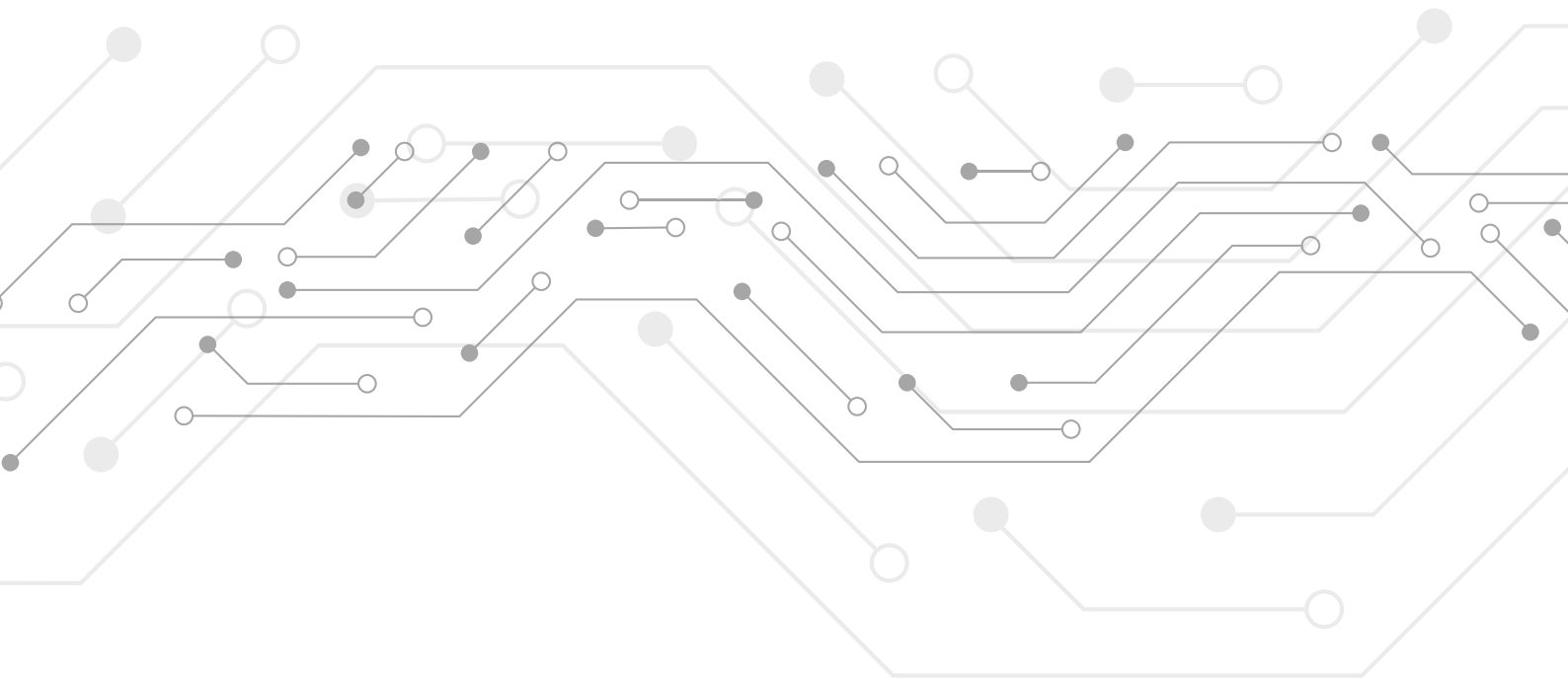


# The STAR Accommodation Project Evaluation

Community Rehabilitation  
Company Evaluation Series



November 2021

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# Introduction

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Ingeus commissioned an independent, external consultant, Russell Webster, to undertake a series of evaluations on a range of interventions which Ingeus delivered as the lead organisation in the Reducing Reoffending Partnership (RRP), alongside Change, Grow, Live and the St Giles Trust, which operated the Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire & Rutland (DLNR) and Staffordshire & West Midlands (SWM) Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRC) between 2015 and 2021. This evaluation focuses on the STAR Accommodation Project (STAR) which opened in November 2018 and was designed to provide the support needed by people on probation and people released from prison to enable them to progress to independent living and reduce the likeliness of reoffending. The report presents an evaluation of the project's operation from its launch until 31 August 2021, during which time the project provided accommodation to 83 individuals.

Chapter 1 describes the development of the STAR project and its model of delivery. Chapter 2 presents information on the number of individuals helped and their outcomes. Chapter 3 shares feedback from residents and professional partners and presents the evaluation conclusions.

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# Executive Summary

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## Development

The STAR project is unique in that the supported housing comprises the top two floors of the probation office in Derby. Ingeus were aware of an acute lack of appropriate supported housing for people in prison being released back to the city, and local managers knew that the landlord of the building had re-developed the top floors of their office building into high quality flats which he intended to rent to private tenants. Ingeus embarked on a concerted eighteen-month campaign to develop this accommodation to help meet the need for released prisoners by building a multi-agency partnership between the Ingeus operated Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC), the National Probation Service (which agreed to fund two bedspaces), YMCA Derbyshire, and Derby Homes.

## The project

The STAR project can provide housing for thirteen people, with nine single occupancy rooms, two two-bedroom flats, and a communal room for appointments, community activities and group work. An extensive support package is provided via a dedicated YMCA Housing Navigator, an Ingeus community support worker and an Ingeus housing case worker.

The three key strands within the STAR project are:

1. The development of holistic and individualised assessment and intervention plans.
2. The engagement and motivation of ex-offenders to comply and change.
3. Using a strengths-based approach to achieve positive outcomes.

All residents are registered with a local GP, and an initial appointment is arranged with their support worker within one working day of being moved into their accommodation. During their initial appointment a support plan is developed, along with referrals to talking therapies, volunteering opportunities, and training courses. The communal room is used to host community activities, workshops, and courses. A timetable of events is available for coffee mornings, health and wellbeing activities, mindfulness sessions, money management workshops, cooking sessions, talking groups, employability workshops (including CV writing and job searches), and pathway interventions focused on rehabilitation of drug and alcohol addictions.

## Outcomes

Of the 72 people who have been residents and have now left the STAR project, just over half (37, 51%) successfully completed the programme and progressed to stable accommodation. This successful move on rate is very high for a project which caters for individuals with high levels of need, the overwhelming majority of whom have never had their own accommodation before.

In addition to these formally recorded data, many residents are recorded to have improved their personal wellbeing, completed training courses, and found jobs to make substantial progress on their desistance journeys.

Residents interviewed praised the quality of accommodation and the range of support on offer. Professional interviewees expressed the view that the high quality of the accommodation meant that residents valued their home and helped motivate them to address problems and engage in positive activities. They appreciated the wide range of services on offer to STAR residents. It was felt that the STAR project was a good example of multi-agency partnership work and that communication between all partners was of excellent quality.

## Going forward

Ingeus' ability to spot the opportunity to develop much needed provision for high need people on probation is commendable. The organisation was able to combine its entrepreneurial outlook with its willingness to build broad partnerships, with the result of adding to the limited pool of high support accommodation available to prison leavers in the Derby area.

Ingeus gained considerable expertise in how to establish and manage offender accommodation from its experience in setting up the STAR project. At the same time, Ingeus invested much more of its own revenues in providing housing options to the people supervised by the Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire & Rutland (DLNR) and Staffordshire & West Midlands (SWM) CRCs, than most other CRC owners. The organisation established a dedicated accommodation fund and commissioned beds from a wide range of housing providers across the Midlands to meet the accommodation needs of people on probation. In many cases, Ingeus was able to commission beds from providers who did not routinely offer support to their tenants by utilising Ingeus' own Community Support Workers to provide that support.

This offender accommodation expertise has stood Ingeus in good stead for its work delivering accommodation services across the South Central and Greater Manchester probation regions.

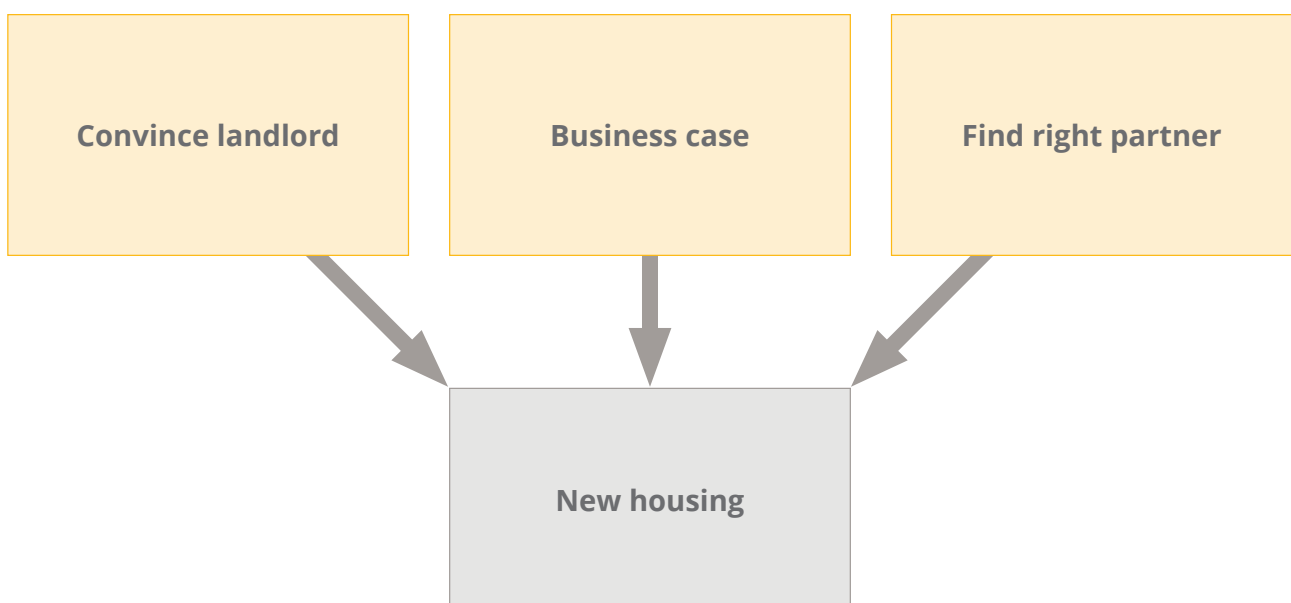
# Chapter 1: The STAR Project

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## Origins

The STAR project is unique in that the supported housing comprises the top two floors of the probation office in Derby. Ingeus were aware of an acute lack of appropriate supported housing for people in prison being released back to the city and local managers knew that the landlord of the building had re-developed the top floors of their office building into high quality flats which he intended to rent to private tenants. Ingeus embarked on a concerted campaign to develop this accommodation to help meet the need for released prisoners.

There were three main components to the campaign: convincing the landlord that making his accommodation available to prison leavers was both a commercially viable option and an acceptable business risk; undertaking a formal assessment of need to make a business case to present to Derby City Council and other potential funders; and developing a partnership with the most appropriate social housing organisation to manage the resource safely and efficiently.



## The model

Ingeus invested considerable time and effort over an eighteen-month period to achieve the goal of establishing this new supported housing provision. Key to the successful launch was the building of a multi-agency partnership between the Ingeus operated Community Rehabilitation Company, the National Probation Service (which agreed to fund two bedspaces), YMCA Derbyshire (YMCA), and Derby Homes. The YMCA was chosen as the key partner agency because of its experience in housing management with vulnerable people, and because it was able to offer a remote CCTV monitoring service over night-times and weekends to protect the integrity of the provision and ensure that no criminal activity such as drug dealing was taking place.

The STAR project can provide housing for thirteen people, with nine single occupancy rooms, two two-bedroom flats, and a communal room for appointments, community activities and group work. An extensive support package is provided via a dedicated YMCA Housing Navigator, an Ingeus community support worker and an Ingeus housing case worker.

The three key strands within the STAR project are:

1. The development of holistic and individualised assessment and intervention plans.
2. The engagement and motivation of ex-offenders to comply and change.
3. Using a strengths-based approach to achieve positive outcomes.

All applicants were discussed by a panel comprising of Ingeus staff, local authority support workers and the YMCA Housing Navigator to ensure a collaborative approach and that professionally informed decisions were made about the suitability of new referrals. Each applicant was assessed on an individual basis, ensuring applicants are eligible, and are not deemed to have needs that extend the capacity of support available.



*Example bedroom at the Star Project*

Once accepted and moved in, residents were eligible to stay at the project for a period of up to six months. All residents were registered with a local GP, and an initial appointment arranged with their support worker within one working day of being moved into their accommodation. During their initial appointment a support plan was developed, along with referrals to talking therapies, volunteering opportunities, and training courses. If necessary, referrals were offered with St Andrews House to provide drug treatment services, drug testing, and referrals for methadone prescriptions. Residents were visited every weekday and there was close liaison with Ingeus Offender Managers to enforce licence conditions, arrange engagement with Pathway Intervention Plans, and other activity programmes. The process of organising move-on accommodation started immediately on a resident's arrival.

The communal room was used to host community activities, workshops, and courses. A timetable of events was available for coffee mornings, health and wellbeing activities, mindfulness sessions, money management workshops, cooking sessions, talking groups, employability workshops (including CV writing and job searches), and pathway interventions focused on rehabilitation of drug and alcohol addictions.



Several in-depth courses, tailored to the project, were delivered which focused on health, wellbeing, self-care, and substance rehabilitation. The courses included:

- Supporting attendees to explore their mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing.
- Guidance to identify problems and respond in a healthier way.
- The meaning of rehabilitation.
- Breaking down myths and stigmas related to mental health.
- Coping strategies and external support pathways.
- How recovery is achievable.
- Improving self-esteem and developing self-awareness.
- Recognising your values and how they tie to your sense of self.
- Methods of communication and building positive relationships.

All courses were offered on a strengths-based approach which fits with the critical success factors of the desistance model of moving away from crime.

YMCA further supported the project through offering STAR participants access to their suite of in-house services, such as the Building Better Opportunities programme; debt support and money management courses; Men in Sheds and Allotments; the YMCA Employment Coach; activity workshops; information, advice, and guidance; and, if needed, access to their in-house counselling service.

To date, more than half of all residents have successfully moved on to their own stable accommodation, full details on outcomes are provided in the next chapter.



*Example STAR project kitchen*

The management of the STAR project was transferred to the Probation Service in June 2021 when the Community Rehabilitation Companies stopped operating.

# Chapter 2: Activities and Outcomes

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## Overview

This chapter looks at the number of people helped by the project and their outcomes. As of 31 August 2021, the project has supported 83 individuals including eleven people in residence at the time of writing. Occupancy rates have increased during the life of the project with an overall average of 80%, with 90%+ occupancy the norm in the last twelve months.

## Referrals

A total of 200 individuals were referred to the project with just 37% subsequently becoming residents. While this admission rate might seem a little under average, a significant minority of non-admissions are because prospective residents have themselves withdrawn from the referral process upon learning that the housing is situated above a probation office and that visitors are not permitted.

## Demographics of residents

YMCA monitoring data shows that most participants, 79%, are from a White British background matching the ethnic make-up of Derby City. Residents range in age from 21 to 55 years old, with the largest cohort within the range of 21 to 30 years. Significantly, 89% of participants reported that they were suffering with anxiety and/or depression on entry. A large proportion<sup>1</sup> of residents also had problems with drugs and/or alcohol.

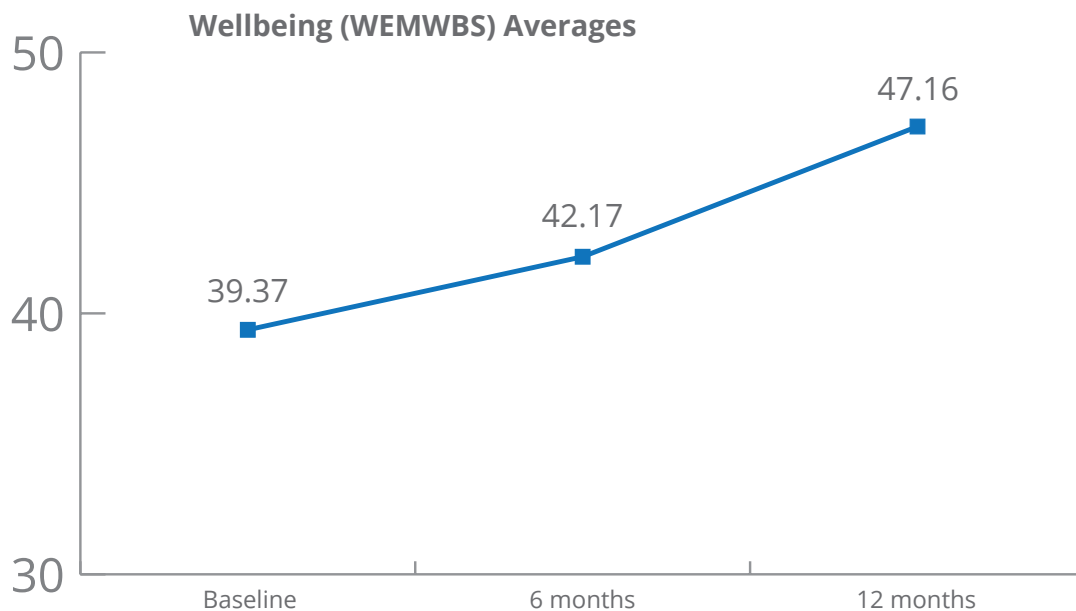
## Outcomes

The YMCA keeps monitoring data on residents' wellbeing as well as their project completion/move-on outcomes.

<sup>1</sup> Although formal data were not recorded regarding substance misuse, the most frequent type of support sessions are focused on this issue.

## Wellbeing

The YMCA housing navigator records residents' self-reported feelings of mental wellbeing via the internationally recognised Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) on admission and at three-month intervals. STAR project residents report an average improvement in their mental wellbeing of 7% at six months and 20% at twelve months as shown in the chart below. The very significant improvement at twelve months is because the group represented at this point consists solely of those who have moved on successfully and reflects the overall impact of someone having access to secure housing and associated support.



## Moving on

Of the 72 people who have been residents and have now left the STAR project, just over half (37, 51%) successfully completed the programme and progressed to stable accommodation. Of the remaining 35 (49%), 21 were evicted owing to relapsing into illegal drug use, breaking site rules, or anti-social behaviour towards other residents, 10 were recalled to prison for further offences or breaking licence conditions and four decided to move out.

This successful move on rate is very high for a project which caters for individuals with high levels of need, the overwhelming majority of whom have never had their own accommodation before.

In addition to these formally recorded data, many residents are reported to have completed training courses (including CSCS cards, SIA licenses, CPC and Road Haulage qualifications, and Railway Track Safety Courses) and found jobs to make substantial progress on their desistance journeys.

## Case studies

Below are some case studies of the work undertaken by the STAR project, all names have been changed to preserve residents' confidentiality.

### John – finding a home and a job

John was interviewed by telephone whilst still in prison. He had never lived independently before and due to his offence, it was not an option for him to return to parents on release. John was difficult to engage and needed constant chasing. We continued to try and build a relationship with John and after several weeks he became more open to support. We were able to convince him to contact his old employer, and he began casual work. In June he moved into a shared YMCA flat, still supported by a housing navigator, in an area near his family and friends. He states that he now feels settled.

### Tony – progress based on relationships

Tony was released from prison after serving 18 months for drug dealing, he had always lived at home with his parents but was unable to return there. He was very angry on his arrival and found it difficult to engage at first and felt isolated because visitors were not permitted. During his time at the STAR project, he slowly began to work with the support available to him. Staff visited him daily, and slowly developed rapport. At first, Tony would only talk at his door but over the weeks he began to invite workers in and was less hostile and more welcoming. As a rapport was established, Tony began to share his goals of wanting to get a job and move into independent living even if this was only a bed sit. Gradually, Tony began cooking meals for himself and making his flat a home. The project helped Tony search for appropriate accommodation, beginning with looking on social media sites for private flats. Eventually Tony was offered a room in a shared house on the outskirts of the City Centre, he decided that it was cheap and accepted it. Tony also found work with an agency at the same time as he moved into his own accommodation.

### Ahmed – slowly making progress

After discussing Ahmed's future move on plans, he agreed he would struggle in independent accommodation and will need some support for quite some time to get to that stage. Although Ahmed does not look like he has made any great leaps on paper, he has come a long way from living in a sleeping bag in the doorway to sleeping in his flat every night and spending his days relaxing and chatting to other residents. He is now addressing his health issues; this is something he never did before and has even made himself GP appointments and attended on his own.

## Critical success factors

The YMCA undertook an analysis of the quarterly reports to identify the key qualities integral to the project approach. Many residents had experienced adverse childhood experiences and as a result found it difficult to build relationships and to trust their support workers sufficiently to engage with the help. Many responded to difficult or challenging situations with verbal aggression or shutting down. The Housing Navigator was an experienced worker who addressed these issues by maintaining a light, but persistent approach, characterised by gentle encouragement and positive reinforcement. She maintained a commitment to support residents even, and especially, when they exhibited very challenging behaviour. Over time, the worker was able to build a positive and co-operative culture with residents increasingly using the communal space and offering mutual support.

# Chapter 3: Stakeholder views

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## Overview

This chapter analyses feedback from STAR residents and the probation staff who supervised them before presenting conclusions on the project.

## Residents' views

Three STAR residents during the course of the evaluation were interviewed by telephone about their experiences of the project. The interviews were confidential, and interviewees received a payment in recognition of their time. All three individuals had been resident at the project for a minimum of five months. The interviews focused on:

- How residents had heard about the project.
- Their views on living over a probation office.
- The best things about the service provided.
- Aspects of the service which could be improved.
- Whether they would recommend the project to a friend.

## Awareness of the project

All three interviewees had been told about the project by professional staff; two by the manager at the approved premises (probation hostel) at which they were living and one by their supervising probation officer. All three said that the interview and moving in process had happened swiftly and that they had been given a clear understanding of the project and its key rules (no visitors allowed) prior to moving in.

## Views on living over a probation office

Although two of the interviewees had initial doubts about the location, all said that they had not regretted their choice once they understood that the project operated separately, albeit from the same premises. Interviewees found the central location very convenient, and one said that living over the probation officer had made it easy for him to comply with the conditions of his licence which he had completed at the time of interview.

## Positive aspects of the service

Interestingly, all three interviewees praised the quiet nature of the project, describing it as much calmer than other approved premises or hostels that they had lived in, with far fewer disturbances or general “trouble”. In addition to the central location, which made it convenient to access a range of services, interviewees all said that they appreciated having separate accommodation which was furnished to a higher-than-average standard. This made residents, many of whom suffered from low self-esteem, feel valued and moving into STAR accommodation often provided vital impetus in their determination to build a better life for themselves. Two interviewees specifically highlighted the quality of help and support that was available from the Housing Navigator and all three were advanced in the process of finding permanent accommodation of their own.

## Aspects that need improvement

Two interviewees said that they could not suggest any improvements to the project while the other expressed a concern that the lift was currently out of order.

## Recommendations

All three interviewees stated that they would happily recommend the STAR project to a friend in need of supported housing, emphasising the benefits of a quiet service with good quality single accommodation and a convenient city-centre location.

## Professionals' views

Seven professionals were interviewed from a range of probation and other agencies on their views on the STAR project.

## The role of STAR

All interviewees agreed that it has been an important addition to the range of housing options available to people on probation or being released from prison. The project was thought to fill a gap in the supported housing market for people with extensive offending histories who were often not considered suitable by other social housing providers. Probation staff saw STAR as appropriate for people with substantial needs but who were motivated to try to turn their lives around. It was also a good fit for people who had been



released from prison to Approved Premises (a probation hostel) for a short, fixed period but who still had unmet needs when they were required to move on.

### Location over the probation office

Interviewees shared the view that some prospective residents were unwilling to consider the STAR project as their home because of its situation. However, probation officers in particular considered that there were many advantages for residents who did move into the project, chiefly easy access to their supervising officer which resulted in higher compliance rates and much less frequent breach action or prison recalls. Probation staff also appreciated the YMCA's ability to remotely supervise the premises and to advise them if an individual was not using their accommodation (by means of the key fob monitoring system). When an individual was found to be effectively living elsewhere, probation staff were able to get in touch and establish the reason for this (often relapse into drug use) and seek to intervene earlier than would be the case if someone was living in other accommodation.

The fact that the project was situated above the project officer promoted more ownership of it from Ingeus staff who often arranged to meet residents in the communal area and were on hand to offer a greater range of support and supervision than would have been available to people on probation living elsewhere.

### Positive aspects

Professional interviewees expressed the view that the high quality of the accommodation meant that residents valued their home and helped motivate them to address problems and engage in positive activities. They appreciated the wide range of services on offer to STAR residents from Ingeus and YMCA staff with a wide range of services and activities, including managing finance, benefits, and debt; keeping a home programme as well as cooking; and other constructive activities. It was felt that the STAR project was a good example of multi-agency partnership work and that communication between all partners was of excellent quality.

### Aspects that need improvement

Interviewees agreed that the level of service on offer had been adversely affected by the pandemic and the related restrictions which meant on-site support from the YMCA had been unavailable for some months. The reunification of the probation service had also led to some disruption in the range of services routinely on offer to residents, both from the voluntary sector and as rehabilitation activity requirements. However, it was felt that these issues were being successfully addressed at the time of this evaluation and the level of service quality was being restored.

## Recommendations

The main concern of interviewees was that this unique accommodation project would continue to be funded at the end of its current contract since it was one of a very small number of high-quality services available to persistent offenders with high levels of need.

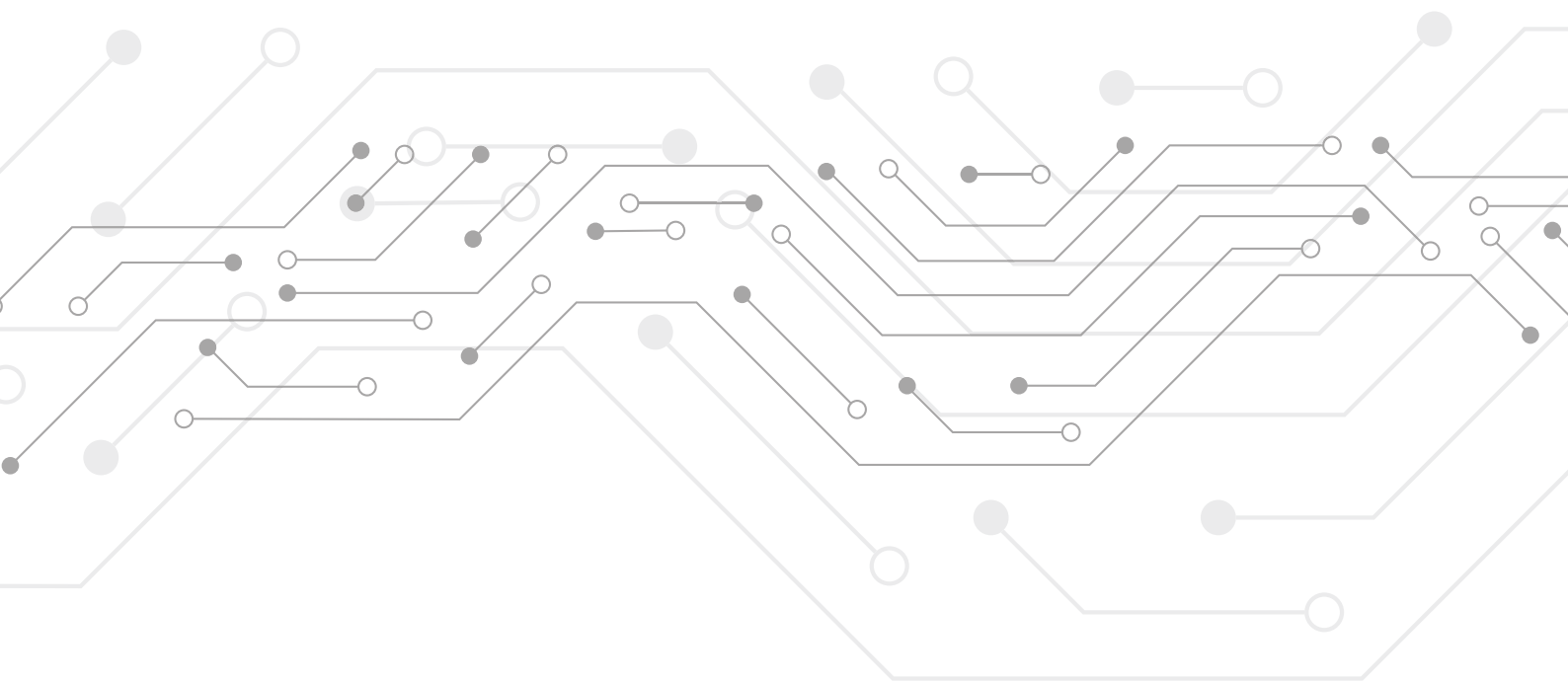
## Conclusion

Ingeus' ability to spot the opportunity to develop much needed provision for high need people on probation is commendable. The organisation was able to combine its entrepreneurial outlook with its willingness to build broad partnerships with the result of adding to the limited pool of high support accommodation available to prison leavers in the Derby area.

The combination of high-quality accommodation and intensive and extensive support from both dedicated STAR workers from Ingeus and YMCA and the greater involvement of supervising probation officers has succeeded in high occupancy rates and successful outcomes.

Ingeus gained considerable expertise in how to establish and manage offender accommodation from its experience in setting up the STAR project. At the same time, Ingeus invested much more of its own revenues in providing housing options to the people supervised by the Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire & Rutland (DLNR) and Staffordshire & West Midlands (SWM) Community Rehabilitation Companies, than most other CRC owners. The organisation established a dedicated accommodation fund and commissioned beds from a wide range of housing providers across the Midlands to meet the accommodation needs of people on probation. In many cases, Ingeus was able to commission beds from providers who did not routinely offer support to their tenants by utilising Ingeus' own Community Support Workers (CSWs), to provide that support. CSWs were a new role introduced to the probation service by Ingeus, deliberately created as an entry level post for people with lived experience of the criminal justice system.

This offender accommodation expertise has stood Ingeus in good stead for its work delivering accommodation services across the South Central and Greater Manchester probation regions.



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