of being an offender".[21] This is supported by Theos research into chaplaincy more broadly, which identified that chaplains' distinctiveness from other services and structures in an organisation is an important factor that enables them to be effective in their work.[22]

Chaplaincy support and spiritual practices remain essential aspects of the prison service both during and after a prison sentence, as they can help to create more meaningful identities, with religion adding to this by providing a potential source of cultural identity. Theos research echoed this sense of cultural identity linked to chaplaincy; one Catholic prison chaplain interviewed in their work described how prisoners who had been to Catholic school or whose family were Catholic would often want to speak to him, even if they were no longer practicing or believing Catholics. In these circumstances, individuals can find meaning in religion during their prison sentences:

> *"In an environment so utterly divorced from their own family and home, the chaplain was a point of continuity with something from their childhood or past, and had some appeal in that resonance."*[23]

17 Ministry of Justice (2022). ***Thousands of new prison places to rehabilitate offenders and cut crime***

18 Thomas, J., and Zaitzow, B. H. (2006). Conning or Conversion? The Role of Religion in Prison Coping. *The Prison Journal*. Volume 86. Issue 2. pp. 242-259.

19 Maruna, S. (2001). *Making Good: How Ex-Convicts Reform and Rebuild Their Lives*. Washington: American Psychological Association.

20 Tomczak, P. J., and Albertson, K. E. (2016). Prisoner Relationships with Voluntary Sector Practitioners. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*. Volume 55. Issue 1-2. pp. 57-72.

21 Tomczak and Albertson (2016). *Prisoner Relationships…*

22 Ryan, B. (2015). ***A Very Modern Ministry: Chaplaincy in the UK***. Theos Think Tank.

23 Ryan (2015). ***A Very Modern Ministry…***

As well as those who reconnect with childhood religion and tradition in this way, there are also stories of those who encounter religion for the first time in prison. It is often chaplains who facilitate these practices of reflection and spirituality that can lead to changed lives. One prison leaver we interviewed described this transformation:

> *"It was steady progress but over time, I let God in and the [chaplaincy] programme completely transformed me and blew me away… The more he [God] gave me the more I wanted, and the more I wanted the more he gave me."*

Findings from prison leavers

As previously noted, we were unable to conduct research with people currently in prison because of Covid restrictions, so we instead conducted semi-structured online interviews with 12 prison leavers. These focussed on their experiences of chaplaincy during their sentence and aimed to unpack the impact of chaplaincy on them following their release. Our sampling was supported by the Welcome Directory, which maintains a directory of faith communities with a declared commitment to welcoming prison leavers. (A full case study of their work is included on page 49.) Our participants were a mixture of men and women who have all been incarcerated, some of whom had been involved with religion and spirituality before entering prison, and some who were introduced to it through the chaplaincy department in prison.

These interviews were framed by the three phases of the research: before, behind and beyond the gate. In the 'before' section of the conversation, individuals were asked about their life before they went to prison and the extent to which they engaged in religious activity before their prison sentence. For 'behind the gate', we asked individuals about their engagement with chaplaincy services during their stay in prison, the range of support chaplains provided, chaplaincy activities and connections with other prisoners through these, and suggestions for improvement for chaplaincy. Lastly, in the 'beyond' section, questions were framed around religious involvement since leaving prison, and whether the chaplaincy department were able to support in direction to religious sites or organisations post-release. The focus of the majority of the data was on the role of chaplaincy 'behind the gate', hence our analysis is included in this chapter of the report.

From our interviews, we heard that chaplaincy support in prison was vital to wellbeing and feeling able to manage prison life, but that the support provided beyond the gate needed to be improved. The value that interviewees placed on chaplaincy support was expressed more commonly in non-religious terms, suggesting that the most important role of chaplains was the pastoral care they provided, as we will now explore in further depth.

One of the key qualities of chaplains as described by prison leavers was the way they went above and beyond their statutory duties to support those in their care. The chaplaincy department was described as feeling like a community, not only in terms of camaraderie amongst prisoners wanting to spend time with like-minded people, but also with chaplains, who were often described as comrades and mentors, a non-judgmental character and someone they would look up to. Chaplaincy services and activities were described as inspiring hope, offering a space for intellectual stimulation, and being somewhere individuals instantly felt at peace. One individual told us that chaplaincy had impacted them so much that they had "adjusted expectations of what to expect from a church community compared to how much I received from it during prison".

Many of those we spoke to encountered faith for the first time whilst in prison. As one put it:

> *"The minute I walked into the chaplaincy, I knew there was something different… God took out the brokenness, the shame and guilt and replaced it with peace and joy and hope."*

Another, who was profoundly impacted by their engagement with the Christian chaplaincy, said:

> *"I felt spiritually free for the first time in my life after this service, words can't even comprehend, and that was the first time I encountered the Holy Spirit."*

Another highlighted the impact chaplaincy had had on their mental as well as spiritual health, saying:

> *"Without those [chaplaincy] services, I would still be lost in addiction."*

We heard that chaplains were able to offer spiritual guidance, teaching individuals about prayer, explaining religious texts and guiding prisoners through religious processes and ceremonies of belonging, such as confirmation in the church.

One prison leaver summarised well the overall narrative of those we interviewed:

> *"Chaplaincy is the heart of the prison, where humanity still exists. I felt respected there, felt like I could be loved there. The chaplains were always approachable and kind, unconditionally prepared to listen and offer insight."*

This is supported by the account of Reverend Jonathan Aitken, who wrote of his time in prison that

> *"[Chaplains] are the bridge builders to the gentler side of prison life… in the dark environment of a prison, chaplains can be beacons of light and hope."*[24]

Reflecting on post-prison spiritual support, interviewees made it clear that there was no structured support plan in place to help offenders with religion and spiritual matters beyond release. Several interviewees said that they had not contemplated the idea of joining a religious community after their release from prison, due to there being more important things to prioritise like housing and temptations from other sources, as well as the fear of not fitting in or feeling like an outsider.

We found clearly that more support was wanted post-prison, with one prison leaver saying that:

> *"It would be great to have had a support network to reach out to, someone calling me up and saying, 'I know you went to chapel in prison' and offering extra support in that way."*

Another echoed this, saying:

> *"I would've wanted to keep in contact with the church after my stay in a Young Offender Institution but there were no contacts available or people directing me."*

24 Aitken, J., and Smyth, E. (2021). *Doing Time: A Spiritual Survival Guide*. London: Lion Books.

This lack of follow up support proved difficult for some; as one leaver said, "coming out of prison is a bigger test than being inside prison so there are people needed to help keep us in check". While the demand is there, chaplaincy staff do not always have the capacity or resources to signpost prison leavers to additional services and so many are left without support when they leave prison. However, it should be noted that chaplaincy resources vary between prisons and there were also examples of good practice where this signposting process had been done effectively:

> *"I was signposted to so many in terms of accommodation as well, I was almost inundated with information. The chaplains didn't have to do that; it was entirely through friendliness and was hugely appreciated at the time."*

We heard some practical suggestions about what did and didn't work in this regard. One individual said that where there was support available, it was targeted towards the local area of the prison itself, rather than the area where they came from and would be moving back to after release. This is a particularly important point for female prisoners, who are held in custody an average of 64 miles away from their home, with many being held considerably further away.[25]

Another individual suggested that chaplains could make use of volunteers from religious communities who were willing to go to probation meetings alongside prison leavers to support them in turning their life around and said that this service should be used more frequently. We recommend that this should be more widely available, encouraging partnerships between chaplaincies and volunteers from local religious communities to support prison leaves. We suggest that one means by which this could be achieved is the expansion of the Welcome Directory. (For a lengthier explanation of the work of the Welcome Directory, a case study can be found on p54 of this report.) This would form part of a nationwide link between prison chaplains and faith communities that are welcoming to prison leavers, so that no matter which community an individual is returning to, there is support available.

We also heard suggestions about how chaplaincy support within prison could be developed and improved. Prison leavers expressed the desire for there to be more chaplains and pastoral support available to them, or alternatively, a dedicated pastoral service in prisons so that chaplains have more time to carry out their statutory duties. Interviewees said that it would be good if chaplaincy teams were able to get to know everyone individually, and even attend induction meetings for new prisoners and introduce themselves. It was felt that this would be of great benefit to people in prison, who otherwise might not know who the chaplains were.

In our research with chaplains, outlined further in the following section, we heard similarly from chaplains that they felt prisoners are not always aware of the services they offer, not only faith-related support but also other forms such as bereavement support. To address this, we recommend that information about chaplaincy should be a routine part of inductions received by new prisoners, with leaflets or information sessions distributed to everyone who enters prison. This would be both cost-effective and easily replicable across the prison estate, but would have the potential to make a significant positive impact on prison experience and beyond.

Multifaith chaplaincy can be transformative, but at its current capacity there isn't time for chaplains to have meaningful interactions with all prisoners, especially as many aren't aware of their support services. Therefore we would encourage the expansion of chaplaincy volunteers, who could support chaplains with pastoral care and promote its uses and benefits when people first enter prison. Volunteers could be recruited through more active engagement in the community and by expanding chaplaincy connections with local faith groups.

25 Women in Prison (2015). *State of the estate – Women in Prison's report on the women's custodial estate* (2nd edition). London: Women in Prison.

Findings from prison chaplains

As mentioned previously, the second part of our 'behind the gate' research took the form of an online questionnaire completed by current prison chaplains. This gave us the opportunity to explore in detail the individual lived experiences of prison chaplains. We distributed the questionnaire via email to chaplains at 10 prisons, including men's prisons, women's prisons, and prisons in the long-term and high-security estate. We received a total of 22 responses to this. For reasons of anonymity and due to the relatively small sample size, we do not include here a full breakdown of demographics of chaplains surveyed. However, we received responses from Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu and Buddhist chaplains, representing five of the major world religions. Collectively, respondents had over 150 years' total experience of prison chaplaincy, with half of them having been in the role for over a decade. The questionnaire consisted of open-response questions where chaplains could write in their thoughts, and these text responses are quoted verbatim throughout this section.

It was clear from the responses that the Covid-19 pandemic drastically altered the ways in which chaplains were able to support prisoners and carry out their statutory duties. For example, group worship and study groups had to be discontinued across the prison estate. The provision of courses for prisoners, such as Sycamore Tree and Living with Loss, was also curtailed, so chaplains had to be inventive about new ways to stay in touch.

Many chaplains were able to find new opportunities in this for one-to-one work. Some said they had more time and opportunity for personal ministry at a greater depth and quality with prisoners. One chaplain wrote that it "has been a positive experience as it often led to deeper connections and understanding," and another felt it had been "valuable" and "developed practice." However, this was not always a positive experience, with one chaplain acknowledging that having to work with prisoners on a one-to-one basis rather than with a group was "incredibly time-consuming" and noting that "community is an important factor in most, if not all the major faiths."

We learned about examples of chaplaincy teams working creatively and resourcefully in order to continue delivering their work. We heard of the introduction of in-cell worship through CD recordings. One Christian chaplain told us they had put together a weekly faith pack for those who expressed an interest which included a weekly letter from the chaplain, a mass sheet with the readings for Sunday mass, a reflection on the readings, and a poem relating to faith. On the whole, this improvisation in chaplaincy as a result of Covid-19 was seen to be valuable. One chaplain was "very pleased with the results" and had "seen more prisoners engage in faith due to less distraction".

However, the long-term change in routine has made it difficult for some chaplains to return to their normal duties and schedules now that restrictions are lifting in most prisons. One chaplain said,

> *"I'm now finding it tricky to get group sessions up and running again as prisoners are out of the habit of attending regularly."*

While the particular challenges of Covid-19 loomed large for chaplains at the time of research, we also asked them about the main challenges facing prison chaplaincy more broadly. A frequently raised issue here was the sense of feeling invisible, for example rarely being mentioned in reports or signs thanking key workers during the pandemic. Some felt this was also true within the prison system:

> *"Chaplaincy can often feel a little neglected when key decisions are being made."*

> *"We are not seen as being essential by those responsible for programming the regime."*

> *"Many staff don't understand what a difference having a faith can make for those in custody."*

Prison chaplains also mentioned some of the logistical challenges of their role. Prison regimes and staff shortages can make it difficult for prisoners to move around the prison to access services so sometimes chaplains have to carry out the movement of prisoners, reducing the time spent for them to deliver their services, and reducing prisoners' access to chaplaincy services. Chaplains noted that the impact of Covid-19 exacerbated these issues, reducing the ability of prisoners to see chaplains and worsening already poor mental health. One chaplain wrote that:

> *"We have to pick up the pieces as chaplaincy; when all other parts of the system have failed them [the prisoners], they turn to us for support."*

This sits against the backdrop of a steep decline in prison staff, which is perceived as a key contributor to the myriad of challenges currently faced by prisons.[26] The increase in prisoner numbers in England and Wales has been accompanied by "the de-prioritisation of rehabilitation"[27] and an increase in recidivism – 61% of adults are reconvicted within a year of release[28].

Some of these struggles are particularly relevant when prisoners have finished their sentence and are returning to the community. Chaplains spoke about the difficulties of providing continued support beyond the gate for prisoners who have little or no support, and that the need for pastoral care and support for those leaving prison always exceeds the resources available to them. This may be especially challenging considering the environments that many prison leavers return to.

One chaplain described this as:

> *"Poor family backgrounds, drugs and alcohol misuse and years of institutionalisation in care homes, young offenders' institutions and prisons. Once these individuals have a criminal record, everything starts to stack up against them and accommodation, work and relationships are all much more difficult to obtain."*

For these reasons, it is vital that the links between chaplains in prison and faith groups in the community are formed, and that existing ones are strengthened. The introduction of a formal structure would ensure that individuals are well-supported when released from prison.

Despite the difficulties that chaplains and prisoners alike can face, it is clear that chaplaincy offers many short and long-term benefits and opportunities to prisoners. Chaplains can have a unique position in terms of their relationship with prisoners, as they reach out to them at their lowest points and provide trusted, regular relationships that help individuals feel valued and worthwhile. Many chaplains spoke about providing a listening ear to prisoners, giving them time and space to talk, and acceptance. Not only do they provide spiritual support, but also help with practical issues and emotional development, depending on what the individual wants. Additionally, they assist with arranging weddings and funerals so may also be in touch with prisoners' families too, which can be very meaningful for all parties. This supports our findings from the previous chapter, outlining the value of a faith-based staff team for service users. As one chaplain reflected,

> *"As chaplains, we also provide a sense of belonging, so I say to the men that we are your family when you're away from your family."*

26 Howard League for Penal Reform. (2016). ***Preventing prison suicide: Perspectives from the inside***.

27 Teague, M. (2012). Neoliberalism, Prisons and Probation in the United States and England and Wales. In: Whitehead, P., and Crawshaw, P. Eds. *Organising Neoliberalism: Markets, Privatisation and Justice*. London: Anthem Press. pp. 45-80.

28 Prison Reform Trust (2022). ***Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile***.

Another common theme expressed by chaplains was their role in showing prisoners respect, regardless of why they are in prison. Chaplains spoke about acting as positive role models, showing patience, reliability and empathy, as well as encouraging positive relationships between peers. They provide an accessible space for prisoners to be supported, free of judgement, and offer a listening ear. The chaplaincy service plays an integral role within prisons, and acts as a highly valued safe space, providing a crucial support system for vulnerable prisoners and those struggling with incarceration.[29] In the words of one chaplain:

> *"We offer compassion in a setting which is not very compassionate."*

In terms of volunteers, chaplains spoke about what the prison system could do to attract more volunteers and staff to join chaplaincy. The recruitment process for volunteers in particular was described as time-consuming and difficult. One chaplain wrote that the system is "a nightmare if you only use them occasionally, with the prison allocating no admin support to chaplaincy" and another noted that it is reliant on managing chaplains working significant additional unpaid hours." The system for welcoming volunteers into the establishment is a comfortable process, although the vetting process could be quicker and more efficient to allow volunteers to start sooner, we heard. Whilst it is obviously important that volunteers are appropriately vetted for safeguarding purposes, it appears the process could be more streamlined so as not to put a strain on chaplains' time and also not to dissuade potential volunteers from pursuing it.

Chaplains said they had plenty of volunteers prior to Covid-19, but numbers had dropped during the pandemic and were only now beginning to pick up. This echoes the similar experiences of faith-based organisations reliant on volunteers, as explored in the *Before the Gate* chapter of this report.

Responses to our questionnaire suggested that this could also be helped by providing further encouragement and training for volunteers and more investment in unpaid chaplaincy staff, as well as continuing to find ways to improve support and employment conditions for paid staff. As discussed in the next phase of the report, *Beyond the Gate*, many chaplains wrote about the importance of having better links between prisons and local faith communities/churches, as networking and engaging with the public would create more awareness in the community.

There were mixed responses to the question about the level and quality of support that chaplains receive from the prison institution. There were many positives, including support from colleagues and from prison leadership, "mainly because we are well thought of in the prison and seen to be an asset." Another chaplain said that:

> *"Governors see the importance of faith in a prisoner's life and encourage it and support where needed, so staff continually signpost prisoners to see chaplains."*

Chaplains also spoke about receiving training and advice from the Chaplaincy and Faith services headquarters, as well as good support and encouragement from managing chaplains and, for Anglican and Catholic chaplains specifically, their diocese. However, one chaplain noted that often chaplains are not appreciated or taken seriously by the wider prison staff team. Support seemed to vary between prisons, therefore we recommend that all prison staff should receive training on the value of the chaplaincy team and the ways in which faith and spirituality can prevent recidivism.

Regarding how support can be improved at both a local and national level from the prison service, a common theme was working more closely with other prison staff and "facilitating genuine dialogue

29 Todd and Tipton (2011), ***The Role and Contribution….***

between staff and chaplains"; for example through team building or well-being events to get to know other staff members outside of chaplaincy. Chaplains wanted a general change in attitude and more education on the benefits of chaplaincy. This could bring a more positive image of the work that chaplains are doing amongst prison staff, and build a stronger awareness of the effects that the chaplaincy team have on prisoners. Chaplains also felt that greater recognition would help, not only of their ability to add value to the prison service in a variety of ways, but also in a more practical sense; for example, the recognition that there is a need to invest time in recruiting volunteers.

One chaplain noted,

> *"It would be helpful if chaplaincy teams from other prisons could meet together to share experiences, both good and bad."*

Regular meetings and conferences amongst multi faith chaplains from different prisons would provide a strong support network for chaplains to share resources, ideas and best practices. It was noted that at present, there are chaplaincy conferences for individual faiths e.g. a Catholic chaplains gathering, an Anglican one and a Muslim one, but no regular multifaith gathering for chaplains. This is something that chaplains express would be beneficial for their work.

As one chaplain expressed,

> *"There is huge potential for chaplaincy to work with community faith groups and other partners to provide support for people leaving prison, but the role of chaplaincy in resettlement is currently ambiguous, up to prisons to develop individually, and not resourced."*

If more resources and recognition were given to chaplains, they could expand their work inside prisons and build stronger networks with faith communities on the outside dedicated to supporting prison leavers, for individuals to continue their faith journey outside of the prison walls.

Conclusion

Our research finds that chaplaincy makes a significant positive contribution to life inside prison, the rehabilitation of prisoners, and often their outcomes once leaving prison; in particular, desistance from crime. However, there is potential for this to be further developed.

At present, there is no accurate data gathered routinely about prisoner engagement in chaplaincy services, and the impact of it. This not only affects the ability of policymakers to understand the nature and scale of chaplaincy services, but it also means that they are less likely to be identified as requiring funding and extra support and intervention. The success of pastoral interventions from chaplains is often due to how they are tailored to each individual's challenges in the prison environment, as we heard from prison leavers. While guidelines and further support should be encouraged and developed, it should also be recognised that there is not one single national model for pastoral care because it is different in each prison context and for each individual.

There is a need for further exploration of the work of prison chaplains in England and Wales, particularly the collection of statistical data and impact measurement. Despite its presence in every prison, we found in our research that chaplaincy remains under-acknowledged and poorly understood. We therefore conclude that it merits greater recognition and further exploration to identify opportunities for chaplains to have a greater and more consistent impact across the prison system. Furthermore, community chaplaincy – which will be discussed in the next chapter on *Beyond the Gate* – must be seen as a continuation of the pastoral care provided by chaplains in prisons and should therefore be brought to the forefront of government agendas aiming to deliver maximum impact in promoting desistance, as this is a continuation of the pastoral care provided in prisons.

Beyond the Gate

The valuable role that faith plays in the criminal justice system does not end the moment an individual leaves prison. In this chapter, we explore how churches and Christian organisations continue to work 'beyond the gate', providing post-sentence care and rehabilitation for prison leavers. We begin by providing some context on recent changes in probation services and highlight the added value that faith brings into post-prison work. We discuss the challenges of this including the specific difficulties faced by FBOs in this sector as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Finally, we explore the impact of faith on prison leavers and how it can support successful rehabilitation.

The findings outlined in this chapter are drawn from our analysis of semi-structured interviews with ten individuals from eight organisations working 'beyond the gate', along with existing literature and insights from our interviews with prison leavers. These also inform our recommendations for future work in this area. We believe that the current context, in particular the recent renationalisation of the probation system, offers a clear opportunity to recognise and promote the positive role that faith can play in such work, as highlighted by this research. With appropriate safeguards, we believe that churches, community chaplaincy projects and resources like the Welcome Directory can provide a safe, welcoming and supported path back into the community for those leaving prison.

Engaging with probation

A key part of faith work 'beyond the gate' is interaction with the probation service, which has itself undergone significant change in recent years. The role of the probation service in England and Wales is to provide sentence management and resettlement support to those who are convicted and subject to custodial and community sentencing.[1] They conduct this work in partnership with a variety of public and private agencies including social services, policing and housing services, to support the rehabilitation of those in their care.

In 2013, then-Justice Secretary Chris Grayling announced a redesign of probation services despite overwhelming opposition from the sector.[2] The government's Transforming Rehabilitation programme and the associated Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 aimed to revolutionise the ways in which rehabilitation services were delivered and how they managed offenders, with a goal to make progress in driving down recidivism rates.[3] The following year, 35 public sector probation trusts in England and Wales were replaced by 21 privately led Community Rehabilitation Companies, with responsibility for supervising service users who presented a low or medium risk of harm.[4] These changes privatised probation services for the majority of offenders.

1 Probation Service (2021). ***About Us***.

2 Newlands, P. (2013). ***Probation officers spell out objections to Grayling reforms***. The Times.

3 Ministry of Justice (2013). ***Transforming Rehabilitation – a revolution in the way we manage offenders***.

4 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (2021). ***Caseloads, workloads and staffing levels in probation services***.

Although the new Community Rehabilitation Companies, which aimed to reduce reoffending, achieved some success and were paid based on results, this was not universally popular with probation staff. The CEO of one charity working in this area wrote in The Guardian that this "didn't stop many dedicated staff leaving after years of insecurity caused by the changes; their workloads excessive, their morale depleted".[5] As a result, reoffending rose substantially, and there were significant increases in self-harm and suicide amongst those on probation.[6] Ultimately, the privatisation of the sector was acknowledged as a failure and in 2020, the government announced plans to renationalise the whole probation service. The National Probation Service was to take over all responsibility for offender management, which came into effect in 2021 and was part of a new government programme of reforms to cut recidivism and reduce crime.[7]

Our interviews with organisations supporting prison leavers were conducted shortly after this renationalisation, and the reforms to the probation service emerged as a significant theme. The *Transforming Rehabilitation* programme was seen to have severely impacted the work of many of the organisations we spoke to, who had lost contracts to support prison leavers. However, many also spoke about how service users are often more receptive to their support specifically because they are not part of the probation system. One support worker told us,

> *"We act outside of the probation service as a more trusting force. Probation is quite official and some women hesitate with that."*

A project manager at another organisation told us that they specifically worked outside of probation in order to better support the service users and provide them with more chances to succeed:

> *"We do everything ourselves. If we had contracts with probation that would compromise our services as they wouldn't be as trusting of beneficiaries as we are."*

Trust was a common theme that emerged out of our interviews. We discovered from both prison leavers and staff working at FBOs that organisations are more trusted because they are not part of the probation service, and that FBOs are also perceived as being more trusting of clients.

While recognising that formal distance from the probation system can be valuable for the work of FBOs, there is also scope to strengthen relationships between probation and the faith sector, as they work together for the best interests of the service users. The CEO of a charity working with offenders spoke of their expectation that:

> *"Now Community Rehabilitation Companies have been shown to have failed, there are opportunities for growth. When the Community Rehabilitation Companies finish up [in 2022], the probation service will recontract organisations like us, who have a better grip on the grassroots community."*

5 Johnson, M. (2020). ***Think renationalising probation will cut reoffending? Think again***. The Guardian.

6 Ministry of Justice (2019). ***Deaths of Offenders in the Community, England and Wales, 2018/19***.

7 Ministry of Justice (2019). ***Justice Secretary announces new model for probation***.

Renationalisation is a significant moment for the probation system in England and Wales. This could also serve to highlight the potential of FBOs working in communities and with prison leavers. As the quote above illustrates, there is a hope among these organisations that this might lead to greater funding for them, allowing them to resume or continue work they were funded to do prior to *Transforming Rehabilitation*. It may also allow them to increase their staff capacity and expand their work.

Faith Partnership Framework

Until recently, the formal partnership work of probation has generally not extended to faith communities, with faith not acknowledged as a factor in desistance from crime. For example, although prison chaplains and the probation service are essentially working with the same group of individuals, albeit at different stages, there is no regular engagement between the two.

As a result of chaplains highlighting this disconnect, a National Partnership Framework was proposed in 2017 between the probation service and faith communities to address this. This led to a pilot study in 2018, the evaluation of which demonstrated that where faith was assessed as a protective factor, it contributed to an individual's wellbeing and rehabilitation.[8] The pilot was also found to have strengthened the links between prison chaplains and the probation service, and supported the development of links between approved premises and faith groups in the community. Both sides of the partnership – probation and faith groups – identified positive impacts in the form of improved communication and a greater understanding of the other's work. The final Framework was published in 2020, aiming to formalise partnerships and improve liaisons between the prison service, probation staff and faith-based communities, and to consider the spiritual and pastoral needs of those who wish to continue their faith journey through the criminal justice system.[9]

The added value of faith

One of the ways that faith groups are active 'beyond the gate' is through the work of community chaplaincies across the UK. These are generally independent, faith-based voluntary organisations that provide practical and emotional support for those leaving prison, in the form of mentoring and resettlement help.[10] Whilst they initially focussed on providing pastoral care and faith support, community chaplaincies are increasingly involved directly in resettlement, including meeting individuals at the gate on their release as well as offering ongoing services for those on probation in the community. Like prison chaplaincies, community chaplaincies support individuals of all faiths and none, providing pastoral and spiritual care. They are supported by the Community Chaplaincy Association (CCA), an umbrella group who provide resources and share information and ideas between community chaplaincy groups. Many community chaplaincies also provide practical help such as accommodation, basic skills training, and employment support.

8 Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (2021). ***Faith Partnership Framework***.

9 HMPPS (2021). **Faith Partnership Framework**.

10 Dominey, J. and Lowson, E. (2017). ***Community Chaplaincy and Desistance: Seeing a new future***.

The CCA describes its values as those of love, hope, forgiveness, the restoration of relationships, and walking alongside people and these values explicitly underpin the organisation's work and that of the chaplaincies it supports.[11] These values are not exclusively religious, and are practiced in secular organisations too, but the link between these principles of faith and the ethos of the organisation is crucial for the CCA. They note that:

> *"The faith ethos of Community Chaplaincy provides a firm foundation for the work that we do, a motivation for doing it, and ultimately, a profound benefit for those we work with."*[12]

Researchers from the University of Cambridge, in partnership with the CCA, found that service users of community chaplaincies spoke about the added value of such projects in the form of personalised support and hope for the future, as well as positive relationships with staff and volunteers that are "genuine, helpful, reciprocal and caring"; comparing these relationships favourably with those with workers from other agencies.[13] The study explored the history of community chaplaincy, as well as looking ahead to create a better future with stronger partnerships. It found that the relationship between local faith communities and community chaplaincy has potential to develop, as communities can offer their resources and people. In terms of desistance, local faith communities are observed to be a potential source of social capital to support service users moving on and becoming part of a community.[14] A separate study of Catholic chaplaincy in 2016 echoed this, noting that being able to connect with faith communities on release from prison can help prison leavers reintegrate back into community life.[15]

11 Community Chaplaincy Association (2021). ***The Importance of Faith***.

12 Community Chaplaincy Association (2021). ***The Importance of Faith***.

13 Dominey, J. and Lowson, E. (2017). ***Community Chaplaincy…***

14 Dominey, J. and Lowson, E. (2017). ***Community Chaplaincy…,*** p.43.

15 Lemos, G. (2016). ***Belief and Belonging: The spiritual and pastoral role of Catholic chaplains for Catholic prisoners***.

Case study #3: Bringing Hope

Bringing Hope is a charity based in Birmingham that works in prisons and the community, with those involved in serious violence and crime, who have often been categorised as hard-to-reach, problematic or marginalised. Their aim is to address the root causes of social exclusion and crime, and to challenge systems that perpetuate injustice. They do this through providing culturally competent, long-term and resilient support for individuals in the form of pastoral care, family therapy, group work, mentoring and peer support to those who need it most.

Family is at the heart of Bringing Hope, and they work alongside the other significant people in an individual's life by offering family mediation and family therapy. Bringing Hope has a hard-earned reputation for delivery. They work both independently and in partnership with other organisations who have similar goals, for example, public service agencies whose policies have an impact on Bringing Hope's clients. They also work with employers and other agencies to help improve their clients' job opportunities.

The work of Bringing Hope is governed by a Christian ethos, which staff uphold by working with people of all faiths and none. They pride themselves on being culturally competent and able to relate effectively to those from a variety of social contexts and ethnic backgrounds, particularly those of African Caribbean heritage. They have integrity in their organisational culture, and many of their staff team are previous beneficiaries of their work.

Some examples of Bringing Hope's work include:

- Second Chance is a 12-week course delivered in prison, which addresses the thinking, attitudes and behaviours of offenders to enhance their potential to make positive life choices and to reduce the chances of reoffending. Bringing Hope spend months identifying individuals who would benefit from their programme and preparing them through one-to-one time.
- Sisters of Hope is a team of volunteers who provide befriending and mentoring services to support female clients and each other. They work closely with the relatives of men who are at risk of being involved, or already involved, in the criminal justice system. The group aims to reduce the isolation women can often feel around the emotional and practical issues faced by having loved ones involved in the criminal justice system, and support them in their communities.
- Probation Services are provided in partnership with Staffordshire and West Midlands Probation Service, to provide encouragement and wraparound support to young men on probation.
- Training and Partnership work, providing specialist advice and consultancy to local and national government agencies and other sectors in relation to understanding their client group and the principle of giving them a second chance.

Bringing Hope also hosts conferences, workshops and training seminars to raise awareness about the work they do and the services they offer. Their catalogue of services help build the capacities of the faith, voluntary, community organisations, public and private sectors by developing good practice and providing the right tools to engage specific client groups.

This chimes with the findings of our own interviews with FBOs at work beyond the gate. We found that faith communities can provide a community that is seen to act like a family, providing support that goes beyond someone's immediate or material needs. When faith communities actively get involved in the criminal justice system, it can provide a relational approach that is fundamentally different to other programmes. As the director of one FBO told us,

> *"You can physically look after someone but that doesn't give them an identity or a sense of belonging to a family."*

When our participants spoke about the value of FBOs, they often spoke about not what they could do for service users but who they could be instead;

> *"Faith-based organisations treat people as human beings not as human doings. A higher level of intrinsic motivation for change is about people being allowed to have dignity, identity and belonging."*

The ethos of FBOs, grounded in spirituality or religious tradition, is what is seen to differentiate them from other secular rehabilitation organisations which may share the same values of honesty, trust, kindness and genuine openness. This added element of spirituality that shapes the approach to rehabilitation here can lead to a transformation in thinking, and offer service users a sense of hope that things can be different. There are multiple factors that affect successful resettlement, such as housing, training and employment, but one of our participants argued that the most important factor is mindset. They also felt that when the element of faith and spirituality is introduced into someone's resettlement journey, it helps them to think and perceive things differently.

This quality of providing individuals with the hope that things can be different emerged as central to the ethos of one participant organisation in particular, which works with women both in prison and after their release. Staff here acknowledged that, for a lot of their service users, they are part of a revolving door of going to prison, coming out to the same circumstances with no hope or opportunities and no chances given to them to live differently, then getting back into trouble and going back to prison. In response to this, the charity has a core value of promoting that women are not their history, that they do not have to keep perpetuating their past, that there is hope and they can live a different life. One support worker here told us:

> *"The values at the foundation of faith are a good starting point for any intervention, so what we convey to the women we support inside and outside is love, compassion and hope; these values that sit within a Christian framework are invaluable to any intervention."*

As discussed in the Before the Gate chapter, there can be anxiety around faith groups and proselytism or conversion. However, participants generally felt that their organisations represented a safe space and healthy environment for service users, irrespective of their faith. The core message of faith is that there is hope for change and rehabilitation, no matter what somebody has done and this is critical to their work. One worker told us,

> *"I wouldn't be doing this job if I didn't have a faith - when God gives you the grace and will to do it, and the passion, it lights a fire within you."*

In this example and more widely, we heard from staff that they were motivated by their faith in choosing this line of work, as they felt this could provide a more personal input to their work.

Challenges and Covid-19

In discussing the challenges facing the sector, the Covid-19 pandemic was inevitably at the forefront of our research participants when they were interviewed in late 2021 and early 2022. The pandemic brought many new challenges to the sector, but also exacerbated issues that were prevalent before the pandemic. A common theme from participants was that Covid had made it difficult for their organisations to collaborate and engage with each other as they had done before, such as at networking events. Ad hoc development of work therefore became very difficult during the pandemic when staff, volunteers and service users were largely confined to their homes:

> *"Zoom takes away that solidarity and power of togetherness, and I have been worried about isolation and our networks diminishing."*

For umbrella groups like the CCA in particular, this was important because networking and supporting other groups is at the heart of their work. Many organisations that work beyond the gate begin their work inside prisons, engaging prisoners and identifying those who could benefit from their help once they have left prison.

This was also restricted during the pandemic. Like prison chaplains, they were no longer able to run in-person courses or activities and had to be more inventive with their work. For example, one charity handed out cell workbooks and encouragement packs to women in prison, consisting of taster versions of their courses, colouring sheets and goodies. This required collaboration with prison staff, which was helped by their existing reputation and relationships. Over two years since prisons were locked down, things are only just starting to return to pre-Covid regimes.

Aside from the pandemic, the short-term nature of funding was raised as a key challenge by participants. The founder of a charity delivering key services that support ex-offenders and their communities told us there is a volatile nature to the way that services are commissioned. As a small charity, they only receive 12 month funding contracts with government bodies, the nature of which can be challenging for staff:

> *"As this is combined with the niche expertise of staff in the field, staff with that level of experience are unlikely to stay on if the job security is only for 12 months at a time."*

As discussed in the first chapter of this report, *Before the Gate*, we argue that the government must focus on providing FBOs long-term, sustainable support so that they can continue to provide for their communities. Longevity of intervention is a key strength offered by FBOs, but it needs to be matched with longevity of resources.

When we asked participants about advocacy work - organising evidence and taking action such as campaigning and demonstrations to create positive change - the response was often that there was no time or resources to do so. On a similar note, we heard that staff can often become cynical about advocating for their work or speaking at Select Committees, for example, because the turnover of staff in the civil service makes it difficult to achieve change. Overall, FBOs feel like where they make the greatest difference is on the ground, and that their energies are best placed there. However, we note also that the reversal of probation reforms is partly due to their unpopularity in the sector, so it would appear that sector-wide advocacy does have some success.

Faith and rehabilitation

Defining and measuring desistance from crime is complex in nature, and thus there is limited research on the relationship between religion and desistance. However, a review of 270 research studies on the relationship between religion and crime published between 1944 and 2010 found that roughly 90% reported a beneficial impact of religion on crime and delinquency.[16] Only two of these studies reported a negative effect of religion, supporting the view that involvement in religion is a relevant prosocial and protective factor.

16 Johnson, B. R. and Jang, S. J. (2011). 'Crime and religion: Assessing the role of the faith factor' in *Contemporary issues in criminological theory and research: The role of social institution: Papers from the American Society of Criminology 2010 Conference*, pp. 117–150.

Case study #4: The Nehemiah Project

The Nehemiah Project is an independent charity in South London working as a residential drug and alcohol service for vulnerable men with a history of addiction. They provide a CBT and abstinence-based Recovery Programme, and a place for residents to tackle the root causes of addiction within a supportive and non-judgemental environment. Upon completing the programme, residents transfer to one of their move-on houses where they can take part in Nehemiah Works, a programme aimed at preparing them for work and supporting them in all areas related to employment.

The charity has over 25 years of experience in supporting men who have struggled with being in care, homelessness, prison, and marginalisation as a result of addiction. A key aim is to build a recovery foundation in residents so that when they move on, they can deal with unexpected and challenging life events by making informed choices without resorting to old behaviours, and using coping strategies to avoid relapse and recidivism.

> *"At Nehemiah, we believe that anyone can change their life, and this underpins all our work. Our holistic, peer group approach to recovery creates a safe space where men can go through the painful process of reviewing their lives and create a foundation on which to build their future."*

Nehemiah's mission as they state it is:

- To enable vulnerable men who are prison leavers to break free from crime and addiction and to help them rebuild their lives.
- To offer men, once outside the prison walls, the resources to enable them to set new goals and give them hope for the future.
- To assist in their reintegration into the community through the provision of supported housing immediately after release and beyond as well as the provision of rehabilitation programmes.

The impact of the Nehemiah Project's work in rehabilitating men is evident:

- Only 5% of men they have worked with in the last five years have gone on to reoffend, compared with 50% of offenders nationally and 60% in London.
- 74% of men in Nehemiah programmes remain abstinent from substances, compared to 30% of prison leavers nationally.

One resident told us:

> *"HMP used to always be Her Majesty's Prison to me, now it's hope, meaning and purpose!"*

We argue that being involved in a faith community can act as a protective factor after prison for individuals to desist from crime, as discussed by our participants with lived experience. To find a calling where an individual finds purpose is a vital step for desistance to maintain any form of longevity.[17] Whilst in prison, chaplaincy often helps prisoners develop a new purpose through faith and encourages them to continue this and apply it as an important part of their life post-release. Several prison leavers who we interviewed spoke about their newfound directions:

> *"The chaplaincy department gave me faith, shape and purpose."*
>
> *"Meeting God has helped me build my foundation and renewed my mind, my character and my heart."*

Measuring success post-release is subjective, contextual and differs between individuals and organisations. One participant organisation runs a self-empowerment course to help women in prison build confidence. They have found that during this course, lots of women have identified the importance of leaving toxic relationships, where they would often engage in criminal behaviour together, because they have gained confidence in themselves enough not to go back to abusive relationships. This is seen as a marker of success, albeit one that is not routinely measured.

One of our participants was a former chaplain who is now a trustee of a charity for prison leavers and has therefore seen first-hand the impact of how being part of a supportive community helps prisoners on the inside, and knows that it has an effect on their life outside as well:

> *"Through continuing that faith journey, it has a really positive impact on people's lives. If resettlement is done well and includes a supportive faith community, that also has a really positive impact on recidivism rates."*

The literature on desistance often cites the importance of having the social capital offered by networks such as churches or other groups that generate opportunities for prison leavers and help them to build new relationships.[18] Such social capital can be transformative for whole families when a prison leaver has their life changed through engagement with faith-based interventions. From many of the participant organisations, we heard how people who have had their lives transformed often volunteer to visit prisons and charities to share their stories to others, and how some go on to become volunteers and staff too. They also saw intergenerational cycles of success – for example, when a father breaks the reoffending cycle and becomes transformed through faith, he might then bring his whole family to church and his teenage daughter might also be positively impacted. Whole families can engage when an individual has benefited from the work of an organisation.

Anecdotally, one community chaplaincy project said they saw the best results from people who have a faith, despite working with people of all faiths and none:

> *"The wholeness that people achieve is huge because they are really broken and full of pain and having a faith helps them forgive themselves and let go of the past'.*

Offenders are more likely to come from backgrounds of trauma, abuse, substance abuse and poor mental health,[19] and it was felt that having a faith helps them to focus on the path ahead.

17 Maruna, S. and Farrall, S. (2004). Desistance from crime: A theoretical reformulation. *Cologne Journal of Sociology and Social Psychology*. Volume 43. pp. 171-194.

18 Farrall, S. (2004). 'Social capital, probation supervision and desistance from crime' in Maruna, S., and Immarigeon, R. (eds.) *After crime and punishment: Ex-offender reintegration and desistance from crime*. Devon: Willan Publishing. pp. 57-84.

19 Prison Reform Trust (2022). ***Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile***.

The ratio of staff to clients was also highlighted as a key factor that can make a positive difference for people, especially for personalised care, support and successful rehabilitation. One organisation we spoke to had a ratio of 1 staff member to 10 clients of their housing support service. This is a notable contrast to probation staff. In some Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs), staff reported that they had over 100 cases to manage, more than double the level staff suggested was ideal. It was felt that "more than 45 cases was too many life stories to try to absorb".[20] HM Inspectorate of Probation found that when probation practitioners held a caseload of 50 or more, they were less likely to deliver high-quality work that met the general prison aims of rehabilitation and public protection.[21] In 2020, 86% of staff in CRCs were responsible for more than 40 cases.[22]

The *Transforming Rehabilitation* programme has been a key driver in changes to caseloads in recent years – service users managed by probation escalated from just under 40,000 in March 2015, to almost 70,000 in March 2020 – an increase of 74%.[23] Prior to Transforming Rehabilitation, the caseloads for probation trusts had fallen year on year since 2000 - the result of it has left probation services with service users who have more complex needs, more established offending behaviours and often higher risk levels.[24] This increase in service user numbers has not been met by an increase in probation staff numbers, with severe staff shortages resulting in intolerable workloads. In 2018, staff vacancies were at 11% across the probation service, and up to 20% in London.[25] Therefore, it is particularly important for probation to link with FBOs or community chaplaincies who could support probation users or direct them to other services, as probation services are overwhelmed with caseloads that may affect their ability to deliver a high quality service.

Connectivity and partnerships

In our interviews with staff working with prison leavers beyond the gate, we asked about partnerships between groups working together to divert people away from reoffending, and whether these could be improved. There are lots of infrastructure barriers for prison leavers who want a job, for example being near to transport links, finding accommodation, but with good partnership work these barriers can be reduced for the benefit of individuals.

Participants told us that communication is vital for similar organisations working together, for both formal and informal partnerships to share practice and resources. Projects are happy to share staff expertise and pass on successful courses and information to other groups and organisations. However, these partnerships could be improved by having a formal structure to them, for example a forum where Christian organisations working beyond the gate can meet on a regular basis to share information and good practice. We facilitated a roundtable discussion for Christian organisations in this sphere and made this suggestion, with the overwhelming response being that they would want to be a part of this. Feedback suggested this had been tried formally several times without success, so future discussions on this topic must include how to sustain such a forum. While informal partnerships are common, a more structured approach is needed.

20 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (2021). ***Caseloads, workloads and staffing levels in probation services***.

21 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (2021). ***Caseloads, workloads and staffing levels….***

22 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (2020). ***Comprehensive Spending Review representation***.

23 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (2021). ***Caseloads, workloads and staffing levels…..***

24 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (2021). ***Caseloads, workloads and staffing levels….***

25 Public Accounts Committee (2019). ***Transforming rehabilitation: progress review***.

Transforming Rehabilitation is still having an impact on how people view partnerships. Several of our participants noted that they were reluctant to commit to new formal partnerships due to the possibility of policy being likely to change again quickly. However, some mentioned how regional partnerships were a positive development in their work, as others in the same area understood the difficulties in that local community. Partnership work looks different for every organisation. For example, one organisation's resettlement work is primarily practical and pastoral, tailored to meet each individual's needs, and can involve signposting and working in partnership with various different people. Thus, there is need for a shared and integrated responsibility from probation, social services and healthcare services for prisoners both during custody and after release, as one organisation may not be able to support all of their needs. The power of these partnerships is illustrated by the work of the Welcome Directory, outlined in the case study on page 49.

One of our participants was a trustee of the Welcome Directory, who talked about how their vision is to look at the bigger picture, by bringing in prison leavers to faith communities, as it takes meeting people to change attitudes. At present, they are having difficulty recruiting new faith communities onto their directory, although so far, work from senior stakeholders in the field has helped to emphasise the importance of the concept and of the theology behind it. We note that this recruitment is most effective where it directly involves the voices of those with lived experience of the prison system and connects them with churches to talk about the impact of faith.

Case study #5: The Welcome Directory

The Welcome Directory has a simple yet powerful vision: to help faith communities become places where people who leave prison find acceptance, and a place to belong that not only nurtures faith but also offers appropriate practical support. They maintain a diverse directory of faith communities who have declared a commitment to welcoming prison leavers – to date, they have 258 registered communities across 6 major world faiths.

Each self-identified community, with the support and commitment of their faith community leadership, ensures that they have in place:

- People identified who have undergone training to make them aware of the needs of prison leavers.
- Active safeguarding policies.
- Identified local resources that might be helpful to someone making the transition to life in the wider community.
- A link with a local prison.

Their goal is to create a substantial directory with wide geographic coverage and a wide breadth of faith groups, ensuring that every person leaving prison with a faith is made aware of the directory, and ensuring that every resettlement prison has support from a Welcome Directory volunteer.

The Welcome Directory has 5 key organisational values:

- *Human potential*: we value a faith that inspires us to achieve more than we can currently imagine.
- *Belonging*: we value the creation of places of welcome where people leaving prison feel that they belong.
- *Non-judgmental acceptance*: we value the desire to accept both that people make serious mistakes in life, but that change is possible when trust is promoted.
- *Welcome*: we value welcome for all people irrespective of difference or history.
- *Flourishing*: we value safe places where people can flourish as they grow in faith and are offered practical support.

The Welcome Directory also run a Prisons Awareness Course, a three-session course designed to allow faith groups to explore what it means to welcome people leaving prison into their community. These sessions are framed around pre-existing ideas about people in prison, the opportunity to engage with prison leavers and prison chaplains, and exploring the benefits of engagement with faith communities, celebrating the power of connection, support and acceptance.

One staff member told us,

> *"As a former chaplain, I see the impact of how being part of a supportive community helps prisoners on the inside, and I know that it has an effect on their life outside as well. Through continuing that faith journey, it has a really positive impact on people's lives and if resettlement is done well and includes a supportive faith community, that also has a really positive impact on recidivism rates'.*

We recommend that bishops and faith leaders should continue promoting resources like the Welcome Directory to their communities and encouraging them to take part in their Prisons Awareness course. This would also present a valuable opportunity for the Church to improve their procedures for welcoming prison leavers and engaging those going through rehabilitation journeys. Rt Rev James Langstaff, the former Bishop to Prisons, wrote that

> *"Through growing local links with prisons, victims services and other organisations, churches can serve God, helping some of the most vulnerable in our communities".*[26]

Comments such as this show the importance of the church working collaboratively with organisations with similar missions. By working in partnership with the probation service, the Church can improve its safeguarding policies and put support in place for those leaving prison, ensuring that there is a safe space for them to worship and be part of a faith community. Although this is already happening in several churches, there is no consistent approach or format on how to do so. As noted in our recommendations, we suggest training those in local churches and the community who want to support FBOs and prison leavers in practical ways. These trained individuals could be the link between their church and the probation service, to provide greater consistency in these partnerships.

Acknowledging faith as a protective factor in resettlement and desistance from crime is a significant development for the prison and probation service, and demonstrates their commitment to inclusivity and meeting the needs of those within their care. This recent work from probation also presents an opportune time for churches and faith groups to engage more with probation and support the welcoming and safe integration back into the community of those released from prison.

26 Butcher, C. (2018). *40 Stories of Hope: How faith has changed prisoners' lives*. Farnham: CWR Press, p.1