



EVALUATION OF THE CARD PORCH PROJECT

FINAL REPORT

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This report was commissioned by the CARD PORCH Project, a partnership project of Exeter Community Initiatives (ECI), a local social inclusion charity based in Exeter. The report was written by Huw Vasey and Kim Ward, of the Department of Geography, School of Geography, Archaeology and Earth Resources, University of Exeter. The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of ECI, the CARD PORCH Project or other partners.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Executive Summary.....	3
1 Introduction.....	7
Technical Summary.....	9
Glossary.....	10
2 Case Studies.....	11
Housing Support service	11
Mentoring service.....	28
Experiences of Mentors.....	39
3 Commentary.....	47
4 Concluding Remarks.....	57
References.....	59
Appendix A.....	60

Executive Summary:

The CARD PORCH project was formed from the merger of two separate projects providing housing and mentoring support to promote the resettlement of prolific and other persistent offenders. The overall purpose is to promote independence, reduce re-offending and contribute to safer communities. During 2007/8 the Project provided housing support to 64 clients and assisted 80 clients through its mentoring scheme (Exeter Community Initiatives 2008). In October 2008, an independent research team from the University of Exeter was commissioned to provide an external evaluation of the combined CARD PORCH Project. The research utilises a longitudinal approach, with individual clients, staff and mentors interviewed at the start of the research and then re-interviewed 6 months later to gauge the progress. The executive summary highlights the main findings to arise from this process and is divided into three sections, dealing in turn with issues relevant to each element of the project and, finally, focusing on factors concerning the project as a whole.

Mentoring:

- All clients interviewed reported positive experiences of the mentoring service of CARD PORCH and felt engaging with the project had added some degree of stability to their life and provided them with an avenue of support that was not offered elsewhere.

- All the CARD PORCH Mentors interviewed were motivated and committed to the project. They felt they were generally well supported by project staff and felt happy and able to carry out their roles. Retention and recruitment appear not to be a significant concern at present.

- Clients and Mentors alike stressed the importance of the flexibility inherent in the mentoring service of CARD PORCH project. Additionally, many from both groups felt that the mentoring service was vital because it was seen as not being 'part of the system', and this allowed for the development of close and trusting Mentoring relationships.

- However, there is a need for the mentoring service to retain a balance between effective record keeping and a flexible and immediate approach to client welfare. The current system of documenting Mentoring sessions does not appear to fully meet the needs of Mentors and was not highly regarded by clients. It is also questionable whether the current system is fully functional for the purposes of reviewing cases and evaluating the development of mentoring relationships. Therefore, it may be worth considering altering the current system of documenting and recording Mentoring sessions in line with the needs of all groups involved.

- The mentoring service maintains an excellent working relationship with a number of key referral agencies, which benefit from its flexibility to provide support and assistance to a variety of clients. However it may prove useful to offer clear routes to referrals to other agencies for both clients and volunteers, so as to further increase awareness of what resources are currently available at other organisations in the area.

Housing Support:

- Four of the five CARD PORCH housing support clients interviewed during this evaluation are residing in suitable, stable accommodation, sourced and supported by the housing support service of the CARD PORCH project.

- All clients interviewed had a positive experience with the housing support service of CARD PORCH, recognising that it offered valuable support to them on both a practical (housing, work-based training and financial management training) and emotional level during their resettlement.

- In order to ensure the long-lasting and durable resettlement of clients, and the long-term sustainability of the project, the housing support service may wish to consider encompassing a broader accommodation portfolio to fit a range of different clients and different client needs.

The CARD PORCH Project:

- Many respondents felt that the CARD PORCH project provided a unique service which directly led to sustained positive outcomes when clients were motivationally ready to take advantage of the support provided.
- Whilst both the mentoring and housing support services continue to do excellent work in their areas of responsibility, there appeared to be relatively limited movement between the two parts of the project. Whilst this may indicate a certain overlap in the services provided, it may also be useful to consider the effectiveness of referring clients within the service and of enhanced cooperation in providing support for all clients.
- It is not entirely clear what the overall aims and objectives of the mentoring element of the combined CARD PORCH project are. Clarification of this would help to elucidate the role that the mentoring service plays in the wider CARD PORCH programme and aid future service delivery planning.
- The housing support service works with prolific offenders as part of the Priority and Prolific Offender Unit (PPOU). This narrows their client base significantly and usually prevents referral of clients from the mentoring service to the other part of the project. This creates the potential for a tiered system of housing eligibility which may encourage a sense of inequity. Furthermore, this may provide a structural impediment to the effective integration of the combined project.

- Although not yet fully integrated, the CARD PORCH project provides a valuable avenue of support for offenders, displaying an open, supportive environment within which clients are offered a variety of practical and emotional services to assist their effective and sustainable resettlement.

1 INTRODUCTION

Background to the Project:

The CARD PORCH Project was formed from the merger of two separate projects in December 2007 in order to provide housing and mentoring support to promote the resettlement of prolific and other persistent offenders. The stated aim of the combined project is to, 'promote effective resettlement for high risk and vulnerable offenders in order to reduce re-offending.' (CARD PORCH 2007). This aim is met through the two constituent parts of the Project, the Closing A Revolving Door (CARD) mentoring scheme, and the Prolific Offenders Resettlement through Co-ordinated Housing (PORCH) scheme.

The CARD project was launched in 2003 as an Exeter Community Initiatives¹ (ECI) venture, in order to provide a mentoring support service for offenders with a pattern of re-offending and failed community resettlement in Exeter. The PORCH Project was launched, following a six-month developmental period, as a pilot project in the summer of 2006. It aimed to create a 'floating support service' to deal more effectively with prolific offenders in Exeter, East and Mid Devon, who were supervised by the Prolific and other Priority Offenders Unit (PPOU) in Exeter. The pilot project was run as a partnership project of ECI, with the support of Exeter City Council, the National Probation Service, HM Prison Service, Devon Partnership NHS Trust and Devon and Cornwall Constabulary. The two services were incorporated in October 2007, following the recommendations of the Project Committee earlier that year. The combined service seeks to build on the successes of both projects within a single, integrated, framework.

The project continues to focus on the provision of housing and related support² in order to reduce the number and seriousness of crimes committed by prolific offenders. Case management is carried out by two members of staff, a Housing Co-ordinator and a Housing Worker. During 2007/8, the Project provided housing support to 64 clients (Exeter Community Initiatives 2008). The mentoring scheme, meanwhile, provides support through a Mentoring Co-ordinator working as an initial caseworker, as well as a team of trained volunteer Mentors. 80 clients were supported through this scheme in 2007/8 (ibid).

Aims of the Research:

In October 2008, a research team from the University of Exeter was commissioned to provide an external evaluation of the combined CARD PORCH Project. The research utilises a longitudinal approach, with individual clients, staff and Mentors interviewed at

¹ An Exeter-based social inclusion and community development charity.

² At present only those prolific offenders supervised by the Exeter PPOU are eligible for support from the housing element of the project.

the start of the research and then re-interviewed 6 months later to gauge progress. The research has three objectives:

1. To examine the **role of mentors** in a post offending support system;
2. To evaluate the **effectiveness of support projects on ex-offender re-integration**, using the CARD PORCH project as an example of a post-offending mentoring service; and
3. To explore the effectiveness of a **longitudinal research methodology** that uses snapshot interview techniques to assess the efficiency of support projects such as CARD PORCH.

The research also seeks to build on a previous baseline evaluation project (Southern et al. 2008), undertaken with regards to the PORCH Project, to provide information in regards to the past and future development of the integrated CARD PORCH Project.

Structure of the Report:

This report provides an evaluation of the CARD PORCH Project based on two rounds of interviews with clients and staff, and a single set of interviews with volunteer Mentors. Parts 1 and 2 provide a contextual background to the report; Part 1 outlining the background of the CARD PORCH Project and the commissioning of the research and providing a technical summary of methods and terminology used. Part 2 includes a summary of the case studies, focusing on clients of the mentoring and housing support parts of the Project, and the views of the staff involved. Part 3 provides a commentary on the findings of the research, whilst Part 4 covers our concluding remarks and a summary of issues to be considered.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

Methods:

The research was conducted primarily through the use of in-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews. Interviews were designed to take between 45 minutes and one hour to complete, and all interviews were conducted by the report authors at the offices of the CARD PORCH Project at 14 York Road, Exeter, with the exception of a sole interview at HMP Channings Wood. Participants were asked a series of questions regarding their experiences of the CARD PORCH Project and the ways, if any, they felt it could be improved. The initial round of interviews was conducted with 5 clients of the Project and 4 members of staff. The second round consisted of re-interviewing these individuals as well as speaking to 3 further clients and 3 volunteer Mentors involved in the CARD scheme.

Participants were recruited through ECI and were asked whether they wished to participate in the research. All interviewees were provided with a statement on consent and confidentiality by the researchers and were able to withdraw their consent at any time. Participation in either the mentoring or housing support schemes was not reliant on their co-operation with the research and involvement was on an 'opt-in' basis only.

Ethical principles are concerned with the rights, dignity and welfare of participants and other stakeholders in research. To this end, this research has been conducted after assessment and approval by the Department of Geography Ethics Committee, University of Exeter. A copy of the statement on consent and confidentiality orally provided to all interviewees is included in Appendix A.

GLOSSARY

CARD	Closing a Revolving Door
DCPA	Devon and Cornwall Probation Area
ECI	Exeter Community Initiatives
ENDAS	Exeter and North Devon Addiction Service
PORCH	Prolific Offenders Resettlement through Co-ordinated Housing
PPO	Prolific and other Priority Offender
PPOU	Prolific and other Priority Offender Unit
WCTS	West Country Training Services

2 CASE STUDIES:

The purpose of these case studies was to gain a deeper understanding of both the impacts and the working practices of CARD PORCH in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the project as a whole. To this end, initial interviews were carried out with five project clients – two who were solely involved with the mentoring scheme, two who were solely involved with the housing support scheme, and one who had been previously involved with housing support scheme but was now solely engaging with the mentoring project³. Clients available to participate were re-interviewed during the second round of the project, as were a further three clients who had been unavailable during the initial research period. The client interview data detailed in this report also utilises background information contained within case notes. Additional interviews were conducted with all four members of staff employed by the combined project during both research periods. Volunteer Mentors were interviewed only during the second research period. All initial interviews were conducted in October and November 2008. A second round of interviews took place during May 2009.

The report is arranged so that interview data is detailed in regards to each individual client case study. These are divided into separate discussions of the mentoring and housing support elements of the project, with a further section covering the views of volunteer Mentors and a discussion regarding the CARD PORCH Project as a whole.

2.1 HOUSING SUPPORT SERVICE:

CLIENT ONE:

History:

Client One is a forty year old male with no dependents. He was an entrenched heroin user with a long history of drug use. His history of criminal offences includes theft, a Bail Act offence and driving without insurance. He has served a number of custodial sentences and was identified as a prolific offender before joining the housing support scheme. After the first round of interviews in November 2008 Client One could not be re-contacted.

Support received:

Client One has received support in a number of areas since engaging with the housing support service. He has received a range of practical support from the team including assistance in making successful applications, for council housing (in a suitable area),

³ Additionally, a further interview was sought with a housing support client but, due to their personal circumstances, the interview couldn't be conducted in the relevant timescale.

Housing Benefits and community care grants among others – all applications which enabled a fluid transition from prison to resettlement. The client has stated that he would not have felt informed or competent enough to make such successful applications on his own.

Interviewer: *So in what way have PORCH⁴ supported you?*

Client One: *I mean you go and see the council and they just fob you off...whereas they [PORCH] know the right questions to ask, sort of what buttons to push.*

Client One was also supported by the housing support team on an emotional level. Staff were able to provide him with a stable professional relationship built on trust and understanding.

Interviewer: *So you use them instead of probation?*

Client One: *There are other things I can talk to them about and just feel more comfortable sitting down and talking to them than I would do talking to probation.*

Impact of support:

In the case of Client One, the housing support service has had a significant impact on the clients housing stability. The client has a volatile housing history which includes long spells of sofa-surfing punctuated by time spent in and out of custody. The impact of support given by the housing support team has had a notable impact on Client One's housing circumstances; staff were able to secure a council flat for the client through East Devon District Council and, following placement in council accommodation, sustained practical support from the housing support staff – with Housing Benefit and other related paperwork – have allowed him to maintain a stable residence in his flat:

Housing support staff member: *He didn't hand in his housing benefit forms so we had a lot of work to do to make sure that his housing benefits were up and running and that the arrears were sorted.*

⁴ The housing support element of the combined CARD PORCH project is still popularly known as PORCH (its previous title). Similarly, the mentoring side of the project is widely referred to as CARD. To avoid confusing those interviewed, we retained these terms in all the interviews.

Client One has also benefited from the suitability of his housing placement by the housing support team – away from the area where much of his offending occurred. This distance has had a positive impact on the success of his resettlement:

Interviewer: *Are you finding that better being separated from...*

Client One: *Yeah, I mean it works it sort of makes it a lot easier sort of controlling myself as well and I can get away from the people I was mixing with.*

Interviews with both the housing support staff and client suggest that although Client One had a ‘rocky start’ after being initially housed, the support given by housing support team was central to his stable resettlement.

Perceptions of the project:

At the time of the first interview Client One was satisfied with the housing support service and had a very positive perception of the project. In particular, he made positive comments about the working relationship formed with staff and how their determination to work with him to improve his circumstances was much appreciated. One suggestion made by the client was that the housing support service had outposts in the area in which some clients were housed. This would have made it easier to maintain contact with the housing support team during the client’s resettlement. Now he has found housing stability through the project he looks to them to lend moral support as he learns to take responsibility for himself.

Interviewer: *So what’s the next step for you?*

Client One: *It’s more moral support than anything else that I need now, anything that I want to do now is really in my own hands.*

Summary

Client One has made a significant improvement since his engagement with the housing support project. From an entrenched heroin addiction and passing in and out of custody for over a decade, he has gained stable, suitable accommodation distant enough from previous locations to maintain some sense of balance. The engagement with the housing support service has been a vital arm of support for the client during this time.

Although he has dabbled in heroin since working with the project, he has retained his accommodation and his PPO order has finished. He is also currently working part time and is enrolled onto a brick laying course. Despite this progress, he continues to work with the housing support team. In his own words:

Client One: *Theoretically I can say 'Cheerio' and I don't actually need to come and see you anymore and that would be it. But I'd be cutting my own throat if I did really.*

CLIENT TWO:

History:

Client Two is a thirty three year old male with a long criminal history including theft, shoplifting and theft of a vehicle. A longstanding heroin addiction has acted as a trigger of the offending behaviour - Client Two has been a heroin addict for approximately fifteen years. It has also been noted in the client's case file that he has a relatively low intellectual ability and suffers from mental health problems. Accompanying these problems, Client Two has had an unstable housing history and previously had no qualifications. Yet after engagement with the housing support team, he is in stable accommodation, participating in work-based training and has aspirations for a future in employment.

Support received:

The housing support service has supported Client Two both practically and emotionally from the point of engagement. In terms of housing, the project has supported him in finding and sustaining accommodation. The former has been an evolving process, with the client initially moved into Bed and Breakfast accommodation, then on to Oakfield's - accommodation for high-risk offenders - and finally into a bed-sit in a shared house. This is partly representative of the client's positive progress as well as the housing support team trying to find the best accommodation to fit his needs. The project has been vital in helping the client to sustain his accommodation; this support has been of particular importance due to the client's vulnerability and low intellectual ability. For example:

Housing support staff member: *He was in Oakfield's and in the move on he was getting a lot of people coming around to the property and sort of bullying him to let them in and sort of causing a lot of problems at the property which the neighbours were reporting. So we arranged a three way meeting with Oakfields accommodation providers to try and manage that situation and they were on the verge of giving [Client] his notice.*

This action by the housing support team allowed the client to keep his place in Oakfields as well as permission to move back into the main hostel where he felt safer. This is an

example of the practical mediation with partner agencies that the housing support team are able to use to support the needs of clients. The project has also supported the client with learning to drive. This has involved identifying avenues of funding which he can draw on to subsidize his lessons and tests and signposting him to West Country Training Services (WCTS). They have also helped him with financial/budget management. In addition, the housing support team have also lent the client a supportive ear and provided a firm support base for him to build from.

This client has continued to receive support from the project during the six month period between interviews. The project continues to help stabilise his accommodation and the Client can be seen as an example of how a progression can be made in accommodation at each stage of the rehabilitation and resettlement process. He was initially placed in bed and breakfast accommodation; a hostel, a shared house, and the housing support team have just successfully sourced a flat so he can live independently. These housing transitions are representative of each phase of successful resettlement and, by working closely with the service, the client has made extremely positive progress. The housing support service has been, and continues to be, at the forefront of his housing stability. The project have sourced his new independent flat and sorted out of paperwork involved. The project has also paid for the deposit and first months rent with instruction that the Client pay this back gradually.

The housing support service also continues to support the client, in terms of work-based training. Since interviewing in November, the client has passed his driving test and fork truck license- important hurdles to employment that he wanted to tackle when we last spoke six months ago. This has been done very much with the close support of the service, who booked lessons and a test for the client. These qualifications will significantly increase his chances of gaining employment.

Impact of support:

The evidence suggests that the Client's housing situation has become significantly more stable since engaging with the project due, in part, to support from the service in helping him to sustain accommodation. As a staff member notes:

Housing support staff member: *He wouldn't have been able to manage that [sustaining accommodation] on his own.*

Signposting of the client to other agencies such as WCTS, as well as support and guidance in organising driving lessons, have giving the client something to aim for, as well as actually helping him gain his fork lift truck licence and passing his driving theory test. Although it is noted that throughout his engagement with the project the client has occasionally returned to heroin use, the positive impact of the project on the client cannot be dismissed. Evidence suggests that with this particular client, the support given, both practical and emotional and by 'just being there', is essential to his progress.

Six months on from the initial interview, the project continues to have a positive impact of the client's resettlement. It is certain that without this support and guidance, the client would have found it a great deal harder to find, and hold on to, suitable accommodation.

Interviewer: *Is it practical things you tend to talk to them [the housing support team] about?*

Client Two: *They help with any paper work or funding or anything, any sort of help that I need really, they're always there like. Anything I get stuck on they'll help me with, paper work and they're good at it.*

This type of practical support has proved vital to the client and since having an avenue through which paperwork, functional questions and other queries can be channelled, the client has succeeded in gaining independent housing and a number of qualifications to ease him in to work.

Perceptions of the project:

Although the initial interview with Client Two proved to be cursory and is not in-depth enough to yield full analysis, it is clear that a good relationship developed between him and the housing support team.

Interviewer: *Tell me a little bit about the way they are with you and the way you are with them?*

Client Two: *They're good as gold like, they'll help me with anything so. They'll help with anything.*

He also made positive reference to the scheme throughout the interview via a variety references such as WCTS and securing driving lessons and had a positive view of the scheme as a whole.

Client Two: *I know they help quite a lot of people anyway.*

Whilst it was clear that the client had a positive perception of the project after the initial interview in November, the last six months appear to be a period of transition for the client, and with the help of the housing support service, the client has made measurable change in a number of areas of his life. The client notes that the project has been a vital support for him during this period.

Interviewer: *Do you feel like things are developing in the right way?*

Client: *Yeah everything is going good and in the right way. PORCH have helped me as much as they could. Without their help I would have been up Shit Street if you know what I mean. Yeah, without a paddle.*

Summary:

Client Two has experienced a positive evolution in housing, skills training and general stability since engaging with the project. Furthermore, he has progressively been placed in accommodation to suit his needs and has been supported by the housing support service to help sustain his residence in the long term. The client has not re-offended since engagement but has not remained drug free, occasionally slipping back into heroin use. However, Client Two has been given a supporting arm by the project and has made considerable progress thanks to their assistance in many aspects of his life. There is evidence to suggest that without the support from the project, his resettlement would have been less successful. It is clear after the second round of interviews that the client has evolved immensely since his engagement with the project. His housing stability has developed positively to the point where he is currently in the process of moving into his own flat. He has also progressed measurably in his work-based training.

Interviewer: *Do you think you would have been able to achieve these things without them?*

Client: *No not really. They help, it has been loads better for me that they have been here to help me because I would have been stuffed and I don't think I would have been getting on as well without them.*

With support from the housing support service and other agencies he is working with (ENDAS, WCTS) he has made considerable progress in many aspects of his life. It should be noted that the housing support service has been a fundamental part of this progress.

The following three case studies reflect interviews with clients (Clients Three – Five) who joined the evaluation process during the second round of interviews. For this reason, evaluation of the project through their resettlement does not, unlike clients One, Two and Five, evolve across a six month period.

CLIENT THREE:

History:

Client Three was an entrenched heroin user with a long history of drug use before joining the project. He was referred to the project by probation after experiencing problems with his current landlord. Since joining the project his housing and financial situation has been greatly improved.

Support received:

This client had been with the project for just over two months at the time of interview. During this time the client has received much practical support from the housing support team, for example receiving information and advice on financial management and being offered practical support in dealing with the landlord. The service has also been of assistance in regards to the client's relationship with the council, as the client had misunderstood the council tax system and was in council tax arrears when first engaging with the housing support service.

Interviewer: *Tell me a little bit about what they have done*

Client Three: *Apart from sorting out my landlord, they sorted me out with my debts because I got behind with my council tax which I didn't realise I had to pay because I'm on the social*

The housing support team are also working closely with the client to find him more suitable accommodation. This is an ongoing process where the client will be moved into a supported property, when available, from which he will go on to apply for council housing, with assistance from the service. The project is not only supporting him in this transition but is acting as a vital channel through which these changes can be made.

The client noted that the housing support team were available for him to lean on in terms of emotional support but stated that he also uses probation in that sense.

Client Three: *If I need to talk she's always there on the end of the phone when I need to talk to her but I've also got probation for that as well. I've known [my Probation Officer] for about ten years now*

Impact of support

The impact on the Client's life after receiving support from the project has been substantial. He now feels confident that his accommodation is secure and, more importantly, that he is not being taken advantage of by his landlord who had been overcharging him rent – adding to the clients previous level of general discomfort.

Client Three: *It's been a big help, it's been a sort of weight lifted off my shoulders because I was worrying because I knew that my landlord was taking the Mick out of me*

The project was also a vital instigator in the client's reengagement with the council regarding council tax and has supported him in successfully managing his debts.

Client Three: *I didn't know the right way to go about it because I'm useless at things like that.*

The client also stated the support has had a greater impact on his life practically and emotionally because of the collective knowledge of the staff and being aware that there will always be someone around who knows his story:

Interviewer: *What generally is your relationship like with the PORCH staff?*

Client Three: *Oh, brilliant, I mean there're all there you know. If I can't speak to one then there's always someone there I can talk to and that does come in handy because they all know what's going on ... it's not like I have to go through it all again and everything.*

Perceptions of the project:

Client Three's perception of the project was, without doubt, a very positive one. This was secured for him by the caring and determined effort of the staff to aid him with issues that he may bring to them:

Client Three: *She goes out of her way, she do go out of the way to help*

He has also recommended the project to an associate who is facing similar problems with their accommodation and landlord. Though, as the project only works with prolific offenders this may not be as helpful. Although this instance does show the confidence that users have in the service.

Client Three: *I said to him 'get in contact with PORCH'*

Importantly, the client also made reference to the importance of his own motivational readiness prior to engaging with the project; he felt that he would only be able to use the full support of the project if he was ready to support himself. He was referred to the housing support service by his Probation Officer after getting clean and, once emotionally ready to utilise it, the guidance of the housing support team has made a significant difference to his resettlement and rehabilitation:

Interviewer: *do you think if you had been in touch with them a year ago when you were still using it would have had the same impact?*

Client Three: *Not at all, not at all because I don't think I would have been interested, just using and that, that's the sort of thing it does to you, it blocks all of your emotions and you know anything like that out of the way. That's why I knew when [probation officer] mentioned it, I thought yeah it would be a good idea because now I'm clean and I know what I want, and it [the housing support service] just gave me everything I needed*

Summary:

Engagement with the project has already had a significant, positive impact on the client's finances, accommodation and state of mind. When joining the project he was

being over charged for his accommodation, unhappy with the landlord, in council tax arrears and felt helpless to sort out these problems alone. With the help and support of the housing support service, and other agencies working closely with the project, the client has now had his rent lowered and is waiting to be housed in a more suitable residence, has engaged with the council regarding council tax (and is now paying a manageable sum to them fortnightly) and is engaging in work-based training.

CLIENT FOUR:

History:

Client Four is a thirty year old male with a long history of criminal offences in the Devon area. His file also indicated a long history of drug use. He has served a number of custodial sentences and was identified as a prolific offender and began to engage with the project whilst serving the last few months of a custodial sentence. He has been suitably accommodated since joining the project and was supported by the housing support team in this and a number of other areas.

Support received:

The Client began his engagement with the project whilst serving a custodial sentence at Dartmoor Prison. This contact was organised in the first instance by probation and a member of the housing support staff visited the client in prison before his release in February this year. A relationship was established during this time and client goals were put into place which could be achieved upon release. This undoubtedly aided his positive and determined attitude in the transition from prison to the community. In terms of practical support, the housing support team gave the client significant assistance upon release, sourcing and placing the client in suitable accommodation, arranging a bank account, assisting in the receiving of housing benefit and job seekers allowance and organising training and job opportunities. For this client, the service was the vital agency in arranging and supporting each of these practicalities. The team also assisted the client in activities such as going to the gym, dropping him off at the site to actively encourage this aspect of rehabilitation and bought essential food items for him upon release.

Impact of support:

Since being released from prison in February the client's engagement with the project has had a significant impact upon his life. For example, the client's Job Seekers Allowance was not processed properly two weeks in a row. His key worker then helped to set up his benefits and a bank account so that this would not happen again – working at weekends to make sure the allowance got through to the client. This made a vast difference to client's positive activities during the first few weeks of re-settlement.

Client Four: *She [housing support staff member] said 'I don't want to see you all weekend with no money' because if I got no money she doesn't want me to think I would slip back into my old ways. Do you know what I mean, burgling*

Interviewer: *Do you think you would slip back into your old ways if that happened?*

Client Four: *There's a good chance I would have yeah*

Using this case as an example, the support the service offers can be viewed as, an often vital, element in the successful resettlement of ex-offenders into the community and into a stabilised way of life. The Client has also benefited from his housing placement by the team away from the central area of the city where he was well known for his criminal activity. After going into Bed and Breakfast accommodation in the city centre for the first few nights after his release, the client was uncomfortable with the location and asked to be moved as soon as possible; organised by the team, this move then took place within a matters of days:

Client Four: *Every time I left the B&B I'd walk up the road and bump into people who I'd sell it [drugs] to, or bump into people that I was associated with... I told PORCH this and I said 'I can't handle that' and they got me moved*

Although the initial placement was not appropriate for this client, when this became apparent, the team acted quickly with the resources they had, to accommodate him in a place more suitable for his rehabilitation. This has made a definitive impact on the positive success of his resettlement. Additionally, the housing support service has also been involved in employment projects with the client, finding the necessary contacts for the client's job of choice on release.

Client Four: *I've been trying to work towards working on the Railways and you have to have a sponsor because of the Special License job.*

Interview: *Okay*

Client Four: *[Housing support staff member] been digging round for weeks and weeks about it now she's finally got a sponsor and she's got one coming down*

The client was extremely hopeful and positive about this avenue of work (due to the obligatory drug testing) and was extremely grateful to the housing support team for their persistence in finding a sponsor. It became obvious during the interview that this employment opportunity is a positive source of aspiration which has aided his resettlement.

Perceptions of the project:

The client has experienced an extremely positive association with the project and his perceptions of the service confirm this. For him, the project has offered numerous examples of affirmative practical support and a non-judgmental atmosphere as a foundation to rebuild his life upon.

Client Four: *They've encouraged me and they've helped me a lot*

And:

Client Four: *If I ever come into any money I'd definitely donate money to fund it and things like it because it is well worth it, do you know what I mean, they done me proud.*

Summary:

This client has tackled his prolific offending behaviour and the backbone of his support network in this tough task has been the project. His stable housing situation, supported by the housing support service, is now suitable and, he believes, distant enough from problems of the past to make positive progression into a new life. There are also numerous examples of the practical support in terms of paperwork and official procedures where the housing support service has been critical. He has been in touch with specific employment programmes, arranged through the project, which he is hopeful will give him the financial stability he needs in the long term. The client has not re-offended since release from prison and has remained drug free in this time. Evidence from the client interview suggests that without the support from the housing support team, his resettlement and rehabilitation would have been a less smooth and positive experience.

Client FIVE:

History:

Client Five is a nineteen year old male. He suffers from depression and alcohol dependency and joined the project as a prolific offender last year. During the process of this evaluation, the client has spent a number of periods sporadically in and out of custody and is currently waiting to be placed in suitable accommodation.

Support received:

The client has been provided with support from the project for approximately nine months. However during this time he has been in and out of prison six times and has proved a difficult case to stabilise in terms of accommodation and emotional support.

Over this time he has had secured accommodation in Oakfield's, a Bed and Breakfast, and Ashleigh House – a Bristol hostel – but, due to the clients volatile behaviour, his accommodation was compromised at each stage. The housing support team are currently trying to source suitable housing for him.

During his engagement with the project, the housing support team have assisted him in application for appropriate benefits - as the client felt embarrassed talking over the phone to the benefit agencies and suffers from low self confidence. The service also supported the client with his depression, ensuring doctor's appointments were made and met, and the appropriate medication was given. These are a few examples of the broad assistance the project offer to stabilise clients as appropriate.

Interviewer: *Have you found the service useful? If you could tell me why?*

Client Five: *Because obviously I was homeless before and they put a roof over my head, I had no money and then they helped me get my money and I had no pills for my depression so they took me up to the doctors and come with me and that, supported me on the way.*

Impact of support:

Despite his chaotic behaviour, the support the client receives from the project is of fundamental importance to his current stability. The client commented that his commitment to complete his probation license (which was successfully completed two days after this interview took place) is largely fuelled by his desire and to find stable independent accommodation, in this case by working with the housing support service.

Interviewer: *Have you completed it [probation license] before?*

Client Five: *I've never completed it; I've always gone back in.*

Interviewer: *So you're feeling really positive at the minute?*

Client Five: *It's the longest I've stayed out of prison so...*

Interviewer: *Do you think PORCH have helped or is that mainly down to you?"*

Client Five: *PORCH. They deserve it. Like I've said like they've said they're going to try and house me and on my own independency.*

Interviewer: *And that [housing] is really what's making you focus on it*

Client Five: *Yeah*

It became apparent during the interview and analysis stage that gaining his own independent housing, not within a hostel, was part of the driving force behind the

Client's completion of his probation licence. During this three month period, housing support staff supported the client practically and emotionally, but perhaps more importantly, openly discussed his housing options with him, giving him hope that he will be accommodated in suitable housing in the near future, if his behaviour was appropriate.

Perceptions of the project:

The Client has positive perceptions of the project, but perhaps due to his chaotic lifestyle is not ready to accept all the support they may offer. Although during the interview he rarely discussed the emotional support that he is given, he does note his relationship with them is open and helpful.

Interviewer: *How do you find them [the housing support team]?*

Client Five: *I find them alright yeah*

Interviewer: *You don't feel like they're judgemental or...*

Client Five: *No never. They always say we can't force you to do anything but it would be good if you could do this.*

The client does not believe that he is ready to fully rehabilitate but perceives the housing support service as an important avenue and contact when he is.

Client Five: *I'm not ready to stop drinking [...] but I know they're there if I need them.*

Summary:

The Client has returned to prison a number of times during his engagement with the project but has stabilised somewhat in the last three months. This is, in part, reflective of his positive working relationship with the housing support team, who are supporting him on many levels in pursuit of suitable accommodation.

CLIENT SIX:

History:

Client Six is a thirty one year old male who had been involved with the project for approximately one year at the time of initial interview. He had just finished a three and a half year custodial sentence, has been in and out of custody over the last ten years and was identified as a prolific offender before becoming involved with the project. His

file indicates a history of drug use and he was a heroin user upon joining the project. However, he is residing in stable accommodation and currently retains a full time job.

Support received:

Client Six had been provided with support from the project since November 2007. This support has declined in recent months due to his successful resettlement and drug rehabilitation. The support provided during his engagement with the scheme included securing accommodation, receiving support with self-budgeting and financial management as well as help in obtaining skills training (relating to education and employment). In conjunction with these practical aspects of support, Client Six also discussed the importance of the emotional support given to him by members of the housing support team. Before joining the scheme he had experienced periods of housing instability and was staying in Prospects, a hostel working with drug users, shortly after release from prison. It was during this time that he became engaged with a staff member from the housing support team and subsequently joined the project.

Client Six also received support from the CARD PORCH mentoring scheme after a referral from the housing support team. He was mentored by a worker with the mentoring project. Mentoring support was provided on a weekly basis by a trained volunteer⁵.

Since the initial round of interviews in November, the client has moved away from the housing support arm of the project – as he has successfully maintained a full time job and stable accommodation since that time. Although still in touch with the team through occasional personal contact, he has successfully exited the project.

Client Six: I still live in the property what I was in before so I'm supported from a distance but really it's my, it's become my time to stand on my own two feet with the knowledge that they're in the background if I need it.

Impact of support:

The staff found accommodation for the beneficiary in a short time frame.

Client Six: It was quite quick from the first time I saw them from them actually finding me accommodation; it wasn't long in between there.

The housing support team not only found accommodation quickly but also a place which was suitable to the beneficiaries' wants and needs.

⁵ This aspect of Client Six's involvement with the CARD PORCH Project is detailed in the following section of the report.

Client Six: *Being in a hostel I knew that it probably wasn't the right place for me.*

The client was housed in a property owned by a landlord with close ties to the project. This enabled him to resettle in a markedly different and more stable environment than that of a hostel. From these results it is clear that support from the project has been central to the stable housing of Client Six. In addition to this, the housing support team also provided assistance in other key areas from training and skills to providing basic lessons in budget management which has assisted in his development and financial independence in the longer term.

After the six month reassessment, it should be noted that the support provided by the project has been essential in the successful resettlement and rehabilitation of the client.

Client Six: *What they've enabled me to do now is enabled me to live independently and I've probably, the thing like you said, I think it shows how far I've come, that I don't need them anymore and that success is really down to the work they put in and did with me in the early days.*

Perceptions of the project:

Client Six found engagement with the project to be a very positive experience from the offset and quickly developed a good relationship with the staff member working with him.

Interviewer: *Did you feel that you understood what you were getting involved with [the housing support scheme]?*

Client Six: *All I really saw from first meeting [Project Worker] was that she was someone who was going to help me.*

Client Six also made reference to the importance of his own determination to make positive changes in his life, and how this determination, when fully supported by projects such as CARD PORCH, gave him the chance he needed to resettle successfully into the community.

Interviewer: *Is there anything else you feel you want to add in terms of talking about PORCH?*

Client Six: *It's so important that the person is in the right place you know, because you're not going to make changes if you don't want to but I think it's so important that these [...] organisations are there for people when they want to.*

Undoubtedly, after the second round of interviews, the client still has a positive impression of the project.

Client Six: *I still feel that it's a very valuable service they provide here and I'm walking talking proof that it works.*

Summary:

To summarise this case, Client Six has taken many positives from the project and has gained both stable accommodation and stable employment since working with the housing support service. In terms of accommodation, he was initially placed in housing to match his needs – and importantly, not in a hostel where he was worried he could slip back into his old life.

Client Six: *It's [accommodation] a great place, I still live there now and it's a great place to live.*

In terms of stable employment, helped through skills training and networking facilitated by the housing support service, Client Six has secured a job. His positive attitude and determination, combined with the practical and emotional support lent by project staff has led him to a successful resettlement in the Devon area.

2.2 MENTORING SERVICE:

Client SIX⁶:

History:

Client six is a 31 year old man. He had originally been involved with the project after his release from a three and a half year sentence. He had been referred to the mentoring scheme towards the end of his involvement with the housing support project and was placed with a Mentor. This relationship continued for some time but has now ended.

Support received:

Because of the rapidity of developments since leaving Prison, as well as some confusion as to what the mentoring scheme could offer him, Client Six reports initially being reluctant to commit to the scheme:

...I really didn't want to get involved with CARD at the stage it came along, because I felt very much that I was doing all that I needed to do and everything was in place that I needed and there wasn't really space for a CARD mentor...

However, after meeting with his Mentor and discussing their ideas about what mentoring could achieve, the client reports becoming increasingly positive about the relationship, particularly in regards to emotional support. Indeed, it is this aspect of the project that he sees as the most vital:

I don't go and say, 'Look I'm struggling to fill in this housing benefit form, can we do that together', which I'm sure a lot of other guys would do, so we just really made it a kind of individual thing; 'what do you want to talk about this week?'

⁶ Client Six has been supported by both the housing support and the mentoring parts of the project. This section deals predominantly with his involvement with the latter, whilst his experiences with the former are dealt with in the previous section.

Though Client Six and his Mentor developed an Action Plan, the client did not see this as a major element of the relationship as he had dealt with most of his 'big issues' during his time working with the housing support side of the project. However, it still acted as a useful exercise:

The action plan was useful because it kind of got me thinking about how I can like utilise some of the service, kind of thing, what I can do, what the options are and what we can look at, I suppose it just brings it to the fore of your mind, oh yeah budgeting is an issue for me or this is an issue and this needs a look at. But yeah I think the mentoring that I've had, obviously every situation is unique but I think we've kind of veered away from what the standard way of doing things is just because of where I was at, you know and that's the flexibility of the scheme I suppose.

Since the initial interview the client had ended his relationship with his Mentor, feeling he no longer required the support offered and that it would be more effectively provided to someone in greater need. However, like other mentoring clients, Client Six reported finding it difficult to break the relationship with his Mentor:

I did have a Mentor [...] and I think that came to a natural end. He didn't come to the – I personally struggled to end it in probably the best way, because I was never, I don't know... But probably I could've ended it in a better way; I just – my life picked up and I just – our meetings... it became apparent that I was just; it was just down to me just to do it [...] I'm sorted. I'm as sorted as, you know, I can get and now it's up to me basically [...] I just felt [the Mentor's] time was better spent with someone more in need.

Impact of support:

During his involvement with both the mentoring and housing support elements of the Project, Client Six has made significant progress. He is no longer using drugs, is in stable accommodation, and in permanent employment. Though it is difficult to ascertain exactly what elements of this can be specifically attributed to the mentoring scheme, it is clear that he appreciates the emotional support and guidance he received from his Mentor, as well as the efforts of the wider project staff:

... I can't forget how crucial CARD and PORCH were to me when I needed them in my life; what they've enabled me to do now is to live independently and [...] I think it shows how far I've come that I don't need them anymore, and that success is really down to the

work that they put in and did with me in the early days; there's no doubt about that, the big difference in my life this time was the help and support that I got.

Perceptions of the project:

Client Six was very positive about his overall experiences of engaging with the combined CARD PORCH project suggesting that, along with a positive attitude on his behalf, the availability of support had been vital:

...there's two things going on this time around; [...] I had a change in attitude and there seemed to be more people around to help me...

Combined with this, Client Six also commented on the commitment and effort put in by the staff and volunteers of both elements of the projects.

Summary:

As indicated earlier, Client Six was initially uncertain about his involvement with the mentoring scheme and seems to have been unclear about what the project's aims or terms of engagement were. Whilst these two elements may have been related, it is also apparent that he developed a strong bond with his Mentor once they had begun to meet regularly; a bond that appears to be appreciated by both parties. It is also clear that Client Six has continued to make significant progress during his involvement with the project and, whilst this cannot be exclusively be attributed to this engagement, there is evidence to suggest that the emotional support and guidance provided by his Mentor has helped Client Six to continue his forward progress.

CLIENT SEVEN:

History:

Client Seven is a 38 year old male and had been involved with the mentoring scheme for 36 weeks at the time of the initial interview. He had previously been in the Armed Forces and ran his own business for a number of years. However, his file indicates he has a long history of drug dependence, particularly Cocaine and Heroin, as well as spending long periods living rough (including the time immediately prior to becoming

involved with CARD). He also has a history of criminal offences and has served at least one custodial sentence.

Though he had successfully secured a Methadone prescription whilst involved with the project, this has since been withdrawn. Files also indicate he was evicted from his accommodation for suspected drug dealing. He has since been re-housed in a Council property. He has suffered from long-term illnesses (Hepatitis C and Deep Vein Thrombosis) possibly related to extensive periods of homelessness and drug use.

Since the initial interview, Client Seven had begun to use Heroin and Crack Cocaine again and had been convicted of a commercial burglary. This resulted in him breaching the conditions of his bail and receiving a 12 month custodial sentence, which he was serving at the time of the second interview. At the time of this interview the client reported not having used drugs since returning to prison four months previously.

Support received:

Client Seven has been mentored by the Mentor Co-ordinator throughout his engagement with the project. During this time, all his goals at the time of his first engagement with the project – securing accommodation, gaining a prescription for Methadone and addiction support from ENDAS, and receiving support with a pending court case – all appear to have been addressed with the support of the project and other agencies (particularly a Royal British Legion outreach worker). The client also pointed to a number of other areas of assistance, including help with time-keeping and self-organisation, referral to a counselling service and emotional support. Indeed, it was the latter that he reported finding most beneficial:

Interviewer: *Okay. You mentioned some things already, but how's CARD been able to support you since you joined the project? What do you think are the major areas that they've helped you out [with]?*

Client Seven: *I'd say the most help they've been is just having somewhere to come and speak, just to be able to come in and say 'look this is what's been going on, it's fucking terrible' or 'this is what's happened' and they're there to try and help me out of whatever I've got myself into, you know, with the drug use and they never turn me away no matter what state I've been in...*

However, since the first interview, the client had begun using drugs again and it appears this had played a significant part in his decision to withdraw from the project:

... I was using; I was turning it [support offered by the mentoring scheme] down you know, all the help you're offering me, I'm turning down because, you know, the drugs are important to me so... I mean, they were offering me the help [but] I just didn't want it all the time.

Despite this, the client reported that he was keen to re-engage with the project once he finishes his current sentence, noting that he regretted his decision to leave in the first place and that he was aware of the effort project staff had made to keep him involved:

... She [staff member] kept coming around until I ignored the door and things like that [...] I'd have people in there – you know, dodgy people and that, do you know what I mean? So it was more my fault that I didn't keep in contact, as opposed to [the Project worker]; you know, she'd, I knew she'd been around a few times to try and see me, so it was my fault really. I wish I'd stayed now, do you know what I mean?

Impact of support:

Though file notes and the initial interview indicate there had been some issues with consolidating progress in certain areas and related problems regarding sporadic engagement with available support and continued drug use, Client Seven indicated in the initial interview that he felt that he had both improved his situation and that much of this was due to the support of the project, particularly in regards to helping him secure stable accommodation:

...I know for a fact that I wouldn't be anywhere like... I was saying about housing and that, I don't think I'd have got a Council place without that.... I don't even know if I'd have been here like if - not physically - but in this position and I'd have still been out there using and I'm not sure if that's true or not. I'd have definitely not been where I am at the moment if it hadn't been for CARD.

Furthermore, the concrete results that had occurred since Client Seven became involved with the project are substantial; he had secured stable accommodation, received referrals and support in regards to his drug, counseling and health support needs, and been supported through his court case. However, once the client made the decision to start using drugs again and, relatedly, to disengage from the project, this progress was rapidly reversed. It is also clear that project staff made efforts to re-engage the client in the Mentoring scheme but that this was resisted by the client.

Perceptions of the project:

As with all the clients who were interviewed, Client Seven had a very positive perception of the mentoring scheme, praising the commitment of the staff and their belief in him as important elements of the project.

Though he did suggest that, in an ideal world, he would have appreciated more help with certain issues – such as healthcare and drug re-habilitation programs – he

understood that, with current resources, this would be difficult to achieve. Indeed, his overall impression was very positive:

I could just be blowing smoke up your arse, but that's how they've been. They've just been brilliant and I can't really fault them.

He particularly appeared to appreciate the independence of the project staff and compared this favourably to other agencies:

[With certain agencies] anything you say to them gets back to probation and so you can't really sit down with them and say, 'look this is what's going on in my life', whereas I could sit down with [Project worker] and have a coffee, you know. And it's all good; I knew it weren't going anywhere.

Summary:

At the time of the initial interview, Client Seven had made significant advances during his engagement with the project. His health and housing situations had both markedly improved and stabilised, and he was supported through a number of difficult situations, including a court case and an extended period of sleeping rough. Additionally, the client had retained his accommodation and had not been charged with any criminal offences. However, a return to routine drug use and acquisitive thefts to fund this, had led to a rapid decline in the client's situation cumulating in a return to Prison. This return to heavy drug use occurred alongside a disengagement from the scheme, despite the best efforts of project staff. Despite this, the client appeared keen to reconnect with the project once he left prison, citing the help he had received from them previously:

Interviewer: *Do you think there is anything else that CARD could have done for you?*

Client: *Not back then, no. They were really good. You know, it was all down to me, I wasn't ready to come off the gear, like, so this time hopefully it will be different.*

Although Client Seven has returned to prison, and had an extended period where he began to regularly use drugs again, he was aware that the project had been beneficial to him. Indeed, it was clear that he felt that the responsibility for his actions lay with him

alone. Whilst it is difficult to ascertain whether this is the case or not, there appears little additional support the mentoring scheme could have offered, considering that it is a voluntary scheme and the client had taken the decision to disengage from it. This case study does, however, illustrate the complexity of supporting people with long histories of entrenched drug use and prolific offending records to move away from such a way of life. It also highlights the importance of sustained motivation for clients to avoid 'old habits' in the face of often significant pressures; something that a volunteer mentoring service can only ever provide a limited amount of support for.

CLIENT EIGHT:

History:

Client Eight is a 43 year old male who had been involved with the mentoring scheme for over a year at the time of the initial interview. He had a significant history of drug and alcohol use, stretching over 27 years, and had a number of criminal convictions, including acquisitive crimes and a number of violent offences. Project files also indicate that the client had experienced insecure housing situations, including being evicted on a number of occasions, and difficult personal relationships.

A previous application to be included on the mentoring scheme, made whilst he was in prison, had been refused by the project due to concerns about his prior offending record, particularly in regards to domestic violence offences. However, he had re-applied after release and was successful.

Support received:

Client Eight had been placed with a volunteer Mentor who met with him about once a week. This arrangement continued for over a year until the Mentor moved out of the area. This appears to have been a close relationship and the Client speaks highly of his former mentor, describing him as a still being a 'good friend' despite the end of their mentoring relationship. After a period of two to three months without a Mentor, Client Eight was placed with another Mentor, who he had been seeing about once a week for the previous month at the time of the initial interview. At this time, he reported feeling that, though still developing, this relationship was useful and supportive. However, this relationship ended after two months on the client's volition and he was not placed with a new Mentor until shortly before the second interview took place.

Client Eight felt that the support he had received from the scheme had been mainly emotional – ‘just meeting someone and having a friend’. This was considered very important by the client:

...someone coming out of prison and trying to sort their lives out, it is really hard you know and so to have someone there who's willing to give up some of their time to help you sort of along that path, for me the way I thought about it, it was silly not to take that support offered...

Practical support and direct referrals were not mentioned in the project files or in the interview with the Client. Additionally, it appears that Client Eight and his Mentors did not feel it was necessary to construct a formalised Action Plan, instead relying on informal short-term targets and support.

Impact of support:

Whilst Client Eight felt that he had most benefited from the emotional support provided by the mentoring scheme, it was clear that this had contributed towards his improved situation, including a move into stable accommodation and enrolment on a training scheme. Equally, the three areas mentioned as Client Eight's goals in his project file – gaining secure accommodation (including the requisite deposit), improving his financial management, and furthering his education – all appear to have been met with varying degrees of success.

Although the client did mention that he wished that the mentoring scheme had been able to offer more direct support, particularly in reference to help with finding and securing accommodation, he also suggested the limited support he had received had been good:

...at CARD they can only do so much I suppose and they can only offer [...] advice and they don't want to intrude into your life. It's got to be down to me to be able to go out and do that and I don't think it's about them holding my hand - you know, sitting with me making the phone calls. The advice that I was given was excellent really and it was stuff that I already knew anyway, you know, but I was supported with it and I was given general nudges here and there if I wasn't actually motivating myself to do it.

It is also clear that emotional support from his Mentor was important to Client Eight during a difficult period, during which he describes himself as, '... being up in the air and going back to drugs and really struggling...' and the advice and reassurance given during this period was fully appreciated by the client:

... [P]art of the mentoring here that CARD offers [...has] been a good fall-back point for me to be able to access that support and that [... has] been beneficial to get me to the point that I am now.

However, once the client changed Mentors it was clear that the relationship formed was not, in the client's eyes, conducive to his continued rehabilitation:

[She] was a wonderful person [...] and very knowledgeable and very helpful and supportive but I think [...] aspects of her life where she'd come from I didn't relate to that too well...

Despite this, the client found it difficult to break the mentoring relationship, fearing he may hurt the Mentor's feelings:

... [W]ell I think for me, and this is being totally honest, I hid my feelings and I wasn't honest about how I was feeling and tended not to answer my 'phone a lot [...] because I actually found it hard to say how I was really feeling or what I do think. And I suppose it's that thing about not wanting to hurt someone, not wanting to offend someone, so I'd rather not speak about it...

After broaching this issue with both his Mentor and the Mentoring Co-ordinator, the client took the decision to leave the programme, citing a wish to regain his independence after moving into a new flat. However, whilst the client acknowledges that this was, 'true to an extent', it was also clear that, by the time of the second interview, he was struggling with certain aspects of 'community living', most notably the task of building up a new support network away from old associations:

... [I]t's alright moving away from drink and drugs but, when you've been immersed in that lifestyle for so long and then you step out of it, you're in a world where you've got nothing really, and then it's about trying to build up relationships and friendships outside

of that, and that's what I'm actually struggling to do and that's what I'm in a bad place with.

Perceptions of the project:

Despite recognising limitations to the support available from the project, Client Eight was thankful for his involvement and supportive of the role the mentoring scheme played in his resettlement after leaving prison:

...without CARD being here I don't think I would've achieved as much as what I have, because, as I say, I've been in a bad place at some times and I think it was only CARD that helped me to get through that. If CARD hadn't have been here - because that was the only support that I had at the time - I don't think I would be in the position I'm in now...

Furthermore, the emotional support given by the Project's volunteer Mentors was recognised by the client as being a vital element in his 'recovery', especially during a period where he admits he was 'struggling' and required guidance and reassurance to avoid returning to his 'old ways.' Indeed, the client was keen to stress the importance of the project to others in a similar position:

... I think that CARD is an invaluable service within the community and to people coming out of Prison, you know? Especially for people coming out of Prison. I mean it.

Summary:

It is evident that, at the time of the initial interview, Client Eight had gained significant stability in his life. He had secure accommodation, had stopped using drugs and alcohol and had not been charged with any criminal offences. He was also in educational training and appeared positive about his future prospects. Despite a difficult period some time into his involvement with the project, during which the Client had begun to take drugs again, he had stabilised himself. The ability to avoid reverting to previous patterns of behaviour in the long-term, despite apparent emotional and practical difficulties, indicates both Client Eight's improved coping ability and the effectiveness of the support provided by his Mentor.

However, it is also clear the Client Eight felt that he required support in other areas, particularly in regards to accommodation finding, which he did not receive. Though he understood that the mentoring scheme may not be able to provide all his support needs, he did indicate that he was unclear as to exactly what he could expect from the project. Similarly, a lack of clear, formalised Action Plans, may have contributed to a certain lack of clarity as to the terms of engagement between the client and the Project.

In essence, though, Client Eight was highly supportive of the project, expressing his concern that it should not 'fizzle out' before it could help others:

...you know, if CARD sort of like fizzles out like a lot of other things have, what is left then for people then, you know? CARD is a really good project and I would recommend it to people definitely.

Whilst Client Eight appeared to have further stabilised his situation by the time of the second interview; having found suitable accommodation, approaching the completion of an educational qualification, and apparently steering clear of drugs, alcohol and criminal behaviour, there were some areas where he still felt he required support. This appeared to be particularly acute around the establishment of an emotionally supportive network of friends and acquaintances; an area where an effective Mentoring relationship may be effective. It is also clear that the client felt he may have disengaged from the mentoring scheme too early, and that this was partly due to the client's unease at ending his previous Mentoring relationship.

2.3 THE EXPERIENCES OF CARD PORCH MENTORS:

The purpose of this section is to explore the experiences of volunteer CARD PORCH Mentors in order to further examine the role of mentors in a post-offending support system. This acts to support discussions of the Mentoring system provided by both clients and staff in other sections. It incorporates data from three interviews with current Mentors, 2 of whom have previously mentored clients who also contributed to this report.

Mentor A:

Mentor A has been involved in the mentoring scheme since June 2008 and was first placed with a client in October of that year. Though that mentoring relationship (with Client Five) only lasted a relatively short period of time (approximately 2 months), Mentor A has since been matched with a new mentee for the past two months.

A former teacher, Mentor A had been motivated to join the project through previous voluntary work and an interest in working with homeless people. She had been put in touch with the CARD PORCH mentoring scheme after approaching the local volunteer bureau.

Training and support:

After having being accepted onto the project, she attended a week-long training course, which she described in positive terms. She also spoke highly of the availability of additional training courses but did stress she felt the addition of a group where Mentors could meet together and discuss issues would be beneficial in this case:

...I've had training on drugs and there are others, [...] things in the pipeline [...] I think if this sort of mentoring group does become more cohesive [...] I think the chances of doing that training are even greater because people will, you know – the more they meet each other, the more sort of enthusiastic they become and inspire [each other] to come to training and that sort of thing.

Indeed, Mentor A spoke highly of the additional support she received from the mentoring team, mentioning their willingness to answer 'any questions', and their concern with her own well-being:

At the moment, I'm kind of e-mail happy and I'll be on the e-mail and [Mentor Co-ordinator] will respond to me; she 'phoned, I 'phoned. [Project Manager] did that with me as well [...] he always responded immediately; very practical, very pertinent, just absolutely spot on kind of advice and information. And they are always very, within that information, they're always very, sort of, quick to say, 'and how are you? How are you coping with this? How are you feeling about this?'

Relationships with clients:

Mentor A felt her role as a Mentor was one of an active listener, an approach she sought to take with both the clients she had been matched with:

... [Y]ou're walking alongside somebody, you know, you're in their lives and you're – I think a lot of it is about listening and listening with a sort of empathy and being able to receive, and a lot of forgiveness in listening and not being judgemental...

Indeed it was this emotionally supportive and non-judgemental attitude that Mentor A stressed most regularly in her interaction with both her mentees. Speaking about her first match, Client Eight, she said:

I was very conscious that when he was with people, [...] they were all checking things off against him and, really, when he came and he sort of met me, it was a release from all of that and it was the first time that he was sitting and just letting conversation move freely and wherever he wanted it to go, kind of thing.

A theme again stressed with reference to her current mentee:

I tell him to, 'eat, don't talk', because he's hungry, he doesn't need to talk while he's eating – just get food into him – and then we just sit and chat [...T]he fact that he's telling the story of his life actually, kind of, makes something real about it. If he's talking about himself it makes himself more real in a way.

Communication and record keeping:

Though Mentor A reported sustaining regular contact with CARD PORCH mentoring staff, it became clear that, whilst she consistently made notes and produced feedback on her meetings with her first client, she found this more difficult with her current mentee as she felt it was more appropriate to be dealing with immediate issues, rather than developing an Action Plan:

I'm aware that I should be sitting down with an Action Plan and I have that, I have that in my head, I don't sit down with it on a piece of paper at this stage; the day, the time, will come with [client] that'll be appropriate [...] I've got my own kind of checks and balances running in my mind all the time that I'm seeing him and I'm checking, 'did you do this?' It's just part of it but it's not on paper.

Instead, Mentor A saw more benefit in building up her relationship with the client, and helping him into a more stable situation; once this had been achieved, she felt it would be effective to start using Action Plans and providing retrospective documentation on their relationship:

...[W]hen he's accommodated, then it'll be a much more – I suppose I'll go by the rule book much more and you'll see that, but there'll be a retrospective at this stage on what's been happening and so there will be a record of it.

Additionally, Mentor A mentioned that the 3 month period between completing her training and being matched with a client was substantial and she had little contact with the project during this period so, in her own words, 'you really had to hang to the fact that you really wanted to do this.' A position she felt would be difficult for some.

Summary:

It was clear that Mentor A both enjoyed her role with the mentoring scheme and felt she was making a positive contribution to those she worked with. Equally, she felt supported by the project staff, able to communicate quickly and effectively with them and was receiving sufficient training for her needs. However, two main issues arose in this interview; firstly, Mentor A felt that she would benefit from a chance to meet regularly with other volunteer mentors and that this would encourage the take-up of optional training courses. Secondly, it was apparent that, particularly with her current client, Mentor A found certain aspects of the current protocol on maintaining a record of meetings with clients and agreed Action Plans were both difficult to achieve and not immediately beneficial to the development of the Mentor-Mentee relationship.

Mentor B:

Mentor B has been involved with the project since its inception in 2003. During this time she has been matched with a number of clients, including one of more than a year's duration. She had not been matched with any clients who contributed to this report. Mentor B had been motivated to become involved with mentoring scheme through meeting a number of ex-offenders during her life who had impressed her with their ability to change their lives for the better. She reported being particularly drawn to the project because of its relatively small size and the close support given by the staff.

Training and support:

Mentor B had been part of the first cohort of mentors trained for the CARD project, receiving 4 hours of training a week for 10 weeks; an experience that the Mentor reported as being very useful and invigorating. She also stated that she felt the on-going support and training available from the project was meeting her needs as a Mentor.

Relationships with clients:

Mentor B, in common with her colleagues, stressed the need to be a good listener as well as being able to provide useful and accurate advice and guidance when it was needed:

I think my role is more, I suppose, in a way, a bit like a buddy – you know, sort of a buddy, friend, ear. I'm more of an ear; people often offload on me and I can guide them towards something practical.

Recounting meetings with a previous client, she gave an indication of the content of their mentoring relationship:

...[Y]ou know there are a couple of coffee places that had, like, art galleries, so we'd go and check out the pictures and chat, and it was amazing what it brought up; childhood memories – turns out he suddenly said, 'I used to really like fishing', and started hunting around in charity shops and got himself a couple of good rods...

She also recounts assisting the same client to re-establish contact with his two estranged children, including helping him write the necessary letters and providing emotional support in this process.

Communication and record keeping:

Client B reported both being in regular contact with staff and regularly completing and following an Action Plan. Though she saw the latter as a useful exercise she did stress that how this was formalised was highly dependent on the context of meetings – including the client's current situation. Therefore, she felt that such protocols were in evolution, rather than being a set template to follow closely.

Summary:

Mentor B enjoyed her role with the scheme and felt she was making a positive contribution to the lives of those she worked with. She had remained with the project since its inception and was planning to continue her work as a volunteer Mentor for the foreseeable future. Though she reported regularly completing Action Plans with clients, the contextual nature of these was stressed and will be addressed further in the 'Commentary' section of this report.

Mentor C:

Mentor C has been volunteering with the project since 2003. During this time he has worked with a number of clients, including Client Six who he mentored for nine months

up to October 2008. He had been motivated to join the project after noticing the high number of ex-offenders living on the street in Exeter whilst working at another agency.

Training and support:

Mentor C had received training over a three month period, with sessions running every other weekend. He found the training interactive and helpful in developing self-awareness and a non-judgemental attitude towards mentees. Though he noted that the project offered a good range of on-going training, he also mentioned that he was rarely able to attend because of work commitments and the distance he would need to travel. He also indicated that he felt a received adequate support from the project for his needs as a Mentor.

Relationships with clients:

Mentor C stressed a number of key issues in developing good relationships with mentees. Firstly he noted the need to develop a mutual trust between the mentor and mentee. This, he indicated, require a certain initial tenacity and resilience on his side:

[Y]ou need tenacity and you need [...] not to take things too personally [...] when you are getting a lot of antipathy and negativity from these guys [...] they've got quite a front that they, kind of, present towards life that's hard and unforgiving, you know? So you're going to get that antipathy...

However, through being an active and non-judgemental sounding board, a trusting relationship could develop:

[Y]ou've got to build that up over a period of time, you know? And it happens by degrees really and it's not like something that can happen in a few weeks.

Once such a connection had developed, Mentor C indicated he saw his role of consisting of being a good listener – an outlet for worries and complaints, as well as dreams and aspirations:

[I]t's important for them to, kind of, put what they're doing with somebody, so they can hold it and that's what I feel I do; I might hold their hopes and aspirations and problems and I might hold it and hopefully it feels like they can trust me to hold it.

Equally, he stressed the need to be able to provide a certain level of perspective on their situation:

[T]here are some guys that are, you know, they get negative or they get into crisis about a particular situation and they need perspective on it and they need you to be providing a bit more context around that particular thing that they are getting anxious about and I

think that's where a mentor can be useful. You provide context and you provide perspective...

Part of this perspective was to encourage mentees to reflect on their own actions and to begin to think before they react to a situation:

I'm a firm believer that, you know, you need to be thinking and not just over-reacting, and to pre-empt things by thinking things first [...] The guys have said, 'I've gone away and I did like we were talking about and I've been thinking that that's really kind of like helpful, because otherwise I would've just reacted in my normal way'...

Once this has been established and the mentee's life has begun to stabilise, Mentor C stressed the need to deliver on-going support and encouragement to the mentee:

[I]t's not like, you know, 'I'm alright, I'm better, I've improved my life now and that's it, because, you know, I've done it.' It's, kind of like, ongoing, isn't it? [...] [Y]ou know, they've got serious addictions and they're turning that around and the will power and the motivation and desire to, like, want to do that is phenomenal.

However, he also recognised that there was a time when the mentoring relationship had to come to an end; a period in the relationship he described as 'the most difficult part', as he felt there were difficult issues of abandonment and rejection that could arise at this juncture. Mentor C indicated that he felt that, though difficult, ending the mentor-mentee connection became necessary for both parties:

I'm trying to, kind of like, optimise that person's independence. I don't want to make them dependent on me [...T]hey want to divest themselves from support workers in a way, don't they? I've got to feel that that person should be confident and independent.

Communication and record-keeping:

Though he was generally happy with the level of communication and support he got from the project, Mentor C did note that he felt somewhat disconnected from the project when he was not matched with a mentee because he was not in regular contact with staff:

[T]here have been times over the 5 years [of involvement with the mentoring scheme] when there's been, you know, there's been like 3 – 4 month gaps where nothing has been going on [...] You can, kind of, quickly feel a little bit disengaged from it [...] I think e-mails are essential regularly [...] just to kind of inform us what's going on.

In terms of record keeping, Mentor C suggested that, though he could see the necessity of keeping records of meetings with mentees and developing formal Action Plans, he often found them an unhelpful barrier in the mentor-mentee relationship:

I haven't found them that useful to be honest [...] you're there and you're with that guy – you know, you really don't want to be getting too many things in the way...

Indeed, with regards to producing formal Action Plans, Mentor C suggested that part of the problem may be that mentees are not initially entirely clear what their concrete aims are:

A lot of them don't know [what their aims are]. I mean a lot of them have not really got that; I mean it's very, very ambiguous and a lot of them just want to have someone that they can just sit down and moan at [...] then it can move on from there to, kind of, somewhere else, but initially it's just somewhere they can just offload...

Instead, Mentor C indicated that he used his own insights to pinpoint where it may be most useful to concentrate his efforts – particularly in regards to encourage them to talk and address any issues they may have:

So just talking to them is kind of an appropriate intervention – you know what I mean? I think maybe, because I've been doing this for so long, I do sort of pick up on [...] the immediate goals and objectives that, kind of, might be, could be [useful].

Mentor C also noted that he struggled to fit what he was experiencing in his meetings with his mentees into the formalised structure of an Action Plan or meeting monitoring forms, which he found 'contrived and artificial.'

Summary:

In line with the other Mentors interviewed, Mentor C reported enjoying his role with the CARD project and expressing his wish to continue to volunteer with them. He also felt that he was making a positive contribution to the clients he worked with, even if at times this took time to become apparent:

Interviewer: *Do you feel that a mentoring relationship has a positive impact on the guys you work with?*

Mentor C: *Generally speaking, yeah I do, and, I mean sometimes [it's] not always apparent to me what that positive impact is but, if you are dropping seeds in there you might not see any of them come flourishing [until] 2 months later, or even maybe a year later...*

Indeed, it was the complex and subtle nature of the mentor-mentee relationship that Mentor C tended to stress most often in his interview, indicating that such connections could not be easily translated into regulated protocols or procedures. He also mentioned, as with many of the clients interviewed, that the most difficult part of that relationship was the closure, or exit. He did not, however, suggest that this was through

a lack of support from CARD PORCH, but rather that it was 'naturally' a difficult transition to negotiate for both parties.

Whilst Mentor C was happy with the training and support offered by mentoring scheme, he did mention that he felt that communications between the project and volunteers not currently matched with clients could be improved through regular informal e-mails outlining current news from the project. This he felt, in common with a fellow Mentor interviewed, would make him feel more connected and engaged with the project when he was not directly working as a volunteer. Overall, however, as with all the Mentors interviewed, he was highly supportive of the project and its aims.

3 COMMENTARY

This section is intended to provide commentary on the findings of the interviews with clients, volunteer mentors and staff involved in the CARD PORCH Project. They indicate some of the over-arching issues that came out of the two rounds of interviews.

The commentary section has been divided into three sections. The first of these deals with the mentoring scheme, with the second concentrating on the housing support side of the project, and the third focusing on overarching issues that are of import to the project as a whole.

MENTORING SCHEME:

Overall, the three mentoring clients interviewed all provided extremely positive feedback regarding the mentoring scheme. Though each had different experiences of the how they came to be involved, how they related to their Mentors and what they achieved whilst they were on the scheme, this can be seen as reflecting the flexibility of the project and the natural development of the relationship between individual Mentors and Mentees. It is also clear that all those interviewed were in a more stable situation at the time of the initial interviews than they had been before they became involved with the scheme. All the clients continued to be in a stable condition at the time of the second round of interviews, with the exception of one client who had received a one-year custodial sentence, after breaching his bail conditions, returning to regular drug use and being convicted for a commercial burglary. Prior to his arrest and subsequent incarceration, the client had disengaged from the project despite the best efforts of project workers and volunteers. He did, however, stress his wish to rejoin the programme once he had completed his sentence and noted that he felt his situation was more to do with his return to regular drug use, rather than a lack of support from the project itself.

There are a number of additional themes which arose during the research that require further comment. Firstly, the service users and volunteers interviewed were universally keen to praise the project, stressing its ability to 'make a difference' to those in a vulnerable position. Equally, both groups were positive in their support of what they saw as the open, accessible and non-judgemental nature of both of the project and those who worked or volunteered for it. This was seen as very valuable by service users and acted to differentiate the project from other mentoring or quasi-mentoring services available. Relatedly, the flexibility of the project was viewed as an important aspect of the mentoring scheme, with clients and mentors alike enjoying the freedom this allowed them in their interactions with the project.

Whilst these positive aspects of the project extended widely and included the overall purpose of the mentoring scheme, there were, as with any project, issues to be addressed. Whilst this report does not seek to provide solutions to these, they are points to consider in the future development of the project. For clarity, these have been divided into three main areas – resources and available support; record keeping and protocols; and communication and partnership working – which are covered in turn below:

Resources and available support:

In any organisation of this size and with such a heavy impetus on voluntary support there will always be an issue regarding the limits of available resources, whether they are financial or human. Because of this it will not always be possible to provide clients or volunteers with all the support that could ideally be forwarded. However, there was some feeling that it would be beneficial for the mentoring element of CARD PORCH to be able to provide a structured mechanism for supporting clients into stable housing. Indeed, all the clients interviewed pointed to finding stable accommodation as being a vital secure foundation to build from. Bearing this in mind, as well as the importance given to access to supported housing by homeless and vulnerably housed people in Exeter in previous research (Vasey 2008) and the destabilising effect homelessness and poor quality housing can have (Chartered Institute of Environmental Health 2008; Department for Communities and Local Government 2000), this is certainly an issue worth investigating further.

There was also the question of motivation. It was clear that for all clients interviewed, their ability to benefit from the scheme was dependent on their motivational readiness to change and challenge often entrenched behaviour. The ability to provide support and assistance to vulnerable people both at the point of need *and* when they are motivated to take advantage of it may be key to the benefits felt by those we spoke to, as well as being an explanatory factor when such positive outcomes were not sustained.

There were additional issues regarding long-term and transitional support; firstly, it was clear that, even when significant progress had been made, service users often appreciated support for some time afterwards. Whilst one of the reported benefits of the mentoring scheme was its perceived ability to provide this support, issues remain regarding scaling down and ending Mentor-Mentee relationships. This was noted by a number of both clients and volunteers, who suggested the problem may revolve around how to negotiate what was seen as an emotive issue. Additionally, in one case it appears that a client felt that to end a mentoring relationship also required him to leave the project, when he was perhaps not ready to do so. Whilst these are not simple issues to deal with – and are, in some ways, created by the success of the project – it may be worth considering ways to both make it easier for clients to approach someone other than their Mentor when they wish to discuss ending a mentoring relationship and,

secondly, for there to be some way in which the progress of clients is monitored once they have left the project to ensure that, should they require and wish it, there is an avenue to re-engage with the project. Whilst this is undoubtedly there in an informal manner – clients often referred to the ease and welcome of ‘dropping in’ to the project – an active attempt to contact clients post-exit may be a useful strategy to employ.

Whilst it was generally felt that the support available to Mentors was suitable and met their needs, there was a suggestion from one volunteer that a mentoring support group may be a useful forum for Mentors to meet, discuss issues and build a community of practitioners. This may also go some way to addressing the danger of volunteers becoming disengaged from the project when they are not matched with a client.

Record keeping and documentation:

There is a need for the mentoring element of CARD PORCH to retain a balance between effective record keeping and a flexible and immediate approach to client welfare. It was clear from comments supplied by both clients and volunteers that these two aspects were occasionally seen as conflicting. What was stressed by both groups was the importance of a trusting relationship where advice, guidance and, most importantly, a receptive and non-judgemental listener was available. This was widely seen as more important than keeping to strict protocols or inflexibly following Action Plans. Whilst this is an understandable view, there would appear to be a need to retain some sort of record of meetings and a way of structuring the aims and objectives of a mentoring relationship. This would be useful both for reviewing cases and evaluating the development of mentoring relationships, as well as providing a useful illustrative resource for future funding applications. However, it is also clear that the current system is not meeting the needs of Mentors and did not appear to be particularly highly regarded by clients. Part of this can be linked to a concern not to alienate clients by appearing overly bureaucratic, as well as wishing to reinforce the social elements of a mentoring relationship – to avoid, ‘getting too many things in the way’ of that connection, as it was expressed by one Mentor. Therefore, it seems pertinent to consider ways of providing on-going documentation and monitoring of mentoring relationships that are more in tune with the applied practice and needs of volunteer Mentors. A move towards more flexible approaches – such as reflexive journals and case notes – may be beneficial, though any alteration to the system needs to be carried out in collaboration with volunteer Mentors and clients to ensure such changes would meet their needs wherever possible.

It is not entirely clear what the overall aims and objectives of the mentoring element of the combined CARD PORCH project are. Whilst there are performance indicators available for the housing support service (Southern et al. 2008), there are no equivalents for the mentoring scheme. Whilst the overall aim of the combined project – ‘effective housing and mentoring support to promote resettlement and reduce re-offending’

(CARD PORCH 2007) – is apparent, it may be useful to consider developing a suite of performance indicators for the mentoring element of the project (and to combine these with the existing housing support service indicators where necessary), in order to provide on-going and comparable data regarding the development of the mentoring service. Indeed, as many mentoring clients fall outside the remit of the housing support service, a second set of indicators would appear to be a measure worth considering. Equally, setting up this kind of review framework would help to clarify the role the mentoring scheme plays in the wider CARD PORCH programme and for future service delivery planning. However, some caution needs to be taken in this respect; firstly, there is the possibility that an over-emphasis on measuring and auditing outputs draws attention away from the more tacit and immeasurable qualities of a project (Power 1997). Indeed, it is such subtle aspects of the project that were repeatedly stressed by clients and volunteers as those that made the project unique and essential. Equally, there is a need for the mentoring scheme to continue to encourage mentoring rather than monitoring relationships, as this has been shown to be vital to meeting the wishes of client groups (Barry 2000). Therefore, any on-going performance indicators must retain the capacity to incorporate such qualitative outcomes.

Communication and partnership-working:

Questions were raised by clients as to the clarity of engagement with the mentoring scheme. It was mentioned in all the interviews that there were times when clients were not entirely sure as to the extent to which the mentoring scheme could support them. For some this was an initial confusion as to exactly what the scheme offered and how this could be useful to them, whilst for others the issue was the clarity of the extent to which it could assist them beyond the chance to speak to a Mentor.

Equally, some Mentors felt that it would be beneficial to be kept more informed about the working of the project when they were not immediately involved – i.e. when they were not matched with a Mentee. They felt this would help them to feel more engaged with the project and, especially for newly trained Mentors, to help them retain their motivation and enthusiasm. Regular informative e-mails and a chance to meet with other Mentors were the suggested solutions to this.

Whilst mentoring scheme retains good working relationships with several key referring agencies, there may be some room to further formalise these relationships, to ensure they are on-going and consistent. Equally, it may be possible to provide clearer routes to referrals to other agencies for both clients and volunteers, so as to further increase awareness of what resources are currently available at other organisations in the area.

Although technically an integrated project, it was apparent that mentoring and housing support services worked largely independently of each other. Whilst there were signs by the second stage of research that the two elements of the overall project were increasing their partnership, the separation between the two was reinforced by

variations in spheres of activity, with most mentoring clients falling outside the remit of its partner and, therefore, being unable to access additional services available to housing support clients; a difficulty that was particularly apparent in regards to sourcing suitable accommodation. Whilst it is understandable, in the light of divergent remits and funding streams, that the two elements of the project have taken time to integrate fully there remain considerable benefits to be gained from a further increase in partnership working and closer working practices.

Housing support:

The housing support project has increased the housing stability of all the Clients interviewed since their engagement with the project. All had previously experienced particularly unstable housing histories which included homelessness, sofa-surfing and time spent in drug rehabilitation centres. In all cases the housing support service had helped to secure housing for the client and has supported them to sustain their tenure. The extent to which the project assisted and continues to support the clients - in matters of accommodation as well as other needs - seems dependent on the individual needs of the client. During the course of engagement with the housing support service, clients have progressed at varying levels in other aspects of their lives and evidence suggests that it is important that Clients must be motivationally ready to make changes and take responsibility for themselves in order to achieve the greatest results. However, the emotional support which the housing support service offers to clients who may not be ready are positive steps in working towards a more stable foundation for this.

All clients bar one are now in stable accommodation which matches their needs and are in a better position than they were before joining the project. Although Client One could not be contacted at the point of second interview, he has successfully exited the project and continues to reside in his council flat. For clients Three and Five, an early identification and search for housing outside of hostel-type environment led to more suitable environments, contributing to a stable resettlement. After being moved from a Bed and Breakfast to a hostel to a bed-sit, Client Two experienced more instability and it took longer for the team to find accommodation to suit his needs. It is not clear whether this has had a negative effect on his early resettlement but he now appears to be more stable in his current accommodation. Client Two has now made forward steps and his progression into his own flat shows that his relationship with the project has been an evolving process with long term positive outcomes. Although Client Three was in relatively stable accommodation prior to joining the project, his engagement with the service has had a constructive impact on his housing and financial situation, as well as with his confidence with dealing with landlords and official paperwork. Client Four worked with the housing support service during his transition from prison back into the community. The stability of his housing placement along with other assistance provided by the project has enabled a successful resettlement of the client back into the area. Client Five has had a particularly unstable housing history and despite his often chaotic behaviour, engagement with the project has given him hope of being placed in an independent flat- one of his main motivations for completing his probation license. Client Six resides in stable accommodation, is living independently and successfully holding a full-time job.

Overall, all of clients have had a positive experience with the project, recognising that it offered valuable support to them on both a practical and emotional level during their resettlement. The project has made a positive impact on the current housing situation

and the general stability of all clients has positively impacted other aspects of their life at varying levels. However, there are a number of additional themes involving the daily working practices of the housing support service and the relationship of the CARD PORCH project that arose during the initial period of research that require some further discussion. These were examined further during the second round of interviews and are discussed below. Whilst this report does not seek to provide solutions to these issues, they are points to consider in the future development of the project.

Exit strategies:

The housing support service is, in essence, a prolific offender resettlement service. It runs under the premise that the provision of appropriate accommodation and support for offenders upon release will have a positive impact on their lives and importantly, on reducing their offending behaviour. It was noted during the interim analysis that further exploration into the exit strategies of the project would be appropriate in gaining further information into the working protocols of the project. This is discussed through a consideration of the entry and exit of clients from the project and includes the progress and relationships which are built up within these time frames.

Having a structured protocol for entry and exit of the clients into and out of the project is fundamental to the structural success of the project. After further examination during the second round of interviews it became clear that the project has relatively clear entry and exit strategies for clients. Entry often begins with referral from Probation and a relationship is established between the client and a member of the housing support team. Depending on the client's circumstance, this often includes a visit(s) to the client whilst still in prison to allow for a good working relationship and knowledge of the clients personality and needs to be established from the onset. This allows the appropriate decisions to be made in terms of housing, training and emotional support to fit the client upon release. The exit strategy from the project can take on three alternative routes. If the client is successfully resettled the case is closed by the housing support team with the full knowledge with the Prolific Offenders Unit. If the client returns to prison they are contacted by the housing support team to let them know that the service will be there for them when they are released if they behave appropriately whilst serving their sentence. Thirdly, the client may 'disappear from view'. If the team are unable to make contact with them, their case will be closed with the appropriate scenario noted and filed. Records are kept in all three routes.

Resources:

All clients participating in this research were positive about their experience with the service, but the subtext, when teased out, suggested that they thought it possessed too few resources in the way of people on the ground. This was also echoed in staff interviews. In the second set of interviews which included follow-up client interviews and three new clients – this issue was less apparent. However, the theme was explored

in depth in the staff interviews and has been split into two brief sections: staff and housing.

Staff:

The CARD PORCH project as a whole is currently undergoing a phase of re-structuring after the retirement of the previous Project Manager at the end of April 2009. This has meant that a short transition period between his retirement and the appointment of a new housing worker to the team. Although this has not been completely smooth, the project can be expected to return to pace following the successful recruitment of a new housing worker at the end of May. Furthermore, the promotion of the Housing and Development Worker to the post of Project Manager should lend the project expertise in this area and allow for the devotion of more time to sourcing landlords and accommodation for clients; an aspect of the project noted by both housing support staff as a vital resource and an important avenue for housing clients quickly and efficiently.

Housing:

The housing support service facilitates resettlement, and at the core of this is housing. Bearing this in mind, it is important for a project such as this to have the appropriate breadth of suitable accommodation for its clients. Whilst it is noted above that more time may be dedicated to the task of sourcing accommodation after the current organisational restructuring, it should be understood that this task is imperative to the sustainability of the project in the long term and should be a principal area of work over the coming year. For long-lasting and durable resettlement of clients, the project should have a broad accommodation portfolio to fit a range of different needs and different clients. Unquestionably the housing support team devote much thought to each client, assiduously matching the suitability of accommodation to each individual client with the aim of stabilising resettlement in both the short and long term. However, this process would benefit from having additional housing resources to draw on.

The CARD PORCH project:

It became apparent at an early stage of the research that the mentoring and housing support schemes were working as largely separate entities. Whilst, both continue to do excellent work in their individual area, the development of a more integrated partnership may be of benefit to both. One of the blockades to this working partnership is the clients themselves. This is discussed below.

The housing support service work with prolific offenders as part of the Priority and Prolific Offender Unit (PPOU), this narrows their client base significantly as they work only with prolific offenders in a supportive capacity to assist PPO resettlement and rehabilitation upon and after release from custody. The housing support service is committed to assist PPO resettlement in a number of diligent and industrious ways – as alluded to throughout much of this report – and staff work conscientiously and passionately to support and house each client they engage with. However, their client base is restricted by the PPOU remit which means inward referral from the mentoring scheme is typically not an option.

As stated earlier in this report, there was a general feeling from mentoring clients that it would be beneficial for CARD PORCH to be able to provide a structured mechanism for supporting clients into stable housing. Indeed, all the clients interviewed from the mentoring scheme pointed to finding stable accommodation as being a vital secure foundation to build from. The housing support team possess a greater base of resources in terms of both accommodation and knowledge regard to housing in comparison to the mentoring scheme. Therefore it would be beneficial to the CARD PORCH project as a whole to distribute such resources between the two services. Information concerning housing knowledge and law is passed on in this way yet due to the specific remit of the housing support service and its relationship with the PPOU it is not possible to transfer housing resources in this way. As noted by some members of staff, this could lead to confusion between clients as to the fairness of gaining stable accommodation. The responsibility for this confusion does not belong with the staff of the CARD PORCH project; indeed they often go beyond their sphere of responsibility to aid and inform clients from either side of the twin project. Nevertheless it is important to note that combining the two services in a way which does not allow for two-way traffic could cause a tiered system of housing eligibility and create a sense of unreasonable and unnecessary tension between staff of each service and crucially, between the clients themselves.

One aspect of the dual project which could combine each side of CARD PORCH significantly is the referral of clients from the housing support service to the mentoring scheme. Economic factors aside, this referral process appears to be one of the redeeming goals of the initial combination of the separate mentoring and housing support projects into one. Yet this referral process appears relatively under-utilised. This

may be due to a number of factors including the working relationship of the CARD PORCH team, the often chaotic nature of housing support clients – including their ability to engage with a mentor, and the role of the housing support staff as in-house mentors who have already worked to built firm relationships with clients, making it unnecessary to introduce clients to the mentoring scheme. Housing support clients may however benefit from the mentoring scheme as part of the exit process from the housing support service, reducing support from that element of the project gradually through the mentoring process of its sister service. This is something which could be embedded within the CARD PORCH strategy to benefit the duality of the overall project.

4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This report has provided an overview of the CARD PORCH Project by exploring the support, impact and perceptions that either element of the project has on its clients. It has also provided an examination and discussion of the daily working practices and operational structure of the CARD PORCH Project. This concluding section will briefly bring the findings of the final report together.

The evaluation has provided evidence to show that the CARD PORCH Project is having a beneficial impact in many areas of client's lives. Within the housing support service, all five clients participating in this research viewed the project in a positive manner. Their housing situation had improved measurably during their engagement with the project. Within the mentoring service, the three clients participating in the research also viewed the project in an extremely positive manner. Those interviewed were in a more stable situation at the time of the initial interviews than they had been before they became involved with the mentoring scheme. These achievements are remarkable and show some of the affirmative effects that the CARD PORCH project has on the stability of its clients.

Throughout the process of evaluation, the commitment and hard work of the CARD PORCH team has emerged, and they unmistakably endeavour to deliver the appropriate support and services throughout their professional practice to benefit the clients they are working with. Staff show determination, often working with limited resources, to meet their clients needs in the areas of housing, practical instruction and/or emotional support.

The interim report stated the areas which were investigated at greater length during the second stage of interviews. Briefly, these included the operational structure, protocols and strategies of the CARD PORCH project, aspects of partnership working between mentoring and housing support services and their relationships with outside agencies. The final report finds that the operational structure and protocols of the mentoring and housing support services differ markedly; which is understandable when noting that housing support project works as a resettlement service in conjunction with the Prolific Offenders Unit and the mentoring service is a voluntary mentoring project working with clients across the offending spectrum. Due to the relationship with the Prolific Offenders Unit, the housing support service keep relatively complete records and follow a structured protocol when dealing with clients throughout the project, including during the clients entry and exit into the scheme. The operational structure, protocols and record keeping is less well defined in the mentoring scheme; however, there is a need to retain a balance between effective record keeping and a flexible and immediate approach to client welfare.

As stated in the commentary, this disparity in operational remit means partnership working between the two services is not always as effective as it might be. Whilst there

were signs by the second stage of research that the two elements of the overall project were increasing their partnership and communication, the separation between the two was reinforced by disparity in operational spheres of activity and responsibility, with most mentoring clients falling outside the remit of its partner project. This has led to some mentoring clients being unable to access additional services available to housing support clients; a difficulty that was particularly apparent in regards to sourcing suitable accommodation, and tension between the sister projects is evident. Throughout this evaluation process, both the mentoring and housing support services were relatively separate in their structure, daily practices and operational exchanges. However, both projects also share many similarities and points of cross-over which could be utilised to the advantage of the CARD PORCH Project as a whole.

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APPENDIX A

Oral statement on consent and confidentiality (as provided by interviewers at the beginning of all interviews):

Before we begin, I just want to tell you about how the interview works and how I'm going to use what we discuss today.

My name is _____. I'm a researcher at the University of Exeter carrying out some work evaluating the effectiveness of the CARD and PORCH programmes. During this interview I will ask you to explore your experiences of the CARD and/or PORCH programmes. The interview is designed to last between thirty minutes and an hour. However, feel free to expand on any of the questions asked. If you do not wish to answer any questions you do not have to.

This interview will be recorded on to a digital voice recorder. All information you give in this interview will remain confidential and will be anonymised in all future publications. Anything that could identify you will also be removed at the transcription stage. The original data will be held in a secure format by the research team and will be destroyed after 6 months. It will not be passed to ECI or anyone else. You can have a copy of the interview transcript if you wish. You can withdraw consent at any time.

Are you happy to be interviewed for these purposes?

Are you happy for me to continue to record this interview?

