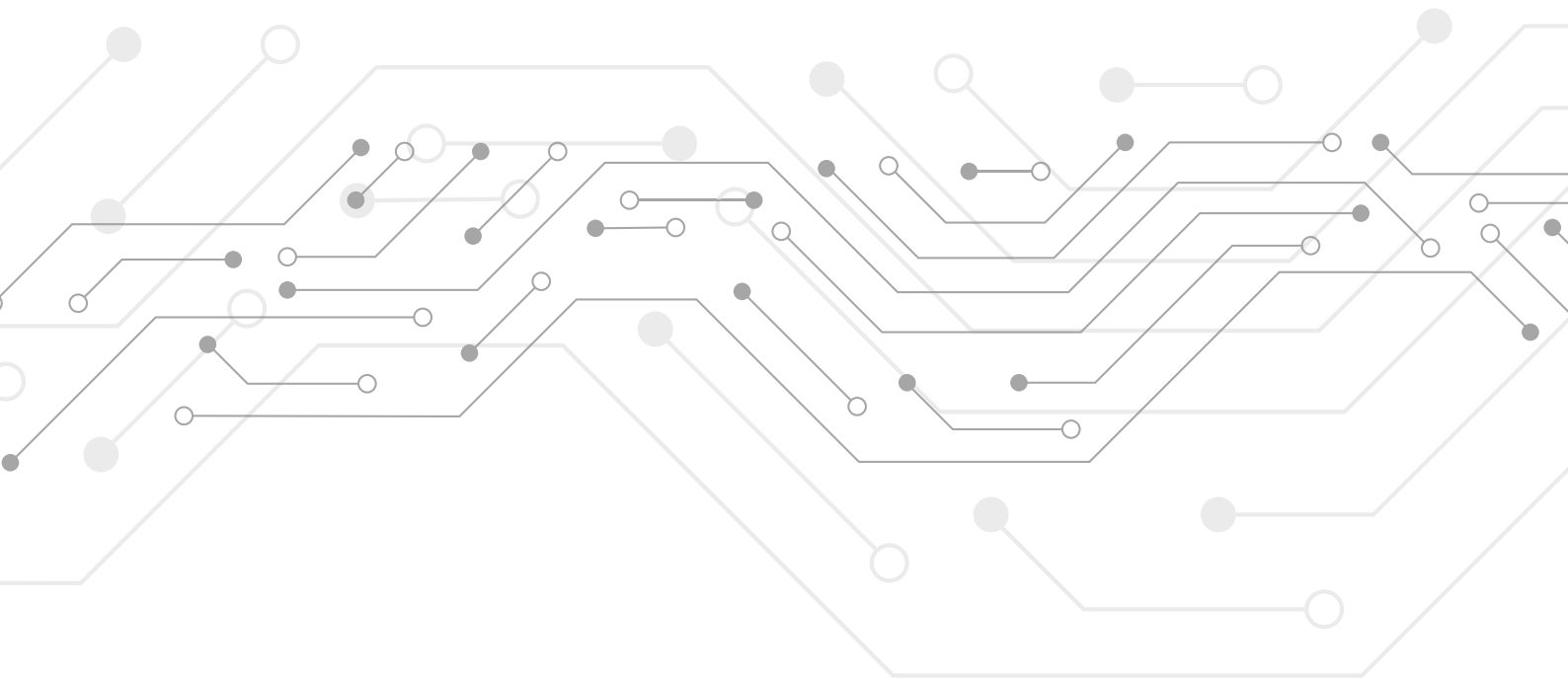


Volunteering & Mentoring Evaluation

Community Rehabilitation
Company Evaluation Series



November 2021

ingeus



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Introduction

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 Ingeus' approach to mentoring and volunteering during that six year period. The decision to invest in mentoring and volunteering was taken at the launch of the CRCs and was part of Ingeus' strategic ambition "to change lives".

Chapter 1 summarises the research evidence on the value of mentoring and volunteering in the criminal justice system. Chapter 2 describes the mentoring and volunteering strategy and its implementation. Chapter 3 sets out the outcomes from that strategy and presents feedback from people who completed the journey from person on probation supervision through mentoring and volunteering into paid employment. Chapter 4 summarises the report and presents conclusions.

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Executive Summary

The evidence base

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. A new best practice guide 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. They learn new skills, and many convert their experience of peer volunteering into paid employment.
- 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.
- 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. They can also grow their workforce by employing peer volunteers who have received in-house training and are aware of their working culture and practices.

Ingeus' work

Ingeus invested substantially in training large numbers of peer mentors across both Community Rehabilitation Companies. The organisation also formed a close partnership with St Giles to develop a large-scale workforce of serving prisoners who operated as Peer Advisors supporting their fellow prisoners. Additionally, Ingeus partnered with Change, Grow, Live (CGL) to train a large number of community volunteers who supported service users of the CRCs and the National Probation Service on both a 1-2-1 and group basis.

Outcomes

The main achievements of the Ingeus mentoring and volunteering programme are:

- Over a thousand individuals took up the opportunity to develop a range of skills, increasing their employability and building their self-esteem.
- Thousands of people on probation supervision have been supported by their peers who have provided a lived example of success as well as advising, encouraging, and supporting them alongside engaging them with a wide range of support organisations.
- Ingeus has increased the diversity of its workforce and developed a new recruitment pathway which prizes lived experience, and which also delivers a workforce with a high level of personal motivation to help others.
- Ingeus has placed service user involvement and the influence of people with lived experience at the heart of the organisation and is able to design (and re-design) interventions which are better suited to meet the needs of its service users.
- The Ingeus mentoring and volunteering programme is substantially funded with significant investment in progression pathways.

Going forward

There have been concerns from a range of criminal justice stakeholders for many years about whether the probation service had become too preoccupied with risk management at the cost of fostering positive change in the people it supervises. The Government has sought to restore this balance with its new slogan for the reunified probation service of: Assess, Protect and Change. We know from the evidence base that the change process of desisting from a criminal lifestyle and building a new law-abiding identity is typically one which takes years. Ingeus' volunteering and mentoring strategy has enabled it to deliver long-term support which extends far beyond statutory supervision periods to hundreds of individuals who are now engaged in providing the same sort of support to future generations. This may be the most important and durable achievement of Ingeus' ongoing commitment to place service user involvement and lived experience at the heart of its operations.

People with lived experience will remain central to the range of new services which Ingeus delivers.

Chapter 1: Mentoring and volunteering 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 new 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 convert their experience of peer volunteering into paid employment and extended careers within the broad social justice sector.

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

- 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.
- 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.

⁵ Ibid.

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 – 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’.

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.

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>

Challenges

In her review of the evidence, Dr Buck also highlights some of the challenges of peer mentoring in the criminal justice. 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.
- 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.

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.

The next chapter looks at how Ingeus and its partners in the Reducing Reoffending Partnership implemented the organisation's volunteer and mentoring strategy across the two large Community Rehabilitation Company areas.

Chapter 2: The volunteer and mentoring strategy in action

Overview

Ingeus and its partners published a substantive volunteer and mentoring strategy which formally set out the Reducing Reoffending Partnership's (RRP) commitment to develop a comprehensive approach to volunteers and mentors across both its Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs).

The strategy acknowledges the "long history of volunteering in the Probation Service" and specifically highlights the mutual benefits of volunteering – both the added value to service delivery and an enriching experience for volunteers.

The strategy specifically cites two additional objectives related to recruiting probation volunteers. The first was "to increase public confidence in the Criminal Justice System and the role of the CRCs within it." The second was to increase the diversity of the organisation with a commitment to recruit volunteers "from a wide range of backgrounds so that they bring diversity in terms of age, race, sexuality, disability, social background, income, education and faith".

Turning to the issue of peer mentoring, the RRP strategy explicitly emphasises 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 and volunteers evolved over the lifespan of the CRCs; the three core roles are described below.

Peer Mentors

Peer Mentors were current (or very recent) service users, subject to 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.

Community Volunteers

Community Volunteers were members of the public who were not normally subject to statutory supervision order or licence although they were sometimes ex-service users. They were trained to offer support to service users engaging with both the CRCs and the National Probation Service and provided both 1-2-1 and group-based support.

The community volunteer service was provided through an external partner organisation, Change, Grow, Live (CGL), commissioned by Ingeus. CGL were responsible for the recruitment, training, and supervision of all the community volunteers. The organisation employed volunteer coordinators, co-located in CRC premises, to manage and deliver the volunteering service.

All community volunteers were required to complete a CERTA level two qualification before they were able to engage with service users. The training comprised a full two-day course which covered role boundaries, confidentiality, the difference between mentoring and friendship and many scenarios and role plays to look at the role of a probation community volunteer in real life.

Community volunteers came from all walks of life with many being young students with an interest in following a career in the criminal or wider social justice sector or people who had retired from work. Some volunteers also had lived experience of the criminal justice system, although were not on any form of probation supervision.

Ingeus established a culture of treating volunteers as equal members of the wider staff team with a commitment to provide ongoing professional and personal support.

Community volunteers were involved in a wide range of activities. The most common were:

Unsupervised 1-2-1 work – meeting with service users in the community in order to achieve a set goal, e.g. register with a G.P., helping someone apply for benefits or housing or signposting them to other helping services. This support work was often organised through regular drop-in workshops to which probation officers would refer service users who needed additional support in doing application forms or accessing other services.

Through the Gate (TTG) – meeting services users in custody prior to their release to form working relationships, set goals and formulate an action plan that will continue to be worked on in the community upon release. This role was only critical to successful resettlement with volunteers helping service users organise such key resources as locating their local pharmacy to ensure that they could collect their medication and ensure continuity of care or attend appointments with housing or even probation itself.

Meet at the Gate (MATG) – a service offered to all female prisoners and those males who are identified as particularly vulnerable when a volunteer ensures the released prisoner can access transport home. This service was adapted to ensure that people released during the pandemic still had transport (via pre-paid bus tickets) as well as a hot drink, clothing, toiletries, and masks.

Group work – supporting service users to engage in group programmes (e.g. Functional Skills for service users with literacy problems). Assisting NPS/CRC staff in group work environments as additional support for service users who may experience difficulties with literacy and numeracy.

Again, community volunteers continued to provide support to service users on a remote basis during the pandemic and associated lockdowns.

Progression

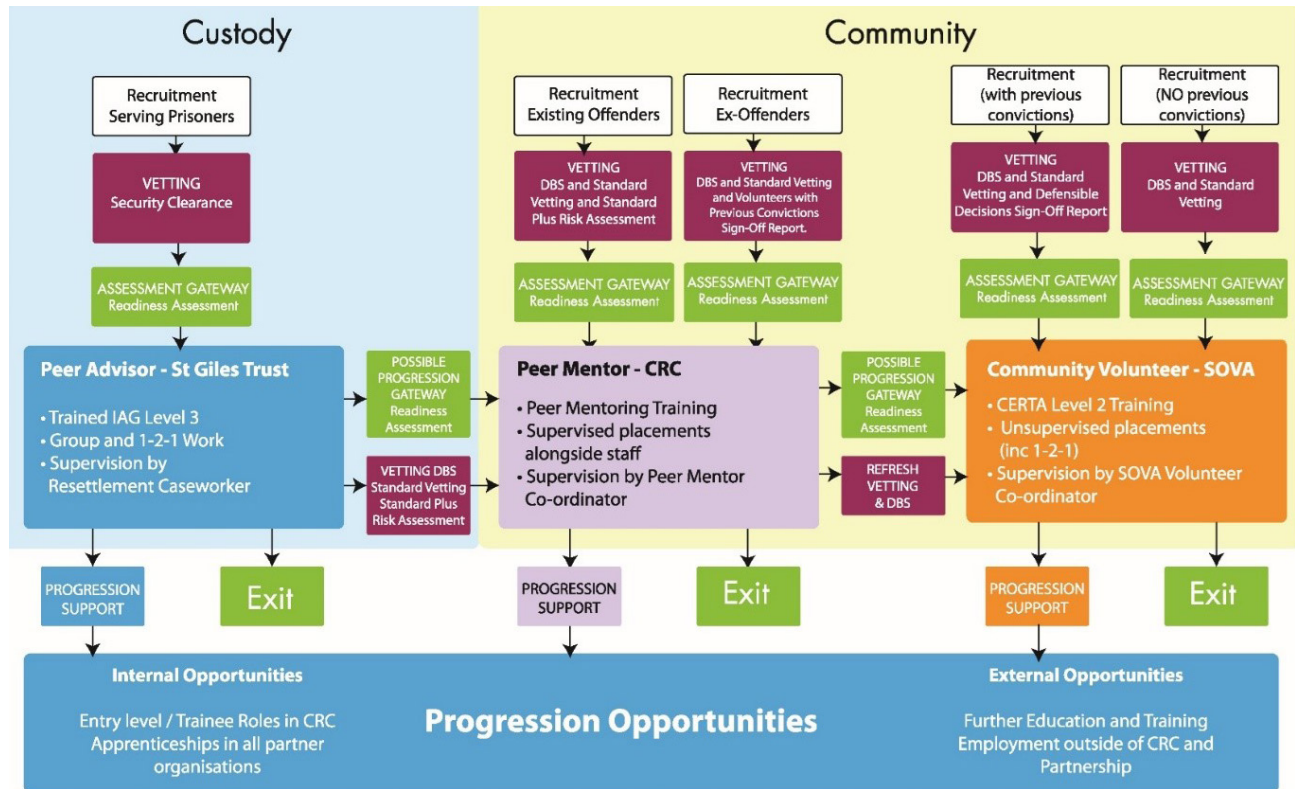
One of the key elements of the strategy was the explicit investment in progression opportunities for everyone who participated in Ingeus' volunteering and mentoring programmes. Progression allowed people to move between the three different volunteering and mentoring roles but, more importantly, to be supported to move on to a range of other positions including:

- Entry level of trainee roles within the CRCs.
- Apprenticeships across a range of partner organisations.
- Further education and training.
- Employment opportunities outside the CRC and its partner organisations.

Ingeus committed fully to this progression process, taking the view that recruiting a large number of workers with lived experience would enhance the quality of their workforce. They therefore took the strategic decision to reallocate resources to create a number of paid Community Support Worker roles. These positions offered additional flexibility so that people in the early stages of their desistance journeys could work on a part-time basis with the chance to go full time when they (and their manager) felt this was appropriate.

The Community Support Worker post was created to act as a steppingstone between volunteering and the existing Probation Support Officer role which is the main entry-point into a probation career. Mentors and volunteers also found work in a range of other posts across RRP described in greater detail in the next chapter.

The progression process is summarised in the graphic below:



Chapter 3: Feedback and evaluation

Introduction

This chapter includes details on the numbers of people engaging in these different mentoring and volunteering roles before presenting feedback from a focus group conducted with four people who progressed from service user to peer mentor to paid employee.

Activities and outcomes

Peer mentors

A minimum of 150 individuals completed the peer mentoring training in both Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) during the six years under review in this report. Ninety-two of these individuals were employed by Ingeus 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). Most of these people transferred over to the Probation Service at the end of the CRC contracts in June 2021 with six individuals now working as Personal Wellbeing Mentors and Advisors with Ingeus. Ingeus has also recruited several other people with lived experience to deliver a range of different Commissioned Rehabilitative Services.

Peer advisors

More than 500 people in prison (515) started the Level 3 Information Advice and Guidance qualification with 366 achieving the qualification. For many individuals this was their first, or first significant, educational achievement. A Level 3 qualification is equivalent to an 'A Level' and achieving this qualification inevitably increased peer advisors' self-esteem and self-confidence as well as greatly enhancing their employability.

Many peer advisors were able to convert this qualification into paid employment on release with 14 graduates of the training finding jobs with St Giles and numerous others with a wide range of other voluntary organisations across the social justice sector.

Community volunteers

CGL trained a total of approximately 500 individuals to become community volunteers between 2015-2021 with a pool of around 150 volunteers at one time. Inevitably, the numbers of volunteers dropped over the last year of operation as there would no longer be CRCs operating. Nevertheless, there were still a total of 74 volunteers operational when the CRCs stopped operating on 24 June 2021.

Peer mentor feedback

Peer mentors

The evaluator conducted a one-hour online focus group with four individuals who had all participated in the Ingeus peer mentor training before going on to be employed first by RRP and currently by Ingeus. These individuals had worked in several roles including community support workers, personal wellbeing mentors, health champions and site hosts for Ingeus as well as other paid roles in other social justice organisations.

All four interviewees were very appreciative of the opportunities created for them by becoming involved in peer mentoring and identified six common critical success factors which are discussed in turn below.

Potential recognised

The interviewees talked about their own challenging backgrounds with most of them having feelings of low self-worth and lack of confidence. All four had been individually encouraged to become peer mentors because of the potential that Ingeus staff had spotted in them. In one example, an individual was overheard in the probation waiting area encouraging a fellow service user to comply with his probation requirements. The receptionist asked the individual if he was willing to talk to the peer mentor coordinator and started on the next peer mentoring course. Other interviewees were recognised by their offender manager or community payback supervisor as having people skills and were encouraged to get involved in peer mentoring.

“Peer mentoring has shown me that I am more than my failures.”

The value of giving back

Interviewees talked with passion about how the opportunity to support others and give back had made a huge difference to their own lives. Doing something valuable and worthwhile enabled people to build their own sense of self-worth and their self-confidence. Not only did this improved self-esteem result in all four eventually finding paid employment but they talked of many other positive changes they had made in their lives as a result. These included: leaving abusive relationships, regaining custody of their children, entering and successfully completing therapy, among many others.

“The more you went, the better you felt. The more you realised ‘I am good at something’.”

Ongoing (and never-ending) support

All four people in the focus group talked about the consistent and persistent support that they had experienced from Ingeus staff, in particular their individual peer mentor co-ordinator. Interviewees spoke of how their journeys had been zigzag in nature with many steps backwards as well as overall progress forwards. The fact that they could rely on support from Ingeus staff was said to be vital to their continued success; several said they continued to seek advice and support from trusted staff despite some years in paid employment and many years out of trouble with the criminal justice system.

“The most important thing I learnt was how important it is to ask for help when you need it, rather than bottle it up and try to cope on your own.”

The power of the group

All the interviewees also had a shared experience of thoroughly enjoying and benefiting from the experience of doing their peer mentor training as a group. They talked of how being with a committed and enthusiastic group of like-minded individuals enhanced their motivations to make a positive change in their own lives and that this positivity was contagious. They talked of how the training resulted in a supportive network which was available to them as and when they needed it with many examples of continuing friendships being established. The fact that this support was offered on a completely voluntary and mutual basis, meant that interviewees experienced it as even more powerful than the support they received from professional staff.

“There were so many benefits in being part of such a motivated group, all motivated to help others and it just was natural to take pride in building each other up.”

Encouragement and motivation

People spoke of the continuous motivation and encouragement they received from Ingeus staff which often *raised their expectations and made formerly unimagined goals appear both realistic and achievable.*

“I’ve got such huge job satisfaction from being a peer mentor, but I didn’t dream that I would end up with a job. But she (the peer co-ordinator) kept telling me about different roles and told me I should apply because I’d be good at it.”

Flexibility and individuality

Finally, interviewees spoke about how important it was that their peer mentoring experience was individualised and that they were able to learn and progress at their own speed. While some people rapidly went on to paid employment, others preferred to stay as a volunteer for a longer period, allocating time to resolving other issues in their life so they knew they would be able to not only find but sustain paid employment. The fact that Ingeus was able to work flexibly and to continue offering ongoing support was a key part of the programme’s success.

In addition to this focus group, three peer mentors wrote about their experience of delivering the Transition and Hope group⁸:

“During my time as a Peer Mentor, I had a very exciting opportunity to be part of developing Transition and Hope, a Rehabilitation Activity Requirement. I thoroughly enjoyed facilitating the group, travelling across the midlands to deliver at various Probation sites, and witnessing that the material clearly motivates service users towards change. I was given a platform to share my experiences to help others identify that hope is there for everyone.” [Jo, Peer Mentor]

“Delivering Transition and Hope is challenging at times but very rewarding. I see a visible difference in how people feel when they come in and then leave the session. It helps to break down barriers, engage people – the key is the personal stories and the examples of hope. There is often a lightbulb moment when people see that change is possible. For people that have been through the system a lot they actually engage with it.” [Di, Peer Mentor]

“I was one of the first people to attend the pilot version. I came away positive and excited about it. I was involved in tweaking the design and then became one of the deliverers. I really liked it and felt that had I had it early in my journey I would have really benefitted. Many people arrive at probation confused, anxious and possibly vulnerable but the involvement of Peer Mentors helps to break down some of these barriers and Service Users often engage at break times and are happy to ask us a bunch of questions and our personal stories help to allay fears, and because we have lived it these messages get through. We provide a lot of practical advice about what to expect, even simple stuff like parking, or what the staff are like, can make a difference.” [Chris, Peer Mentor]

Summary

Overall, people who had been involved in peer mentoring talked about the scheme as a huge opportunity which led them to a series of achievements in different areas of their lives, both personal and in their career. They took great pride in the fact that they were now able to be role models to other people struggling with challenges and problems.

“I can tell people my story and offer advice and support. But more than anything, I can be an example. Look at me, I am the change.”

⁸ <https://www.russellwebster.com/probation-transition-hope/>

Chapter 4: Conclusions

Overview

This evaluation has shared the evidence base for the impact of peer mentoring on people who offer support, the mentees who receive it and the overall culture and understanding of the host organisation.

Ingeus 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 Community Rehabilitation Companies.

Achievements

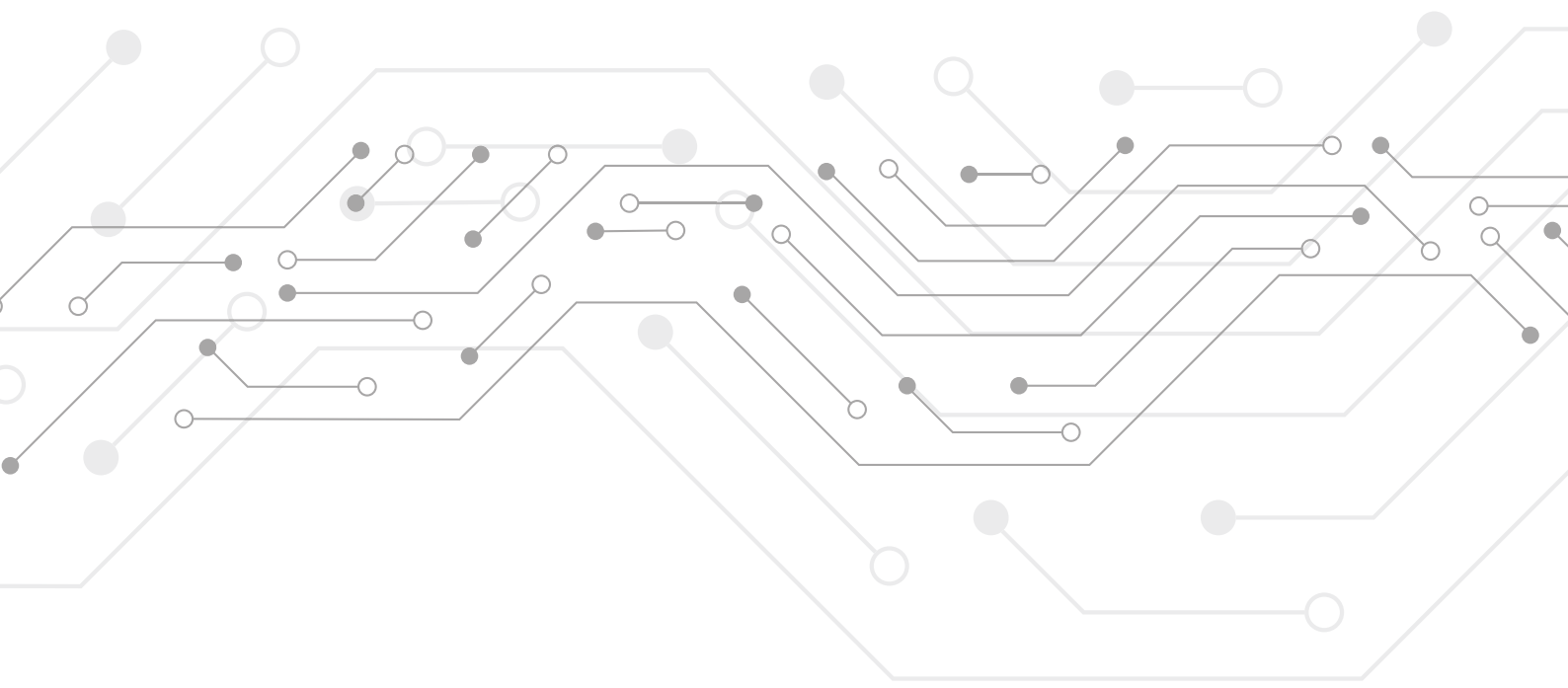
There are six main achievements of the Ingeus mentoring and volunteering programme:

1. Over a thousand⁹ individuals have taken up the opportunity to develop a range of skills, increasing their employability and building their self-esteem.
2. Thousands of people on probation supervision have been supported by their peers who have provided a lived example of success as well as advising, encouraging and supporting them alongside engaging them with a wide range of support organisations.
3. Ingeus has increased the diversity of its workforce and developed a new recruitment pathway which prizes lived experience, and which also delivers a workforce with a high level of personal motivation to help others.
4. Ingeus has placed service user involvement and the influence of people with lived experience at the heart of the organisation and is able to design (and re-design) interventions which are better suited to meet the needs of its service users.
5. The Ingeus mentoring and volunteering programme is substantially funded with significant investment in progression pathways. This has bolstered the reputation of the organisation with partner organisations in both the statutory and voluntary sectors, in both criminal justice and other social justice fields.

⁹ More than 150 peer mentors, over 515 peer advisors and more than 500 community volunteers

6. The programme has also succeeded in its aim of raising awareness and understanding of the criminal justice system. More than 500 volunteers have a much greater understanding of the workings of the probation service. The stories and achievements of many peers have also been shared with partner organisations and with local media outlets to give a more accurate picture of the probation service to local communities.

There have been concerns from a range of criminal justice stakeholders for many years about whether the probation service had become too preoccupied with risk management at the cost of fostering positive change in the people it supervises. The Government has sought to restore this balance with its new slogan for the reunified probation service of: Assess, Protect and Change. We know from the evidence base that the change process of desisting from a criminal lifestyle and building a new law-abiding identity is typically one which takes years. Ingeus' volunteering and mentoring strategy has enabled it to deliver long-term support which extends far beyond statutory supervision periods to hundreds of individuals who are now engaged in providing the same sort of support to future generations. This may be the most important and durable achievement of Ingeus' ongoing commitment to place service user involvement and lived experience at the heart of its operations.



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