

Foundations and Futures



New Bridge Befriending Service Evaluation Report

November 2012

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1. FOREWORD

Over the last few years, New Bridge has rightly been asked some tough questions about whether our Befriending Service has real impact on the lives of the prisoners we serve. Our volunteers have known from the letters and conversations with isolated prisoners that befriending has made a difference. They could see changes in attitude to their offending, changes in their behaviour in prison and a shift in their thinking to one where the future looked brighter. However, this ‘anecdotal’, or case study evidence was not enough; funders, prison governors and the Ministry of Justice asked us more and more questions about how we know for sure that befriending works and contributes to reducing re-offending.

In response to this we are now gathering data on an ongoing basis in terms of the impact of Befriending on our client group and those who work within the organisation on a voluntary basis. This report is the first full evaluation of this material, giving us a clearer picture of the impact of our work and where we need to focus in the future.

The Prime Minister, David Cameron has recently outlined the government’s view that voluntary organisations should take on a key role in work with offenders both in prison and in the community. The encouraging findings of this report evidence the contribution that we at New Bridge make with those in custody. The findings will also help us to frame our services in the new era of ‘payment by results’, confident that befriending can achieve real change in the lives of the prisoners we write to and visit and reduce their chances of re-offending.

New Bridge staff, Volunteers and Trustees are passionate about the work that we do. This report confirms in detail what many of us have been hearing from prisoners for many years; that it increases the motivation to make further contacts in the community, develops self-esteem and confidence, successfully challenges negative attitudes to crime and offending and encourages a positive outlook on life and on the future.

I hope you enjoy reading our report and I commend it to you.

Chris Thomas

Chief Executive

New Bridge Foundation November 2012

2. Executive Summary

The New Bridge Foundation has been supporting offenders for over 50 years. The charity connects prisoners with the community via a national network of volunteers, with the intention of improving well-being and ultimately contributing to a reduction in re-offending. This report is the culmination of an exercise to formally evaluate the Befriending Service, its impact upon the wellbeing of prisoners and to highlight any changes in attitude and behaviour that may make a contribution to reducing reoffending.

This review of New Bridge's Befriending Service comes at a time when the government is attempting to balance high levels of imprisonment with a "rehabilitation revolution". The Prime Minister's recent speech from the Centre for Social Justice reiterated the need for rehabilitation and integration in the community to begin in prison. The move to further introduce a system of payment by results means evidence of impact is crucial for voluntary sector contributors.

Through a questionnaire administered to prisoners and volunteers, this report documents the importance of creating links between the offender and the community for successful rehabilitation and provides an evaluation of the impact on those involved. Based on responses from 153 prisoners and 67 volunteers, this report is able to conclude that the befriending scheme has promoted a number of positives outcomes. In relation to offenders the dominant ones are:

- Increased motivation to re-establish contacts with those in the community, including family, friends and those working within support organisations
- Improved self-esteem and confidence
- The opportunity to challenge their thinking about criminal behaviour
- More positive thinking about their current and future lives
- A move towards a more positive sense of personal identity

These outcomes indicate that long-term befriending of prisoners helps them to work towards successful re-integration into the community and reduce the likelihood of re-offending.

3. Context: Building Bridges between the Offender and the Community

The impact of building good community ties, as a key to transforming the lives of prisoners, has begun to be acknowledged as important. Attention in particular has been directed towards prisoner re-entry (Kubrin and Stewart, 2006), and as a consequence interest in community influences on successful prisoner reintegration has grown considerably (Bales & Mears, 2008). So too there has long been an acknowledgement of the importance of social ties, which is embedded within criminological thought through Hirschi's (1969) social bond theory, which claims that **an individual's connection to society is intrinsically linked with re-offending**. This does not excuse criminal behaviour, although it suggests that more focus is needed on programmes which promote community reintegration. More generally, **evidence also demonstrates the significant impact of social inclusion on the well-being, self-esteem, and recidivism rates of prisoners (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002)**.

Prison may reduce crime by providing a deterrent and by incapacitating offenders. However, there is a considerable risk that a prison sentence might actually aggravate the factors associated with re-offending. Despite limited research on the social networks of prisoners, it is suggested that **family support is crucial to positive post release outcomes for ex-prisoners (Nelson et al., 1999; Twexbury and DeMichele, 2005)**. 'Those with negative family relationships appear particularly vulnerable to a return to crime and subsequent reconviction and incarceration' (La Vigne et al., 2004, cited in Shinkfield & Graffam, 2010: 349). Unfortunately, many prisoners are housed in institutions which are a considerable distance away from their home area. Sentenced prisoners, for example are held an average of 53 miles from home (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002: 30). Additionally, it is common for prisoners to move between prisons due to overcrowding, progression to more open conditions, or for access to a particular programme. Consequently, **prisoners are faced with many challenges when attempting to maintain relationships with people in the outside world (Bales & Mears, 2008)**. In particular, according to the Social Exclusion Unit (2002), 43 per cent of sentenced prisoners said they had lost contact with their families. This highlights the effect imprisonment has on weakening links with the outside community (Snow, 2002).

As a result, prisoners are likely to feel elevated levels of depression and anxiety - psychological conditions most critical to an individual's well-being (Spielberger, et al, 2004). Sadly, this, along with the prospect of a life sentence has also been found to be a risk factor associated with suicidal thoughts (Borrill, 2002). According to a study which examined the role of the emotional state in the reintegration of ex-prisoners, Shinkfield and Graffam (2010) found that impaired emotional state may significantly affect the ability of ex-prisoners to successfully reintegrate into the general community. Researchers have described this as the "gate fever effect", characterised by anxiety and irritability just prior to release (Cormier, Kennedy & Sendbehler, 1967). It is therefore **vital that prisoners have the opportunity to discuss their feelings about leaving the prison environment and re-entering the community (Shinkfield & Graffam, 2010; HM Prison Service, 1992: 12)**. Even so, research by Borrill et al. (2005) found that there is a tension between prisoners needing to talk to someone, and lack of trust in prison staff. This finding suggests that there is an opening for the community to provide a non-judgemental support network. **Visits from community members can reinforce social ties and subsequently the self-esteem of prisoners, assisting with reintegration through the development of positive, community linkages (Bales & Mears, 2008)**

In summary, a great deal of evidence exists concerning the impact of the social exclusion of prisoners. There is no doubt that community reintegration of ex-prisoners plays a vital role in efforts to reduce recidivism (Shinkfield & Graffam, 2009). Indeed, while successive governments have invested significant amounts of money in locking up offenders, policies around re-entry have been neglected (Seiter & Kadela, 2003). It is apparent that there is a pressing need for resources to be directed toward reintegration, through programmes tailored to address the social inclusion of prisoners (Seiter & Kadela, 2003).

4. Background

The New Bridge Foundation has been supporting offenders in prison and in the community since 1956. At the heart of their work is the belief that having a positive link to the outside world improves wellbeing and gives offenders improved changes of successful rehabilitation into the community. These factors all have the potential of reducing further re-offending.

Vision & Mission Statements

New Bridge's vision is of a society in which there are fewer victims, because all offenders who can benefit from our support are given the help they need to stop offending.

New Bridge works with individual offenders responding to their own needs, talents and potential. Through befriending and mentoring we help them to realise their full potential as members of society.

New Bridge stays in contact with offenders for as long as their help is needed, with no artificial cut off points to the offer of support.

The Befriending Service

The Befriending Service is the cornerstone of New Bridge's work. It puts men and women in prison and in secure hospitals in England and Wales in touch with trained volunteers. Befriending volunteers write to and visit offenders offering a listening ear, positive encouragement and news from the outside.

What makes New Bridge different from other national schemes is the combination of writing and visiting, long term engagement with the offender and the fact that the service is not attached to any particular prison. Thus any prisoner in England & Wales can apply for a befriender and if they are moved to a different prison the befriending relationship can continue uninterrupted.

People selected to be New Bridge volunteers undertake an initial two day training and are supported on an ongoing basis by the Volunteer Director and Volunteer Administrator. Locally based Volunteer Support Groups meet regularly to review ongoing work with offenders and to discuss any concerns volunteers may have. They

are chaired by an experienced volunteer and frequently attended by New Bridge staff and trustees.

The contribution of these volunteers is extensive and analysis of casework data shows that;

In 2011 522 prisoners accessed support from the Befriending Service, a 29% increase on the previous year.

In the past 10 years New Bridge befrienders have travelled 843,514 miles to make visits to prisoners.

In the past 5 years 34,891 letters have been exchanged between volunteers and offenders.

5 Aims of this report

This report aims to document and present findings from the evaluation of New Bridge's Befriending Service. The primary task of this report is to present an overview of the impact of befriending on the lives of prisoners. In addition to quantitative research this report also provides case study data that captures the stories from a sample of prisoners. In order to widen the scope of findings and provide breadth this report also provides feedback from a range of New Bridge volunteers.

6 Methodology

6.1 Research aims

The aims of this research are to:

- evaluate the impact of the scheme on prisoners' lives and their eventual reintegration into society
- review the experience of those involved with New Bridge, including prisoners and volunteers
- explore the possible wider impact of befriending on community reintegration

6.2 Participants

The participants in this research were all current or ex-prisoners, from prisons and secure hospitals across the United Kingdom, who had sought the support of New Bridge during their custodial sentence. Prisoners were sampled by inviting all those in custody who had been taken on by New Bridge prior to the last 6 months to contribute to the evaluation. A total of 153 prisoners participated in the evaluation, four of whom have formed case studies.

The participants included prisoners serving sentences for a range of categories of offence, including high risk offenders. Prisoners responding to the questionnaire had been supported by New Bridge for a varying range of years. Respondents supported for up to four years made up 70% of the sample. The remaining 30% have been befriended for five or more years with 9% having had a connection to the charity for more than ten years.

The feedback from an online survey questionnaire sent out to all our Befrienders was also incorporated in this research.

6.3 The research process

The research has been conducted in the following stages:

- A series of meetings with senior staff at New Bridge and Liz Hales, Visiting Scholar at the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, to design prisoner and volunteer questionnaires specifically for this study.

- The sending of questionnaires to all of those in custody who have been in receipt of Befriending support for more than six months (289 in all), to capture their experiences and document the impact of the befriending service.
- The sending of an online survey questionnaire to 157 New Bridge volunteers, to track their satisfaction with the service and to seek recommendations.

In addition factual information obtained from the Befriending Service database has been used to inform the study.

To gather data on service impact from those in custody on a sufficiently large scale a paper questionnaire was seen as the only feasible option. As well as gathering quantitative data information on specific issues, the addition of open ended questions gave the potential for more detailed responses, and a greater understanding of the personal impact of befriending. This qualitative element enabled the delineation of fine differences between individuals that are otherwise difficult to recognise, and ground the findings and interpretations of this report in credibility.

The questionnaire for prisoners covered: what prompted them to apply to New Bridge; how they found out about New Bridge; what they felt most valuable about having a Befriender; participants expectations and how far these expectations had been met; whether they received letters or visits from anyone other than their Befriender; the impact of New Bridge on their motivation to contact others on the outside; thoughts on whether New Bridge has helped them in thinking about their future; ways to improve the service; and, finally, whether they would recommend the service to other prisoners. Prisoners were also given space to tell the story of their involvement with New Bridge and four of these accounts have been used to form case studies.

Volunteers were asked questions about how long they had been volunteering with New Bridge; what prompted them to become involved; how many prisoners they had befriended; what they took away from the experience; participants satisfaction with the service and level of support offered; ways to improve the volunteering experience; and, if they would recommend becoming a befriender to those interested.

6.4 Ethical issues

The research was designed and conducted by people who are experienced in conducting research in prison and with vulnerable people and we ensured compliance with The British Society of Criminology Code of Ethics for Researchers in the Field of Criminology, which states that:

Researchers should recognise that they have a responsibility to ensure that the physical, social and psychological well-being of an individual participating in research is not adversely affected by participation in the research. Researchers should strive to protect the rights of those they study, their interests, sensitivities and privacy. Researchers should consider carefully the possibility that the research experience may be a disturbing one, particularly for those who are vulnerable by virtue of factors such as age, social status, or powerlessness and should seek to minimise such disturbances.

On the basis of this we decided to exclude specific questions that would investigate in more detail issues surrounding the impact of befriending on psychological well-being, as staff and volunteers would not be on hand to address any emotional or psychological issues that could arise from this.

This research also upheld the Prison Service's Statement of Professional Principles. In line with these principles New Bridge dealt fairly, openly and humanely with prisoners, valued everyone's contribution, promoted equality of opportunity, worked constructively with criminal justice agencies and obtained best value from the resources available.

6.5 Response rates

Response rates to the questionnaires sent to those in custody was higher than expected with 153 returns (53%). This is despite the fact that prison moves impact on receipt of mail and recipients did not have access to support from us when there were questions they wished to ask in relation to the questionnaire. Inevitably there were also some questionnaires returned where all information requested was not supplied.

The response rate from Volunteers was 43%, with 67 completed questionnaires returned.

7 FINDINGS

7.1 Prisoners findings

Prisoners were asked to say how they had heard of New Bridge.

- 54 participants said that they heard about New Bridge from other prisoners
- 11 said they were recommended by Probation
- 9 through their Prison Chaplain.

This dominance of recommendations from other prisoners is a positive indication of prisoner satisfaction with the service.

We asked prisoners what is the most valuable thing about having a New Bridge Befriender.¹

- 98 (64%) said receiving letters
- 77 (50%) said knowing someone who is independent of the prison system
- 72 (47%) said developing a link with the world I will be returning to
- 64 (45%) receiving visits
- 58 (38%) said having another point of view to test my ideas against
- 28 (18%) said a link may help with my parole applications

We asked prisoners about their expectations of the Befriending Service

- 139 (89%) said they expected letters
- 117 (76%) said they expected it to reduce their feelings of isolation
- 116 (76%) said they expected someone outside to take an interest in them
- 98 (64%) said they expected visits

Prisoners were asked if their expectations had been met.

87% of prisoners responding to both questions said that their expectations about the service reducing isolation had been either met or somewhat met.

An additional 11 prisoners who did not initially have expectations about the service reducing isolation said it had reduced or somewhat reduced their isolation.

These data on these responses are shown in Figure 1.

¹ Some participants gave more than one answer.

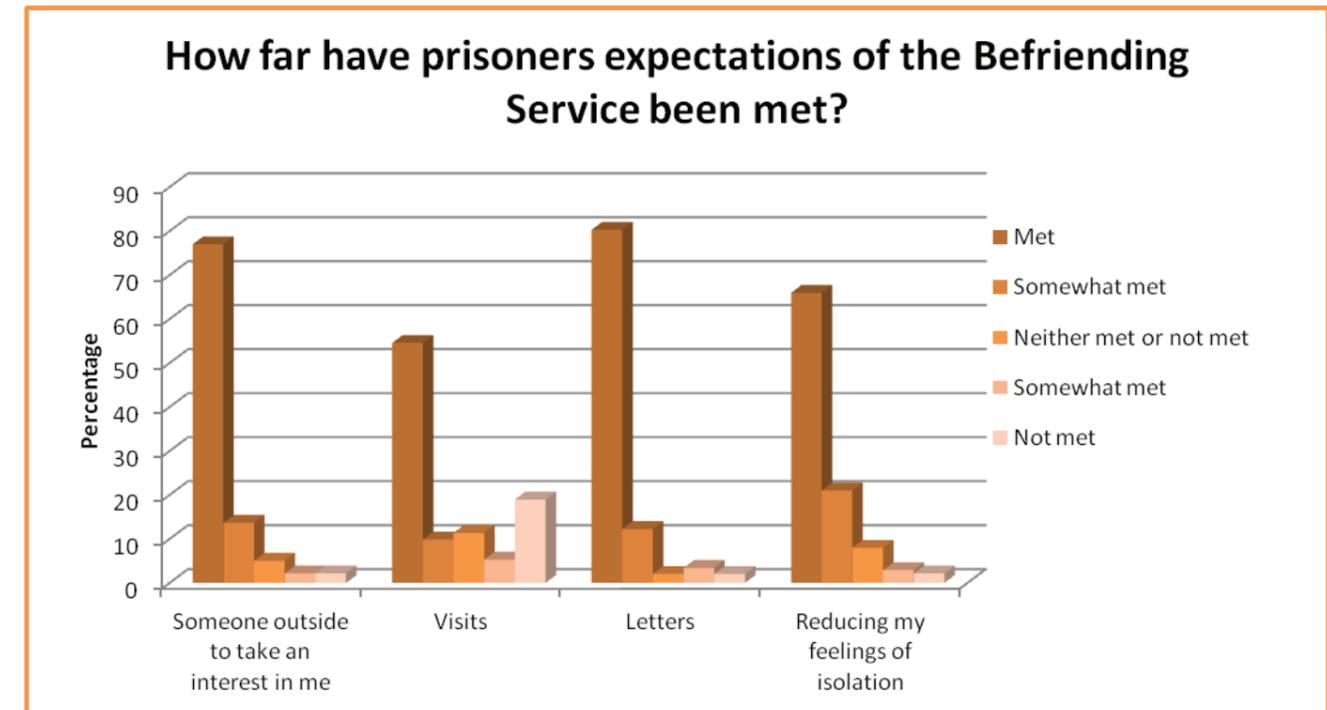


Figure 1

To assess the isolation of this client group we asked prisoners if they receive letter or visits from anyone other than their New Bridge volunteers. At the time of responding only:

- 99 (65%) said they received letters from others
- 83 (54%) said they received others visits

Letters and visits that were received were mainly from family members but also included friends, other prisoners, solicitors and people from other organisations.

We asked prisoners if having a New Bridge volunteer had made them feel more motivated about having contact with friends, family and people from other organisations.

- 79 (52%) said they felt more motivated to contact friends
- 79 (52%) they felt more motivated to contact family
- 90 (59%) said they felt more motivated to contact people from other organisations

Contact with New Bridge and positive thoughts about the future.

Participants were asked if contact with New Bridge had helped them to think about their future in a more positive way and given the opportunity to explain why. In addition they were asked to give an account of their involvement with New Bridge and any differences it had made to their life. In response 71% of prisoners indicated that having a New Bridge volunteer had a positive difference on mental health and wellbeing, self-confidence and improved self-esteem and identity.

When asked what New Bridge could do to improve the befriending Service the dominant theme was not one of criticism of individual support but in relation to wider access and knowledge about what New Bridge could offer:

“Get New Bridge posters back onto wing notice boards. Get more literature about New Bridge into prison libraries. Get both of the above into prison visiting centres”

“I speak to a lot of prisoners nowadays that have no one to talk to, and most are first time offenders who have never heard of New Bridge. So I pass on your address to them, but it would be good to see more leaflets from you about the type of service you provide which I may add is fantastic”

7.2 Case studies

Data from four prisoners is presented as case studies, highlighting the positive impact of their involvement with New Bridge.

Case study 1: Neil² is 44 and serving an indeterminate sentence. He has been supported by New Bridge since 2008.

Initially, I recall feeling isolated, helpless and totally hopeless at the situation I faced, not to mention the sentence. My whole life had been wrecked due to my actions. I felt so alone with no family to confide in, no support or direction of life. Mundanely I existed, below a level of existence, looking neither forward or backwards.

Contact with New Bridge provided some glimmer of hope amongst the hopelessness of an IPP sentence. I dread to think how life may have turned out otherwise. Simply having someone to talk to, non-judgemental, not bombarding me with questions surrounding my sentence was liberating. All at once I felt free from the restraints of the regime of prison life, able to converse with someone impartial in society.

² Pseudonyms have been used for all case studies.

My volunteer provided a new perspective to the situation with a range of book referrals, in addition to encouraging correspondence, optimistic and full of hope. My expectations of the future are increased due to the support, encouragement and kind non-judgemental attributes of my volunteer. New Bridge not only changes lives, it also saves them too.

Case study 2: Geoff is serving a life sentence for murder. He has been involved with New Bridge since 2010.

I am in my late 60s and in prison for the first time. One day as I was reading the Inside Time I saw an article about New Bridge and the work they do. At the time I was becoming more and more depressed and was starting to get to the stage of thinking why should I leave prison (or work towards it) as I had nothing to look forward to outside no home – no life.

I applied and was given a befriender who at first wrote to me at regular intervals. I shall never forget my feelings when I got that first letter. I still get a feeling of great pleasure now when the duty officer hands me a letter. After a while my befriender started visiting me. We sit and talk about all sorts of things and I come away from those visits on a high.

I am now very much looking forward to my release should it happen. My health has improved and no more depression.

Case study 3: Dave is serving a life sentence for attempted rape, aggravated burglary and ABH. He first contacted New Bridge in 2011.

I began this sentence aged 26, 7 years later and I'd lost contact with everyone I'd ever known on the outside. My confidence and self-esteem had hit rock bottom, I'd given up both on myself and other people. Prison had become my reality; it was painful even frightening to think about the life outside of the walls.

Another prisoner convinced me to write to New Bridge. I was dubious at first and it took a long time for me to put pen to paper. I eventually wrote off and had more or less convinced myself that no one would reply anyway. I was shocked when a letter came: it was the first one I'd had in years bar legal jargon. I had a mixture of feelings: excitement, expectation but also anxiousness and concern. Most surprising of all - fear. This person had made effort to write to me and I was unsure how I should respond.

In the end I just opened my heart and the words came. A year or so later and we are still in contact and have laid the foundations of a firm friendship. I never believed that someone would care enough to show an interest in me. It's made a real difference to my life knowing that someone is there; someone to talk to, someone I can express my feelings to. It has helped me to find the strength in myself to carry on, to believe in myself and others, to hope for a brighter future.

Case study 4: Marcus is 22, serving an indeterminate sentence for two counts of possession of a firearm with intent. He first came to New Bridge in 2009.

When I first wrote to my befriender I was depressed about the IPP sentence I received and would constantly tell myself I wouldn't be released. Having my befriender has changed my views on release and explained things in ways I could understand which has led to no more time in segregation, a job on the server and an enhanced prisoner status which is the best place to be whilst in prison.

My befriender has helped me to change so much. My volunteer stuck by me and pushed me down the road I wanted to go. If you could only see the change yourself you would understand how much my volunteer has helped to motivate myself and change the way I think about courses and people I should be friends with.

Thanks to my befriender I'm not the person who came to prison in 2008 as a 20 year old boy. I'm now a man with the ability to do anything, live an honest life because I want to.

7.3 The impact of befriending on prisoners

7.3.i Prisoners' wellbeing before contact with New Bridge

Before contacting New Bridge prisoners typically described feeling frightened, hopeless, lonely, depressed, and unable to trust.

"When I first came to prison I was all by myself, I lost all contact with my family and friend. I was lonely, depressed and suicidal"

"My life was at the lowest. I was having constant thoughts of suicide and self-harm. I didn't have any confidence or self-esteem; there wasn't a light at the end of the tunnel for me"

"I was diagnosed with depression, I felt isolated, unmotivated and I had basically given up on life"

Prisoners participating in the research have indicated that contact with a New Bridge volunteer has resulted in positive changes in their lives.

7.3.ii Improved contact with family, friends and support organisations

As found in the literature, at the time of release, prisoners are confronted with need to build links with their community (Nelson *et al.*1999). This research found that 35% of prisoners were not receiving letters, and 46% were not receiving visits at the time they completed the questionnaire. As a result of their involvement with New Bridge:

- 79 (52%) said they felt more motivated to contact friends
- 79 (52%) they felt more motivated to contact family
- 90 (59%) said they felt more motivated to contact people from other organisations

"Having regular contact with my befriender really enables me to maintain my links with the world outside prison, as well as developing my confidence which has enabled me to resume contact with my sister for the first time in approximately 15 years"

"My befriender taught me the ability to trust again. She showed me the true meaning of loyalty to others and she rebuilt my self-confidence and self-esteem enabling me to be reunited to my family"

Statements such as these demonstrate that New Bridge promotes a link between the offender and the community, indicating increased chances of successful rehabilitation upon release.

7.3.iii Improving self-esteem and confidence

The institutionalising effect of prison has been found to damage prisoners' confidence (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). Improvements in self-esteem have been noted through a number of prisoner's articulations.

"Because of my penpal I have the confidence to survive in the outside"

"I stopped feeling useless, worthless and learnt that I had a lot to offer others worse off than myself"

7.3.iv Promoting a positive sense of personal identity

Labelling theory may also offer another possibility for how befriending schemes might reduce re-offending. Individuals may internalise certain labels (offender) and in turn act according to the label. Befriending acts as an important counter to such labels and instead promotes a more positive sense of personal identity (Bales & Mears, 2008). Through their responses, prisoners appear to really value the support from community members who view them in a non-judgemental way.

“I was very surprised at how I was treated by my volunteer. She treated me with respect, dignity, never judged me in anyway”

“Being a convicted sex offender most people would run a mile or worse. But your volunteer doesn’t judge and helps by being an ear”

Participants were largely of the opinion that they were valued as human beings and not labelled by their crimes, appearing to be adopting a positive self-identity.

7.3.v Positively challenging attitudes about life and the future

Imprisonment can affect prisoners’ abilities to think for themselves, a factor that may influence re-offending. Despite efforts to take part in programmes to improve attitudes, others prisoners may reinforce negative attitudes towards crime. It is important to challenge such attitudes and begin a positive process of change.

119 (78%) prisoners reported that New Bridge had positively changed the way they think about their life now and for the future.

“It has changed my opinion of a lot of things and now I am going to do all I can to get out of the prison system and then I am going to show all the people that care I can change and be a better person”

“I know what I need to do in order to lead a life free from reoffending and your volunteer has been the cement I needed to help me lay my foundation blocks”

“It’s made me think there is a future beyond prison walls, and crime”

7.3.vi Reducing isolation.

The final dominant theme in responses from prisoners was that of reduced isolation with 87% of prisoners taking part in the research stated that contact with a New Bridge volunteer had resulted in this key change. This also appeared in the response to whether they would recommend New Bridge to other prisoners.

“I would say to anyone who feels isolated or just needs someone to write to, contact New Bridge.”

This statement was made by one of the 146 prisoners who said yes they would make such a recommendation.

7.4 Volunteer findings

New Bridge recognises that the dominance of positive feedback from prisoners is resultant on the ongoing work by our dedicated group of volunteers, and that it is important that we gather data to gain a better understanding of expectations, level of input and perceptions of available support by this key group.

In terms of **length of involvement** with the organisation 43% of the respondents had been volunteering with New Bridge for over five years with a further 43% befriending for one to five years.

In relation to **workload** 45% of volunteers had befriended between 4 and 9 prisoners during their time with New Bridge. A further 22% had been in contact to 10 or more prisoners.

New Bridge volunteers come from all walks of life, and from various ethnic and religious groups. When asked **what prompted them to become a volunteer with New Bridge**, answers typically demonstrated empathy and a common desire to help people.

“The ability and desire to help someone get through what may be a really tough experience in life.”

“Wanting to do something to help prisoners re-integrate with society”

New Bridge asked befrienders to consider what they thought they had got from volunteering. (See Figure 2)

90% said it had given them a greater understanding of prisoners' needs

82% said it had improved their knowledge of the criminal justice system

63% said it had given them a sense of achievement.

These outcomes demonstrate the ways in which New Bridge helps to build a bridge between the offender and the community through discussion, which enhances both parties awareness of the inside/outside world. Sense of achievement was resultant on the changes they observed with those they worked with. The impact on personal confidence or developing work related skills was less dominant.



Figure 2.

Feedback from volunteers on their perception of levels of support provided were very positive (Figure 3) with 99% of respondents claimed that they received good support.

"I believe the initial training I had was excellent, and I have felt well supported by other volunteers and New Bridge staff in group meeting and in the office."

"Good non-judgmental support from office. Policies are clear-cut"

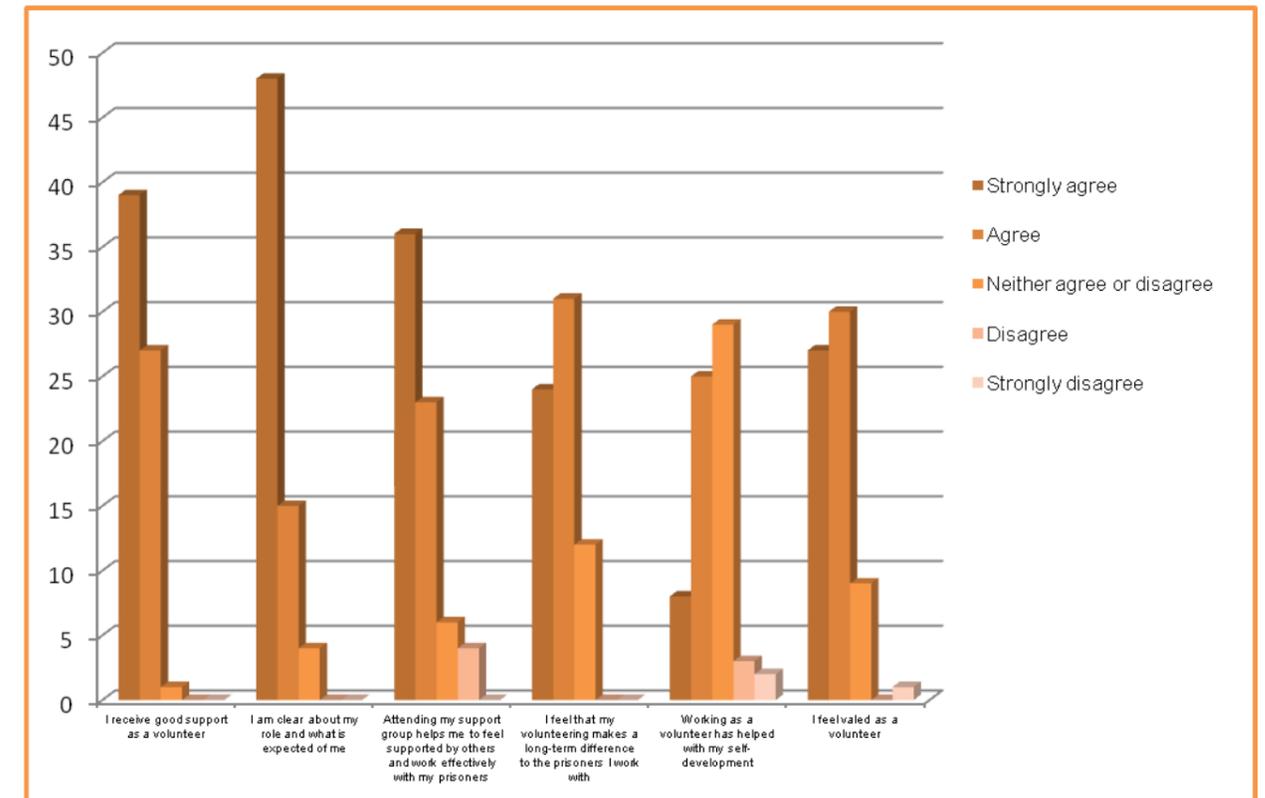


Figure 3.

A small number of respondents also suggested improvements to New Bridge's support for prisoners and the Befriending Service and these and other suggestions outlined below will be reviewed in the context of forward planning.

- A peer-mentoring scheme for volunteers
- Adopting a more regional infrastructure
- Increased work with prisoners post release
- Acknowledging all volunteers in the Annual Report
- Additional local support groups

When asked if they would recommend becoming a befriender to those interested, 100% of our volunteers said yes.

"Yes, strongly. I think it's valuable to both the prisoners and the volunteers. Befriending helps volunteers to understand more about the world. It increases your compassion for humanity"

8. Conclusions and the way forward

Collection of data used in this evaluation is part of an ongoing process we are engaged in to monitor the impact of our work and ensure that those who fund and support our work are well informed.

The key message from this evaluation is that we have a dedicated group of committed and hardworking volunteers. The relationships they develop with those in custody through the Befriending Scheme impacts on the prisoners' views of themselves, reducing the dangerous impact of isolation, linking them into the real world outside of the prison gates and empowers them to think about their current situation and future life in a more positive way. As shown by criminological research all these factors impact on successful reintegration on release, reducing the risk of reoffending.

However, the main criticisms from prisoners and suggestions from volunteers is that we should be doing more. There is still a huge unmet need and this can only be addressed by taking on, training and offering effective support to a larger group of volunteers, so that more vulnerable and high risk prisoners can benefit from this work. All of this depends on further funding and we trust that this evaluation gives confidence to our current supporters and attracts new funders who are looking to provide financial support for the type of effective support that New Bridge provides.

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