



Newsletter

June 2006

WELCOME!

Welcome to the CARD (Closing a Revolving Door) Newsletter. It has been a while since our last newsletter so we have a lot to update. We are planning for this newsletter to be produced quarterly, to update stakeholders and the general community about developments in the CARD project.

NEWS IN BRIEF

CARD mentors have now worked with over 60 offenders from Exeter and the surrounding area.

As well as 1:1 work, CARD is developing a course of group-work

A fifth group of volunteers are currently doing the accredited mentor training course.

WHAT IS MENTORING?

Perspective of a CARD mentor

"Try sitting down with a friend, listening intently to a problem or issue they are struggling with and really try hard not to advise or direct – this will give you an idea of how mentoring works. And it is important that this approach is followed to ensure the mentee is able to take responsibility for their decisions, right or wrong. This sometimes brings disappointment, but most importantly it brings the mentee the reward of confidence and knowledge that THEY can make the difference. Although clichéd, it does actually change lives. And not always the ones you would expect."

CARD Overview

The CARD (Closing A Revolving Door) Project aims to close the door on repeat offending by providing a mentoring service for prisoners to promote their integration back into local communities. A group of dedicated, trained volunteers deliver 1:1 mentoring to adult offenders in Exeter and the surrounding area.

Potential clients are either: self-referred, referred from agencies working in Exeter Prison, or captured in database searches carried out by CARD.

The mentoring relationship develops at a time of transition in a person's life and lasts for a significant and sustained period.

The mentor role is 'walking alongside' someone, offering support, but not doing everything for them.

The aim of the scheme is to assist people in the transition from custody into the community, in a way that they are able to lead as stable a lifestyle as possible and reduce their incidence of re-offending.

Over the past year, CARD has matched 40 people with mentors and at the time of going to press there are 10 active matches.

Other developments this year include: building a group-work programme to deliver in Exeter Prison and Prospects (see page 4), building contacts in Channings Wood and Dartmoor Prison, and commissioning an external evaluation of the project.

WHAT IS MENTORING? A PERSPECTIVE FROM A MENTEE

I was chuffed to bits when I was asked by CARD to write an article for them. As I love putting pen to paper, I readily agreed. Now, I'm not too sure! I've been sitting here staring at a blank piece of paper for five days. I could fill it in minutes, but what do people want to hear? More to the point, what do I want people to hear? It will definitely be comical, as I can't be serious for long. My head doesn't allow it! Life is too serious on its own.

Brainstorming some ideas with Ian, my mentor, gave me a few good angles, like the story from the mentee's point of view. Life from this side of the fence. Is the grass greener? Jump down and have a stroll around my garden and you'll find it isn't! It isn't glamorous, but at times it does raise a grin from ear to ear. Other times you will be left with head in hands.

I'm very good at hiding the truth, or rather, saying the truth in a jumbled up way. I've been through, and seen, a lot. Some things no one should go through, most of them I have brought upon myself. They have made me who I am, however. Who I am at the moment is a mixed-up individual going through the biggest change of his life.

The main reason I agreed to have a mentor is because I feel that at times I will need someone to lean on. I had never heard of CARD before my last jail sentence and thought I'd give them a chance, as it's an avenue I'd never taken.

The change I'm talking about is a major one. A new leaf? More like a whole bush! I have spent over half my adult life in jail. I have driven the woman I love and adore to the point of leaving me for good, which is the one thing that would finish me. It would be the final tear in an overflowing bucket of despair. I got the message loud and clear on my last stay at 'Her Majesty's Hotels' and now I need to act on it before it's too late. She will not put up with the lifestyle I have been leading, and I can't argue with that. As it would break my heart if she left me, the only answer is to change my lifestyle



Artwork donated by Exeter Prison Art-group

I have run away from my problems for too long, now it is time to face up to them, and move on. I won't deny it, I'm scared, very scared! I've got so much emotional baggage to deal with and without a drug/alcohol induced haze to hide behind, it's starting to hit me in the face without warning! So much so that I started to cry on my first meeting with my counsellor. You see, I have held down too much, for too long. So many feelings are now brushing off the cobwebs and fighting to get out. Without any warning, they appear and scare the crap outta me! I've taken my means of escape out of the equation now, so I have to stand there and let a steamroller of emotions flatten me every now and then! To fall back into the life I had, an ostrich with its head in the sand, is no option and would mean total defeat. I'm not a loser anymore, and I want to keep what I've managed to hold onto. The self-pity I would find myself wallowing in if I did, would surely end my career as a person who does actually give a toss!

If there is one thing I'm really good at it's feeling sorry for myself. If it were an Olympic sport I'd be a gold medallist! Beating myself up over the smallest little problem is another specialty of mine. Armed with my big red f**k-it button, I'm a regular little time bomb waiting to go off!

This change is going to take some time. Take a read of my story with your cuppa and choke with giggles at what I get up to, have a tear in your eye for what I've been through and done. Most of all, give me, and others like me the support we need to get through the toughest, scariest period of our lives.

CARD Volunteer Visits Bolivian Prison

I've always been interested in what prison life is like, so when I was spending sometime in Bolivia, I was excited to discover that it was possible to visit and tour San Pedro prison in La Paz. The prison holds all kinds of offenders, from murderers to drug smugglers, sex offenders to petty thieves.

An unusual arrangement (from a British point of view) involves paying a small fee to the guards for access. Once inside I paid an inmate to act as my guide and protection. Apparently this is an agreement between government and the local mafia.

New inmates have to buy a cell, none of which can be locked from outside, from a departing inmate. Prices vary according to which area or floor of the prison they are in and can be as high as several thousand US dollars for the more luxurious cells. Those who cannot afford to do this sleep in the corridors or work for wealthier prisoners in exchange for a place to sleep. Family and friends can all come and go freely and bring in food, cigarettes and other goods. These are then sold in a market area, alongside drugs and weapons.

My guide introduced me to some of the more powerful prisoners. One boasted that he had been in prison in 14 countries in Latin America and also in Canada. Another complained that his sentence would soon be up. I asked him what he would do when he was released. He explained that he would do something to be sent back. "Outside I am harassed by police who want bribes. Young gangs will try and kill me to take my business. In here I have power. No one will touch me".

It struck me that the system completely failed to rehabilitate offenders and the system of punishment appeared to reward organised criminals, essentially offering a haven from the law, while harshly punishing people who had fallen into petty crime through poverty and circumstance

Interested in having a mentor?

Criteria:

- 21 years or older
- Sentenced to under 12 months or on remand and likely to receive sentence of under 12 months or walk from court
- Planning to return to Exeter or surrounding areas
- Motivated to try and stay out of prison
- Minimum of 2 weeks before release

Volunteer mentors provide support and encouragement. They are not specialist workers but offer support and signpost good connections.

If you are interested, and meet the criteria, speak to the Resettlement Team or self refer on 01392 256246

CARD Mentor Training Update

CARD is very pleased to welcome 10 new trainee mentors onto the latest 'Mentoring for Change' course. Tim, Lance, Nuno, Dan, Pom, Melissa, Nick, Kev, Dianne and Bryan started training in March and are on course to complete in June. This is the first course I have facilitated and I hope the trainees have enjoyed the experience as much as I have.

The aim of the course is to stimulate inquiry into the qualities and skills of mentoring, whilst equipping mentors with sound knowledge, confidence and a good support system.

No two courses are the same. The group learns from each other and our collective skills and experience form the basis for much of the learning.

Wherever a trainee or trainer is starting from, there is always more to discover about mentoring, and about yourself.

Gill Amos

Brighter Prospects for the future!

We are pleased to have begun mentoring ex-offenders taking part in the Prospects House twelve week resettlement course, which assists the resettlement of prisoners at risk of further abuse of drugs. Phil previously had a mentor in prison, but was unable to make contact once released. He returned to prison where he was approached again and said he still wanted a mentor. Phil was transferred to Channings Wood, but we were able to keep in touch, and matched him with Jon. The match is working well now that Phil has been released. He has the support of accommodation at Prospects plus a good support package, including group meetings and intervention work. He also has some free time to go into town and to appointments under his own steam. Working with Jon, Phil is able to reflect on the changes taking place whilst at Prospects and plan for a future in more permanent accommodation.

Are you interested in being a mentor?

Person Specification

- Over 25 years of age
- Able to commit to 10 half-day training sessions and 1 hour a week mentoring
- Reliable
- Non-judgemental approach
- Good Communicator
- Able to work as part of a team within clearly defined boundaries

Mentor Recruitment Process

- Volunteer contacts CARD
- Application Pack sent out and returned
- Meeting with the Mentor Coordinator to discuss what is involved and answer any questions
- Mentoring for Change accredited training course undertaken
- Discussion with Mentor Coordinator on suitability for CARD
- Mentor introduced to mentee and work begins

Staff Team



From left to right:

- Paul Douglas (Project Manager)
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- Kevin Hunter (Admin Support)
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- Gill Amos (Mentor Coordinator)
01392 256246, gill@eci.org.uk

Staffing Update.....

Congratulations to Gill, who is going on maternity leave in June. Claire Paine, who is a CARD mentor, has been appointed as maternity cover for her and will be starting in June. Carol will be extending her hours to fulltime during this period. Also, Paul is now working for CARD fulltime.

Thank you to:

- Mentors Matt and Dan

And special thanks to:

- Mentee Nick

For their contributions to this newsletter

FOR MORE INFORMATION



CLOSING A REVOLVING DOOR

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