

Evaluating the impact of lived experience

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ingeus

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Introduction

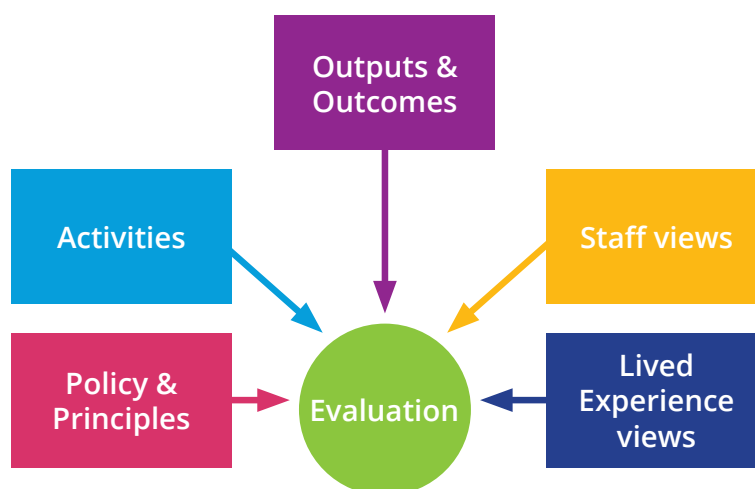
The Commission

Ingeus commissioned an independent external consultant, Russell Webster, to undertake an evaluation of the impact of lived experience within the organisation. People with lived experience of the criminal justice system are key to Ingeus's value base and operating model. They are trained and supported to act as peer mentors and volunteers and supported and encouraged to find paid work within the organisation or with other employers within the social justice sector. People with lived experience are also consistently involved in the planning and review of all services delivered by Ingeus's Justice division.

Ingeus currently delivers a wide range of Commissioned Rehabilitative Services, CFO Activity Hubs, and CFO3. Between 2015 and 2021 Ingeus was also the lead organisation in the Reducing Reoffending Partnership (RRP), which operated the Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire & Rutland (DLNR) and Staffordshire & West Midlands (SWM) Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRC).

The evaluation

The evaluation includes five key components. These are: an examination of Ingeus's policy, practice and principles in relation to lived experience; a description of a range of lived experience activities delivered by the organisation in its current and previous forms as the lead partner in the Reducing Reoffending Partnership; an analysis of the outputs and outcomes of these activities; a consultation on the benefits and challenges of a commitment to lived experience with Ingeus staff, and giving a voice to people with lived experience themselves.



The structure of this report

Chapter 1 describes Ingeus's approach to valuing lived experience and how the principle is enshrined in its service delivery. Chapter 2 summarises the evidence base relating to lived experience in the criminal justice system. Chapter 3 provides an overview of Ingeus's historical activities in relation to lived experience and Chapter 4 describes how people with lived experience are central to a range of activities currently delivered by the organisation. Chapter 5 gives an account of the outputs and outcomes of these activities, with a particular focus on the number of people with lived experience who go on to paid employment. Chapter 6 presents the views of staff, partner organisations and people with lived experience themselves on Ingeus's work in this area. Finally, Chapter 7 sets out the conclusions of the evaluation and charts Ingeus's plans to develop the role of lived experience further within the organisation.

Chapter 1: Valuing lived experience

History

Ingeus's commitment to lived experience is rooted in the work of its staff at all levels in a number of predecessor organisations including the Leicestershire and Rutland Probation Trust (LRPT) up to 2014 and the Reducing Reoffending Partnership (RRP), from 2015-2021. The first opportunities to involve people with lived experience date back to 2010 with an extensive peer mentoring scheme and an offender health trainer initiative, both under the aegis of LRPT. We describe these two initiatives in more detail in Chapter 3 and in Chapter 4 we explain how the successor versions of those early programmes continue to operate today.

The organisation's allegiance to lived experience deepened during its role as the lead organisation in the Reducing Reoffending Partnership (RRP) delivering two Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs). The transfer of probation services into a private company meant that the work which had started in probation trusts could pick up momentum. Having more control over its own policies and procedures, as RRP, Ingeus began to explore what a broader progression route into employment might look like; in particular which roles were appropriate and accessible for peer mentors who may have had very little previous employment experience.

RRP involved peer mentors in these discussions with the result that the solutions were more 'fit for purpose'. Peer mentors became involved in designing new interventions, most notably 'Transition and Hope' which was delivered by peer mentors to all service users on day one of their probation supervision.

The organisation made a significant and substantial investment in its mentoring and volunteering offer which was taken up by hundreds of individuals throughout the lifetime of the CRCs. It also developed a new recruitment pathway which prized lived experience with the aim of growing a workforce with a high level of personal motivation to help others.

One of the key outcomes of this investment was that 92 people with lived experience were employed by RRP in a variety of roles including as community support workers, health trainers, sessional community payback supervisors, sessional Approved Premises (probation hostel) staff and site hosts (reception staff). When the CRCs were wound up in June 2021, some of these staff transferred over to the (re-)unified probation service, and some opted to stay with Ingeus in new roles.

Approach

Now, with even more autonomy, Ingeus formalised its commitment to employing those with lived experience in the form of its Academy. The organisation recruits people first as volunteer mentors, where they gain the skills and confidence to move towards employment and where they can test out new ways of being and even fail in a safe environment. Each volunteer mentor receives regular individual supervision and support which encourages them to set their own goals, particularly in relation to employment and training. Individuals who express an interest in working within the social justice sector are encouraged and supported to apply for relevant roles within Ingeus and are provided with training around interview skills and other job readiness requirements. As Chapter 5 makes clear, Ingeus employs significant numbers of people who first train as mentors.

Principles, policies and procedures

As the organisation expanded its commitment to involve people with lived experience at every level of its operation, commissioners, partners and Ingeus staff raised several perceived risks about this approach. These included issues such as the impact on data security and confidentiality if an employee with a conviction reoffended and whether it was appropriate to employ someone who was still under probation supervision.

The organisation worked through these perceived risks and realised that many of them were little different from the risks of recruiting and employing staff in general. While Ingeus did not foresee any great risk to life, property, systems or service users, it did identify a risk to the organisation's reputation.

It therefore undertook a process of addressing all the risks identified, codifying Ingeus's approach to recruiting people with lived experience in policy documents. This process was guided by a key principle of focusing not only on the safety of others, but equally on the safety of the lived experience employee/volunteer – ensuring that they were able to talk candidly about any issues they were facing, that they felt part of the team and were not 'othered' and that they had routes through which they could receive additional support should they require it. An important component of this support was the organisational decision to provide all employees with regular clinical supervision.

Importantly, the organisation made it an explicit policy statement that employees with lived experience are not expected or required to talk about their personal histories when they no longer wish to. This policy position is based on a belief that people need to be free to redefine who they are and for some that means becoming a professional who is valued for their skills alone.

Ingeus is careful to communicate its commitment to employing people with lived experience to everyone who might be interested, particularly peer mentors and volunteers. It has produced a Factsheet which sets out the application process in accessible language and makes it clear that disclosing criminal offences

does not affect anyone's chance of being interviewed. The fact sheet explicitly states that the decision to interview will be based entirely upon an individual's skills and or experience. Successful candidates are required to go through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check and vetting processes, but Ingeus commits to continue to support applicants during this waiting period. A risk assessment is also carried out and Probation Practitioners are consulted for people subject to current or very recent supervision, with the consent of the applicant. This assessment is approved by the Justice Services Director and for some contracts, the Commissioning Authority. Again, the applicant is supported throughout.

This set of supportive principles, policies and procedures is the framework which facilitates the pathway from service user to volunteer mentor to paid employee. This overall strategic approach which in essence provides Ingeus's recruitment pathway for people with lived experience of the criminal justice system is designated 'The Academy' by the organisation.

Chapter 2: Lived experience in Criminal Justice

Overview

Over the last two decades, the role of people with lived experience volunteering and working across the broad social justice sector has become increasingly acknowledged and valued. For example, Dame Carol Black in Part 2 of her government-sponsored Review of Drugs¹, found that 10% of the whole drug treatment workforce comprises people with lived experience who support their peers on a voluntary basis. This is in addition to the many drug treatment agencies whose workforces contain high proportions of front-line staff with lived experience of dependent drug use².

Peer mentoring has been well-established across the criminal justice sector for many years with several probation trusts (including Leicestershire & Rutland) involved although most commentators³ concur that the voluntary sector has been at the forefront of developing and delivering peer mentoring as an approach within criminal justice.

A recent best practice guide⁴ on peer volunteering identifies the range of benefits of peer mentoring for a range of stakeholders:

- Peer volunteers benefit from opportunities to 'give back', they can rebuild their self-confidence and realise that they have something positive to contribute to society. Peer volunteers can also learn new skills and establish a constructive and positive lifestyle which can help with their own recovery journeys. Many people can convert their experience of peer volunteering into paid employment and extended careers within the broad social justice sector.
- The people supported by peer volunteers are helped in their recovery by people who can share their own experiences as well as providing real-life examples of successful recovery. Peer volunteers can reduce feelings of isolation and increase feelings of self-worth and self-sufficiency, they can also build trust and confidence and, as a result, succeed in connecting the people they support to other services and opportunities.

¹ Dame Carol Black (2021) Review of drugs part two: prevention, treatment, and recovery. HM Government: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-drugs-phase-two-report/review-of-drugs-part-two-prevention-treatment-and-recovery>

² For example, approximately 40% of the Forward Trust's workforce have lived experience of the drug and alcohol issues the organisation addresses. <https://www.forwardtrust.org.uk/about/>

³ For example: Gillian Buck (2021) Peer mentoring in the criminal justice system. Clinks.

⁴ Webster et al. (2021) A guide on how to support people with lived experience.

- Organisations can provide service users with the added dimension of peer support, as well as benefiting from the insights and different viewpoints of peer volunteers working alongside paid staff.
- Organisations can also grow their workforce by employing peer volunteers who have received in-house training and are aware of their working culture and practices.
- Many peer volunteers become involved in wider lived experience groups and movements, working together to bring about positive change in the social justice sector and beyond.
- There is a broader benefit in terms of tackling the stigma and public perceptions of people who have been involved in the criminal justice system or had problems with alcohol, drugs or homelessness.

The evidence

In a recent (August 2021) review of the evidence for Clinks⁵, Dr Gill Buck, the UK's leading academic specialising in peer mentoring in the criminal justice system examines how peer mentoring can help people to leave crime behind, connect them with services and employment opportunities as well as facilitate consciousness raising and collective system-reform efforts.

The impact on mentees

Dr Buck identifies the ways in which peer mentors can help the people they support in their desistance journeys. There is evidence that peer mentors can:

- Act as inspirational role models who offer their lived example in prison and community settings.
- Encourage self-confidence and hope for the future by employing care, empathy and manageable goals.
- Reduce feelings of isolation and increase feelings of self-worth and self-sufficiency. Help people to see themselves in new ways and assist them to imagine lives away from criminality, given they offer a blueprint for pro social roles.
- Offer encouragement as steps are taken and tolerate slip ups or mistakes as people make efforts to change.

Desistance has been proven to be a 'zig-zag' rather than linear process and a scary and difficult process for many. Peer mentoring can reduce people's fears by demonstrating that change is possible. For some people, moving away from a criminal lifestyle can be physically dangerous, financially costly, and emotionally isolating. Because of this – and the prevalence of (past) trauma in many criminalised people's lives –

⁵ Ibid.

mentees often need to talk about and process suffering and grief. Peer mentors can encourage people to talk, given they have often survived similar experiences and are seen to 'genuinely care' since they are giving their time for free rather than 'just doing their job'.

Dr Buck also describes how peer mentors can provide a bridge to engagement and employment for the people they support. There is research evidence around the importance of peer mentors in helping people to navigate different service provision and motivate and encourage them to seek help for a range of health and social issues. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (2016) in an inspection report on resettlement⁶ highlighted that peer mentoring facilitates 'a greater level of cooperation with supervision than anticipated'.

The impact on mentors

Volunteering also offers peer mentors themselves (who are often excluded from employment due to criminal histories) a practical opportunity to prove themselves, gain new skills and, in some cases, move in to paid employment. As they make this transition, mentors make visible the positive potential of people with criminal histories, creating a stronger sense of hope among their rehabilitation colleagues and sometimes even challenging stereotypes and fears held by the wider community.

A recent large survey by Webster⁷ (2021) of peer mentors across the social justice sector in the UK found high rates of employment among people with lived experience who had volunteered with the services that had helped them. Over one fifth (56, 22%) of the 253 peers who completed the survey had subsequently found paid employment.

Buck also described that in addition to the functional and inter-personal benefits already discussed, there are other positive outcomes. Many people who have volunteered as peer mentors have become part of a lived experience movement, often highlighting flaws within the criminal justice system and undertaking campaigning activities focused on reform. These include publishing written work, contributing to conferences, and raising awareness of the experience of marginalised groups through public talks or professional networking; aiming to improve 'the system' from within.

Challenges

In her review of the evidence, Dr Buck also highlights some of the challenges of peer mentoring in the criminal justice system. These include:

- Concerns that the criminal justice system is not always aligned with the values of mentoring. Research has found examples of mentoring departing from its core purpose of providing person-centred support to a surveillance and reporting back role.

⁶ Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP), (2016). An inspection of through the gate resettlement services for short-term prisoners.

⁷ Russell Webster (2021) Volunteering as a service user in the UK: Findings from a cross-sector survey. <https://www.russellwebster.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Volunteering-as-a-service-user-in-the-UK-Survey-Findings-Russell-Webster-2021.pdf>

- Peer mentors themselves can sometimes be blocked from working in criminal justice settings due to previous convictions which raises accusations of exploitation with organisations happy for people to provide work as volunteers but reluctant to employ the same individuals on a paid basis.

Both Buck and Webster (and Dame Carol Black) all raise concerns about the variable quality of training and support experienced by peer mentors across different organisations. Dame Black is typically forthright in raising concerns about the exploitation of some peer mentors in the drug and alcohol treatment sector.

Other roles

The importance of lived experience in roles other than in the direct support of service users has also been increasingly recognised over recent years. Examples include:

- His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation now integrates consultations with people on probation undertaken by lived experience organisations for every inspection they undertake (starting in 2021).
- The ELEVATE CJS 'Elevating Lived Experience Voices, Advocacy, Training and Expertise in the Criminal Justice System' 12-month programme delivered by the Criminal Justice Alliance promotes the redistribution of power to people with lived experience of the criminal justice system.
- His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has established a Lived Experience Engagement Network (LEEN) designed to promote and support actions to increase the involvement and employment of people with lived experience in the criminal justice system.

Conclusion

There is an emergent evidence base about the positive impact of peer mentoring in terms of promoting desistance and reducing reoffending for both mentor and mentee. In addition, there is a growing acknowledgement of the benefits of people with lived experience providing insight into the services an organisation delivers and in co-producing interventions which are more likely to be acceptable to and effective for service users. There is also increased commitment across the social justice sector for people with lived experience to be involved at every level of organisations including on the Board of Trustees and in senior management positions.

The next chapter provides an overview of Ingeus's historical activities in relation to lived experience.

Chapter 3: Historical lived experience activities

As we have seen, Ingeus's commitment to the value of lived experience is based on a solid foundation of work undertaken by its predecessor organisations. This chapter provides a brief overview of that work, providing information on the organisation's promotion of peer mentoring and its health trainer initiative.

Leicestershire and Rutland Probation Trust was one of the organisations which pioneered peer mentoring within the probation service. The commitment to a large group of peer mentors was increased by the Reducing Reoffending Partnership (RRP) when it operated the two Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) in the Midlands.

Ingeus and its partners published a substantive volunteer and mentoring strategy which formally set out RRP's commitment to develop a comprehensive approach to volunteers and mentors across both its CRCs. This strategy explicitly emphasised the benefits to both mentors and mentees:

“Peer mentoring brings benefits for the mentee who may find it easier to relate to somebody who has had personal experience of the Criminal Justice System and also the mentor as it can contribute to their own rehabilitation and successful reintegration.”

The functions of mentors evolved over the lifespan of the CRCs; the two core roles are described below.

Peer mentors

Peer mentors were current (or very recent) service users, subject to a statutory supervision order, or licence. They undertook a 13-week in-house training programme and then volunteered their time to support Ingeus staff and service users within group work settings. They also supported probation practitioners in their face-to-face work. Peer mentors brought a service user perspective to the groups in which they worked, and often suggested approaches to service users' issues using their own lived experience. Peer mentors have recent, real experience of the criminal justice system and were able to provide a great example that change is possible and desirable to other Service Users.

Peer mentors also designed, and went on to deliver, two Rehabilitation Activity Requirement (RAR) interventions. The Transition and Hope RAR was a one-session group activity delivered to all service users on initial contact with the CRC and used lived experience stories to foster better engagement and challenge myths about the probation supervision process. It was delivered by two trained peer mentors with support from a member of Ingeus staff. The session focusses on the personal journey of the peer mentors

through the criminal justice system and the strategies and decisions they make to aid in their desistance. The value of the session is in the way that service users relate to, and engage with, the peer mentors and their personal stories. Mentors provide real, lived examples that effecting positive change, whilst challenging, is possible and indeed desirable. Mentors are also able to challenge the attitudes of service users in often quite direct ways, having faced the same issues and choices, and because of this experience service users are much more likely to accept those challenges than they would from a member of staff with no history of convictions.

The Health and Wellbeing RAR was designed to promote better physical and mental wellbeing and was adapted during the pandemic to be delivered via telephone. Other examples of work undertaken by peer mentors included:

- **Conducting social research** by engaging with other service users to gather information.
- **Attending groups and contributing positively** (by using their experience) to the discussions within groups, supporting service users as appropriate.
- **Meeting with service users prior to groups** and in the breaks to motivate and encourage service users to engage in groups and make positive progress in their lives.
- **Attending meetings and consultation sessions** to give feedback on services and contribute ideas to develop them further.
- **Co-working with probation practitioners** to support their face-to-face work with service users.

The Peer Mentoring service was delivered in-house by an RRP team.

Peer advisors

Ingeus formed a close partnership with St Giles to develop a large-scale workforce of serving prisoners who operated as peer advisors. Peer advisors were trained by a St Giles Trainer to provide advice and support to other prisoners. Peer advisors started off by taking part in a 12-session Learning to Advise training course. This course introduced participants to the key elements of the advisor role and gave them (and St Giles) the opportunity to decide whether being a peer advisor was something they wanted to pursue.

People who wanted to proceed, then engaged in the Information Advice and Guidance Level 3 (IAG L3) qualification. This is a widely recognised qualification for people wanting to work in the IAG field and took between nine and twelve months to complete. Achieving this qualification meant that, when released, peer advisors had the requisite qualifications to apply for a wide range of entry level advisor jobs across the social justice sector.

As part of the peer advisor service, advisors mapped the whole prison journey from a prisoner's point of view from reception and first night through induction and into education, healthcare and resettlement pathways. This mapping enabled peer advisors to offer a range of advice and support to people in prison to meet any of their needs. Although the service was originally conceived as being mainly a signposting one, the level of qualification combined with the high level of commitment of peer advisors meant that many offered a supportive casework service to their peers, helping them survive the experience of being imprisoned and to access a wide range of helping services while inside and on release.

Ingeus and St Giles invested heavily in the training and support of peer advisors who were embedded within every single resettlement team across the two CRCs. A number of peer advisors also became key members of community-based CRC teams on their release. Importantly, peer advisors received a prison wage for the work they undertook.

Health trainers

The health trainer service was first developed in 2010 within Leicestershire and Rutland Probation Trust (LRPT), commissioned by the local Public Health department. The initiative was developed in response to growing concern about the health needs of people in contact with the criminal justice system. Official reports⁸ identify a wide range of health needs including:

- Higher prevalence of infectious diseases, and poorer vaccine coverage;
- Higher prevalence of long-term conditions;
- Higher prevalence and rates of substance misuse, including tobacco consumption;
- Higher prevalence of mental ill health;
- Higher levels of learning disabilities and lower educational attainment.

Service users' life experiences and lifestyles put them at additional risk of a wide range of physical and mental health conditions and many are not engaged with helping services, with significant proportions not registered with either a General Practitioner or Dentist⁹. Historically, there have been very few health-specific initiatives targeted at people on probation to try to address these health inequalities¹⁰.

After reviewing several different health trainer models, LRPT decided to recruit exclusively those with first-hand experience of the criminal justice system. The original health trainer model and successor initiatives delivered by RRP (and now by Ingeus) supports people on probation to access appropriate health services

⁸ Home Office, Public Health England & Revolving Doors (2018) Rebalancing Act: A resource for Directors of Public Health, Police and Crime Commissioners, the police service and other health and justice commissioners, service providers and users.

⁹ Revolving Doors Agency. (2013). Balancing Act. Addressing health inequalities among people in contact with the criminal justice system. A briefing for Directors of Public Health. London, Revolving Doors Agency, Probation Chiefs Association, Public Health England.

¹⁰ Sirdifield et al. (2018) Probation Healthcare Commissioning Toolkit: A resource for commissioners and practitioners in health and criminal justice.

and promote healthier lifestyles. The service is delivered on a completely voluntary basis, to ensure that people can keep their healthcare information confidential and to encourage uptake of the service. The service offers a wide range of health-related services including:

- Support in registering with a G.P and Dentist.
- Access to mental health services.
- Buddying up for appointments and advocating when required.
- Substance misuse education/advice and referral to relevant services.
- Smoking cessation.
- Heathy eating and promoting good physical health.
- Sexual health advice and free condom distribution/registration

The Ingeus approach continues to be based on all health trainers having lived experience of the criminal justice system to be more effective at gaining the trust of people on probation and supporting them to access helping services.

Formal evaluations of different iterations of Ingeus health trainer services found that a large majority of people who engage with the health trainer service succeed in achieving their health goals. Service users identified four key aspects of the service which they valued:

1. The supportive nature of the work;
2. The availability of health trainers;
3. Their non-judgmental approach; and
4. Their reliability.

Those with persistent and complex needs, typically involving mental ill health and or substance misuse, were also much more likely to successfully complete their period of probation supervision.

The knowledge and experience gained by Ingeus through the operation of the health trainer team has been taken forward in a new service being delivered in Chesterfield. Ingeus has now created a proven, cost-effective model to engage vulnerable people, including people not in contact with the criminal justice system, into mainstream health provision with substantial individual gains in terms of health and quality of life and considerable long-term savings to the health service which is able to provide planned rather than emergency care and intervene much earlier in the progression of a range of physical and mental health conditions.

Chapter 4: Current lived experience activities

Ingeus provides a wide range of services for people in prison and on probation. These include:

Commissioned Rehabilitative Services

Providing tailored support around a range of needs including employment; housing; finance, benefit & debt; personal wellbeing and recovery from addictions.

Activity Hubs

Hubs provide safe, supportive and welcoming spaces for people on probation to access tailored support, advice and guidance, and interact with positive role models and peers at a similar stage of their resettlement journey.

CFO3

The focus of the programme is to help people move towards social inclusion and mainstream provision, turning their back on crime, undertaking supportive interventions, training and finding a job. This is achieved by facilitating access to services tailored to their individual circumstances with a strong emphasis on supporting participants into employment.

These services are delivered in most regions across England and Ingeus has created a regional infrastructure to recruit, train and support peer mentors with dedicated mentor co-ordinators. The training and support structures are based on the core practices and principles described in the previous chapter with peer mentors supporting the people receiving support from the Ingeus services summarised above. The range of work delivered by peer mentors varies between services but includes the same core components of utilising their lived experience to engage people in services and support them in their desistance (and recovery) journeys, often by accompanying them to helping services and providing encouragement and motivation to seek help and persevere towards their goals.

Ingeus has commenced a total of 31 contracts since 2021, all requiring rapid recruitment drives. This expansion has meant that many individuals were able to progress rapidly from graduating as peer mentors into paid employment in several roles including:

- Personal Wellbeing mentor/advisor.
- Dependency and Recovery guide/navigator.
- Community support workers.
- Accommodation/Finance, Benefit and Debt advisors.
- Youth diversion workers.
- Health trainers.
- Business support officers.

We provide more detail on the number of peer mentors who have graduated to paid employment positions with Ingeus in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Outputs and outcomes

This chapter provides an overview of Ingeus's lived experience work in numbers. It provides a summary of the total number of peer mentors recruited since 2021; provides details of the number of those mentors who have gone on to be employed with the organisation and provides a brief overview of the financial benefits of Ingeus's commitment to lived experience.

Peer mentors

Ingeus has developed its peer mentor infrastructure incrementally over the last two years, creating regional peer mentor co-ordinators following the acquisition of different contracts during that time. However, a total of 107 peer mentors had already graduated the full training process at the time of writing (July 2023). The speed of development is clear since there were an additional 43 peer mentors currently in training, all of whom were due to graduate in the summer of 2023.

People with lived experience in employment

As we have already mentioned, most of the 92 individuals with lived experience employed by Ingeus's predecessor organisation (the Reducing Reoffending Partnership) transferred to the probation service when the Community Rehabilitation Companies' contracts ended, and the service reunified. Some also moved on to other opportunities prior to unification.

However, there are already 56 people with lived experience currently (again, June 2023) employed by the organisation almost all of whom graduated the in-house peer mentoring Academy. These individuals work in different roles across Ingeus represented by the infographic on the next page. Forty-eight of these roles are entry levels, seven are intermediate (one promotion) and one is managerial (two promotions).

The financial impact of employing people with lived experience

As we have already made clear, there are numerous (and increasingly widely acknowledged) advantages to a social justice sector organisation which values lived experience. For Ingeus, these include:

- The capacity to design (and re-design) interventions which are better suited to meet the needs of service users, through the influence and insight of staff with lived experience who can better appreciate the details of different interventions and how they are delivered.

Lived experience staff by area of operation



- An extensive Peer Mentoring programme which is critical to supporting the people who use the organisation's services. Peer mentors provide a lived example of success as well as advising, encouraging, and supporting people to turn their lives around.
- The opportunity to increase the diversity of their workforce by developing a new recruitment pathway.

However, as part of this evaluation, I also investigated the financial rationale for an organisation to invest in lived experience, primarily to persuade others to follow suit. Ingeus undertook a rigorous internal audit to try to put a financial value on its emphasis on the important of lived experience to sit alongside the social and ethical value discussed throughout this report. The audit found that:

- Employees from a lived experience background were more likely to remain with the organisation, reducing staff turnover cost. (Lived experience employees were more than three times **LESS** likely to leave the organisation in the most recent 12 month period.)
- The recruitment process for new staff with lived experience was much more efficient than the equivalent recruitment process for staff without lived experience. Just one in 15 members of the public without lived experience who applied to work with Ingeus Justice services were recruited (a conversion rate

of 6.72%), compared to more than one in four (a conversion rate of 26.09%) of people with lived experience who were encouraged to apply because of the potential they had shown as a peer mentor or volunteer. This conversion rate makes a huge saving to the cost of recruitment.

- Another bonus for the organisation was that people with lived experience were able to start work within an average of 15 working days from date of appointment compared to an average of 20 days for those without lived experience. This has been an important consideration in the establishment of more than 26 new services over the last eighteen months. (The lengthy vetting process does however impact on this advantage).
- Employees from a lived experience background took FEWER sick days than their counterparts without lived experience (14% fewer in the most recent one-year period).

Chapter 6: Stakeholder views

This chapter analyses and presents the views of two key stakeholder groups on the culture of valuing lived experience within Ingeus. It starts by presenting the views of people with lived experience employed by Ingeus before sharing the opinions of other Ingeus staff.

The views of people with lived experience

This evaluation undertook a series of twelve interviews with people with lived experience employed by Ingeus Justice services in a number of different roles who work in different areas of the country. The interviews, which were conducted on a one-to-one basis via a video call, focused on the following key areas:

- How people with lived experience found employment with Ingeus.
- Whether the organisation valued their lived experience and the extent to which they disclosed their lived experience in their roles.
- The extent to which they received support and training.
- Their overall experience of Ingeus.

We discuss these topics below, illustrating interviewees' views with verbatim quotes taken from the video interviews.

Finding work

Interviewees described a number of different routes into finding paid employment with Ingeus, but typically they first came into contact with the organisation when they were referred by their probation officer or were attending one of the Commissioned Rehabilitative Services delivered by Ingeus, most often those services relating to employment. All but one of the interviewees had been encouraged to participate in the peer mentor training as a first step. While many people found they were immediately suited to the role of supporting peers, others took longer to adapt:

"I didn't see myself as an empathetic person originally, but I have learnt along the way and really enjoy the job."

"When I started, I had zero confidence. I didn't speak in training for months. But I got lots of encouragement and support from the co-ordinator and the rest of the group. Over time, I got more and more confident."

A key factor discussed by most interviewees was the encouragement they received from the very first day with early conversations about paid employment as opposed to volunteering as a peer mentor.

Valuing lived experience and disclosure

Interviewees all talked about being appreciated by the organisation. They felt that their lived experience was valued but also that they were seen as equal team members irrespective of the extent to which they chose to utilise their life experiences in their work.

“Actions speak louder than words, Ingeus looking at the number of people with lived experience within the organisation ‘that says it all’. I feel confident about talking about my experiences within Ingeus. It’s definitely a company that appreciates the value of lived experience within this sector. I didn’t feel like that when I was a peer mentor with probation.”

“Ingeus puts their money where their mouth is in relation to lived experience. You don’t have to talk about your experience if you don’t want to. No-one treats me as an ex-offender, there are a lot of promotion opportunities. I feel that what I do is valued and I feel I bring something to the role.”

Interviewees talked about how they were encouraged to have their own ideas and were trusted to set up new initiatives and seek new partnerships.

“They have brought me on a journey, made me feel really useful. I’ve had support all the way. I feel they have taken a chance on me and I am grateful for where I’m at.”

Interviewees, particularly those who had been in paid employment for some time, talked about how they were more selective about when they volunteered information about their own experiences with the people they were supporting:

“I choose when to talk about myself but sometimes it will break down a barrier. Some days I’ll talk about it all day, other days I don’t want to talk about that at all.”

“Lived experience can make a big difference, walking alongside someone really helps.”

Three interviewees talked about the risks of disclosing their own experiences with people going through similar life challenges. They acknowledged that these sorts of conversations could trigger negative thoughts and remind them of past traumas. They talked about the importance of training and support during these times.

Training and support

Interviewees were particularly positive about the amount of training and support they had received, with several talking about this being a core part of the organisational culture. Interviewees discussed how they

got support from their peers as well as their line manager and how senior managers repeatedly offered them direct access whenever wanted or needed. Several people talked about regular conversations with middle and senior managers.

"The senior management team have all known each other for years and they all share the same ethos, they all believe in people. I can talk to anyone I want if I want or need to."

"I feel massively supported and valued, I've been invited to Teams calls with senior managers and magistrates. I've been doing a lot of training with probation which I never imagined, it's not even two years that I was on supervision myself."

Several interviewees described Ingeus as the most supportive workplace they had ever encountered:

"My manager (who I call my fairy godmother), the regional manager and the big boss all gave me massive support, financially and emotionally."

"I thought my last company was the best I've ever worked for but Ingeus beats them easy, the support and motivation you get from everybody."

"The support is there if you need it, it's not forced on you but very clear that it is there. I've had lots of encouragement, and everyone has egged me on to move on. Straight from the off, I was encouraged to go for more things and move up the organisation."

"Ingeus is paying for a leadership course, investing in my development."

Some interviewees contrasted their experience at Ingeus with previous work settings:

"I did peer mentoring for probation years ago but there was nowhere to move on to, too much red tape to actually get a job."

Overall experience

One theme that many interviewees raised themselves without prompting was how much they valued working within an organisational culture which was focused on helping others; they talked about the job satisfaction they got and how much they felt they had grown themselves as their career at Ingeus took shape:

"I'm earning much less than when I was an electrician but I'd do the job for free, you can't put a price on being able to help people."

"Meeting people who are very broken and very vulnerable and getting the chance to support them is a privilege."

“Prior to Ingeus, I had tunnel vision, wasn’t following a passion. I was driven by money rather than wanting to have a specific role or be a particular person. Then I fell down with my alcohol use and it could have been a slippery slope. Ingeus’ timing was perfect, they picked me back up before I fell too far. They have given me more self-awareness, my tunnel vision has gone, and I’m loving not being judged or judging people myself.”

“I’m really grateful to be honest. A year ago I was a completely different character, I didn’t talk right, dress right, I didn’t feel confident. All that has changed with the support and the opportunity to get a job.”

Every interview was concluded by asking people whether they had career aspirations within Ingeus. While about a third of interviewees said they were very happy with their current role and intended to remain within it, the other two thirds felt that their new careers had only just started and talked of more senior roles which they thought they would be able to do, with the right training and support which they were confident of accessing.

The views of other staff

The evaluation included an online video-call focus group with eleven members of Ingeus staff without lived experience of the criminal justice system to gain their views on the organisation’s commitment to valuing lived experience. The eleven staff members were of different grades, worked in different geographical areas and delivered different interventions. People were encouraged to talk openly with a guarantee that no comments would be attributed to individuals in this report. Six principal themes emerged from the discussion:

1. Practising what we preach.
2. The practical advantages of workers with lived experience in service delivery.
3. Workers with lived experience embody success.
4. Authenticity, passion and commitment.
5. Training and support.
6. Pride in the organisation.

These six themes are discussed in more detail below.

Practising what we preach

Participants discussed what they felt was Ingeus’s genuine belief in the value of lived experience. Several participants spoke of how the organisation’s willingness to “walk the walk” and not just talk about the importance of lived experience was invaluable in their work. For example, when seeking to encourage

employers to consider employing people with lived experience of the criminal justice system, one of the most convincing arguments was to be able to tell the prospective employer that Ingeus itself had employed many people with criminal convictions. Similarly, many partner organisations - particularly those from the charitable sector - were impressed by the number of staff with lived experience that the organisation employed as well as the clear peer mentoring-volunteer-employee pathway.

Service delivery

Several participants described how staff with lived experience were able to better engage end users into the services on offer. They gave examples of some of their colleagues:

"I have really noticed that since they started work as a personal wellbeing mentor, our service users are opening up more and are much more willing to attend the group sessions."

"When people are met by a worker who has gone through the same experiences and challenges you can see that they really appreciate what's on offer and appear much more willing to listen and engage."

The embodiment of success

Another important aspect of having so many workers with lived experience raised by the group was that they were real life examples of how people could turn their lives around.

"When service users come to their first dependency and recovery session and are met by them, they can immediately see that success is possible. He has gone on the same journey."

"People just out of prison think there is no way they are going to get out of huge debts and be taken on by an employer. Then they meet the person who has done exactly that."

"People just starting out as peer mentors hear first-hand from people who, last year, were peer mentors themselves and now they are working for us."

This ability to generate motivation and self-belief was crystallised by one participant who quoted a colleague with lived experience who had previously been a successful salesman:

"I'm used to selling cars and mobile phones, but now I am selling confidence and belief."

Authenticity, passion and commitment

Participants talked about the level of passion and commitment so that many workers with lived experience of the criminal justice system brought to their work. Participants who were managers spoke of having learnt to make sure new workers did not take on too much to their personal detriment.

Training and support

The evaluator asked participants whether they thought that training and support were particularly important for people with lived experience. Although there was a consensus about the importance of these issues and participants cited a couple of examples of specific support groups for new employees with lived experience, the group was keen to emphasise the fact that, while criminal convictions were raised in the recruitment process, all new workers went through the same induction process and had access to the same range of training and support whether they had previous experience of the criminal justice system or not.

The group talked about an organisational culture of support being readily available with every worker encouraged to reach out to their peers or managers as and when required. We're also keen to emphasise that alongside this supportive culture, there was a strong emphasis on working to high professional standards as well.

There was acknowledgment that some people without experience of other workplaces might need time to improve their IT skills and general understanding of working in an office environment. However, there was a consensus that these sorts of skills could easily be picked up over time and were not as important as the core service delivery skills such as being able to engage with service users.

One point which was stressed by the focus group participants was that there was no expectation for people with lived experience of the criminal justice system to share their experiences either with colleagues or with service users and that the choice to do so rested entirely with the individual.

Pride in the organisation and its values

The final topic which emerged strongly at the end of the focus group was the pride that many participants felt in working for an organisation that "lived its values" and was explicit in the value it placed on employing people with lived experience. Several participants said how proud they were to work in a value-driven organisation with some contrasting their experiences at previous employers. Several individuals said that they regarded it as a privilege to work for a helping organisation which expected them to treat every service user as an individual who deserved a high level of service.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

This chapter summarises the main findings of this evaluation.

A principled approach

It is clear Ingeus has a long history of commitment to lived experience dating back to 2010 when many of its staff worked for the Leicestershire and Rutland Probation Trust. The organisation continued to develop its work in this area when it was the lead partner in the Reducing Reoffending Partnership (RRP) before formalising its approach over the last two years.

The organisation has codified its approach to recruiting people with lived experience in policy documents informed by the key principle of focusing on the safety of the lived experience employee/volunteer. Key components of the policy include:

- Ensuring that people with lived experience were made to feel equal members of their team.
- Access to additional support if required.
- Regular clinical supervision.
- An individual choice regarding disclosure of lived experiences.
- A supportive employment pathway.

This overall strategic approach which provides Ingeus's recruitment pathway for people with lived experience of the criminal justice system is known as 'The Academy'.

Delivered at scale

Ingeus's peer mentor infrastructure has been scaled up over the two years of the organisation's operation with a total of 107 peer mentors graduating and additional 43 peer mentors currently in training at the time of writing.

Most of the 92 individuals with lived experience employed by Ingeus Justice division's predecessor organisation transferred to the probation service in 2021. However, the organisation has already employed 56 people with lived experience (almost all of whom graduated the in-house peer mentoring Academy).

These individuals work in different roles across Ingeus with an increasing number (8) already promoted within the organisation.

Stakeholder views

People with lived experience interviewed for this report were very positive about the organisation's culture of supporting them; they cited their appreciation of:

- The support and encouragement to reach their goals, particularly around employment and training.
- Their sense of being appreciated by the organisation; interviewees reported feeling that their lived experience was valued but also that they were seen as equal team members.
- Having individual choice about whether they shared lived experiences.
- The range and easy access to support and training.

Staff members without lived experience of the criminal justice system interviewed for this evaluation clearly valued the contribution from their colleagues with lived experience and regarded them both as fully-fledged co-workers and people with a particular skillset. Those working in employment settings said that the fact that Ingeus employed so many people with lived experience greatly enhanced their work in engaging employers to consider recruiting people with criminal convictions. There was a consensus among these interviewees, that they were proud to work within an organisation which was purpose-driven and which openly praised the value of people with lived experience of the criminal justice system.

Benefits

We know from the evidence base summarised in Chapter 2 of this evaluation that there are numerous (and increasingly widely acknowledged) advantages to a social justice sector organisation which values lived experience. For Ingeus, these include:

- An extensive Peer Mentoring programme which is critical to supporting the people who use the organisation's services. Peer mentors provide a lived example of success as well as advising, encouraging, and supporting people to turn their lives around.
- The opportunity to increase the diversity of their workforce by developing a new recruitment pathway which also enables the organisation to employ highly committed staff with a relevant skillset in a competitive labour market.
- The capacity to design (and re-design) interventions which are better suited to meet the needs of service users, through the influence and insight of staff with lived experience who can better appreciate the details of different interventions and how they are delivered.

Future plans

Ingeus have delivered several successful Lived experience events in the past year and have invited a wide range of stakeholders to come and hear about the impact this approach is having on everyone who comes into contact with it. There still appears to be some opposition to this approach and a belief that recruiting people with lived experience is too risky. As a consequence, there are complicated and complex vetting processes that present barriers for individuals with lived experience, preventing some talented and committed people from finding paid employment in the criminal justice field. Ingeus believe that all risks can be managed and that the biggest risk is to ignore the strong emerging evidence that this approach works and prevents offending.

Ingeus plan to continue to develop their Academy, supporting people with lived experience to volunteer and work with their organisation, informing Ingeus delivery, giving hope to all they meet and helping them to develop and progress to more senior roles with the company.

It has been a challenge to capture fully in words the extent to which the support from Ingeus and career opportunities have completely revolutionised the lives of some of the people interviewed for this report and their sheer passion and level of commitment to provide the same opportunities to the service users with whom they work. So perhaps it is appropriate to let one of these lived experience employees have the last word:

“They have brought me on a journey, made me feel really useful. I've had support all the way. I feel they have taken a chance on me, and I am grateful for where I'm at. I like that they really value my lived experience, but also everyone treats me as just another member of the team.”



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