

**The Untapped Utility of Peer-Support Programs in Prisons and Implications  
for Theory, Policy, and Practice**

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**This thesis is submitted as part of a Doctor of Philosophy degree programme  
undertaken at the Nottingham Trent University**

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## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated solely to the human beings who took their time and energy to speak to me about their experiences of crime, prison, peer-support, and everything else. It was an honour to listen, and I hope my interpretations of your stories reflect that.

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## Publications associated with this thesis

### Journal Articles

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### Chapter

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- Perrin, C. (September, 2014). Peer-Support in Prisons: Instilling Meaning, Purpose, and Positivity 'Drip-by-Drip'. Poster. *13th Conference of the International Association for the Treatment of Sexual Offenders (IATSO)*. Porto, Portugal.
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## Other Author Publications

- Perrin, C., Blagden, N., Winder, B., & Norman, C. (2017). Religion and Desistance: Patterns and trends emerging from work with sexual and violent offenders. In K. Kerley (Ed.), *Religion in Prison: Research, Theory, and Policy*. (pp. 51- 67). Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger
- Blagden, N., & Perrin, C. (2016). 'Relax lads, you're in safe hands here': Experiences of a sexual offender treatment prison. In C. Reeves (Ed.), *Experiencing Imprisonment: Research on the experience of living and working in carceral institutions* (pp. 27-45). UK: Routledge

## Abstract

Peer-support has existed in prisons both in the U. K. and abroad for decades, primarily in the form of discernible yet informal 'programs' or 'schemes'. Through these programs, prisoners are able to access support from fellow prisoners for issues ranging from emotional distress and addiction problems to practical and educational needs. Peer-support, as a general 'help resource', is underscored by the principles of mutual reciprocity, empathy, and shared problem solving. Although this resource has existed in prisons for decades, research focussing explicitly on those who uphold peer-support roles is virtually non-existent. This is surprising when considering the apparent benefits of peer-led helping (i.e. prisoners upholding meaningful empathetic roles) and the ever-present global obsession with identifying 'what works' in addressing the problem of crime. It is even more surprising when considering that peer-helping boasts the innate and transparent benefit of being virtually cost-free. Indeed, an intervention that has organically established itself in the prison context, remained there for decades, and has clocked up no calculable monetary cost warrants further investigation. To this end, the overarching aim of this thesis and its empirical chapters was to provide a deeper understanding of how adopting a peer-support role in prison may affect offenders' attitudes, beliefs, emotions, and experiences of imprisonment. This was approached qualitatively and on two levels in terms of offence type (generalised and sexual), and three levels in terms of context (personal, institutional, and social). Three empirical chapters (studies) represent the core of this theses.

Study 1 explored the broad construct of peer-support with those who uphold peer-helping roles in prison. It asked participants questions relating to how peer-support roles are delivered, experienced, and assimilated into a number offending contexts (i.e. at an experiential and institutional level and at a personal subjective narrative level). Given this holistic focus, this study utilised a sizable (N=22) sample comprised of mixed offence type participants who resided across three U. K. prisons. It relied on semi-structured interviews and employed thematic analysis to draw out recurrent notions that portrayed an understanding of the dynamics of peer-support in prison and its utility amongst offenders. The analysis within this study revealed that the implications of peer-helping in prison

transcend far and wide the simple notion of shared problem solving. For incarcerated people, upholding a peer-support role offers a wellspring of meaningful activity that can be used to cope with prison deprivation, enhance well-being, contribute to good lives and possible selves, and energise cognitive transformations. Ultimately, this study introduced the encouraging notion that through peer-support roles, prisoners can gather forward momentum and create trajectories that are not predetermined by being doomed to deviance.

Study 2 continues the enquiry into the utility of peer-support in prisons and focuses on the experiences of the role-holders themselves. This time there is an explicit focus on a smaller sample (N=15) and on sexual offenders. The justification for these decisions was based on both previous exemplary studies, and the fact that sexual offenders represent an under-researched, poorly understood, and deeply ostracised population. Sexual offenders are also required, more so than other offending populations, to go through intensive treatment programs and demonstrate reduced risk. Therefore, such offenders were considered an important population with which to explore peer-support, given that it appeared from study 1 to engender a community and restorative aspect typified by 'doing good'. The inherently personal-subjective and deeply phenomenological insights that characterised much of the dataset in study 1 featured in the decision to employ an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) in this study. Here, the 15 participants who upheld roles as 'Listeners', 'Insiders', and 'Shannon-Trust' mentors participated in semi-structured interviews. The IPA reiterated many of the findings from study 1 in terms of the experiential benefits of peer-support and the importance of meaning-making in prison. However, analysis also revealed specific benefits of peer-support for sexual offender populations, such as the chance to earn self-forgiveness and consequently move away from harmful labels such as 'monster'. There were also some important implications alluded to throughout this chapter that related to maximising sexual offender treatment gains, and these are discussed alongside rehabilitative climate and therapeutic community bodies of literature.

Study 3 edged away from the phenomenological experiences of the individuals who upheld peer-support roles and asked questions about peer-support as a wider level of intervention that might

be formally assimilated into the institutional context of prison. A convenience subset sample of participants from studies 1 and 2 were follow-up interviewed and their thoughts about the status and potential utility of their peer-support programs were explored. The objective here was to explore peer-support on more of a structural level, but while still relying on the insights from the experts – the peer-supporters serving time. Therefore, participants' general understandings of peer-support, rehabilitation, imprisonment, and how these constructs interact were sought. The aim here was to generate an understanding of the organisational and structural influences that govern rehabilitative work, and how these can either represent challenges or opportunities for the future of peer-support. The questions put to participants yielded responses that were thematically analysed and reduced to three superordinate themes ('through the gate implications', 'stumbling blocks', and 'implications for policy and practice'). The analysis highlights several ways in which peer-support can assist the criminal justice system in dealing with the intricate challenges that come with attempting to rehabilitate and reintegrate offenders. A set of stumbling blocks (institutional challenges) that need to be addressed in order to maximise the utility of peer-support in prisons are also identified and unpacked.

These empirical findings from this research are reflected on in the final two chapters of this thesis, firstly within the scope of a literature-informed discussion, and secondly within the framework of desistance and reintegration theory. The former looks to tie any loose-ends between the literature review and the analytical chapters, and rework any early assumptions and definitions according to the research findings. Accordingly, the extant theoretical definitions of peer-support are re-examined, and some suggestions for how these can be extrapolated to incorporate the prison environment are offered. Also, many of the theoretical understandings interweaved into the analyses in this thesis are revisited, and the degree to which they synergise with peer-support in offending contexts is deliberated. One of the main discussions in this section relates to the extent to which peer-support roles might compliment desistance and whether, therefore, it may be considered to have an innate redemptive property. The final chapter proposes some potential uses for peer-support, mainly for the endeavours of operationalising and shaping theory, and contributing to practical work with offenders.



This thesis closes with a discussion of its limitations and its hopes for the future. It departs with two fundamental messages: 1) a call to policy makers and scholars to acknowledge and further investigate the vast utility of peer-support in prisons; 2) a plea to society to listen to and be willing to accept the people that so often want to be a part of it.

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*With us, prison makes man a pariah... Those lovely links with humanity are broken. We are doomed to solitary, while our sons still live. We are denied the one thing that might heal us and keep us, that might bring balm to the bruised heart, and peace to the soul in pain... Many men on their release carry their prison about with them in the air, and hide it as a secret disgrace in their hearts, and at length, like poor poisoned things, creep into some hole and die. It is wretched that they should have to do so, and it is wrong, terribly wrong, of society, that it should force them to do so. Society takes upon itself the right to inflict appalling punishment on the individual, but it also has the supreme vice of shallowness, and fails to realise what it has done... When the man's punishment is over, it leaves him to himself; that is to say, it abandons him at the very moment when its highest duty towards him begins.*

Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*, 1987 (published 1974)



# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Research inception

This thesis is an exploration of peer-support provision in the context of imprisonment and offender change. The inspiration for this research stems from the candidate's four years of voluntary work within the U. K. Samaritans charity. Throughout this period, the researcher occupied phones in a community-based centre and provided listening support to callers experiencing distress, despair, and suicidal feelings. In time, this community-based role evolved and expanded to include work on a project that aimed to bridge a gap in support for prisoners experiencing distress, despair, and suicide. This project was, and remains 'the Listener Scheme'. The scheme, as will be discussed further along in this chapter and thesis, is quintessential of the underlying theoretical principles of peer-support – it is founded on principles of empathy, reciprocity, mutual problem solving, and emotional support. The first empirical research study to explore the roles of Listeners in prison was undertaken by the writer of this thesis, prior to commencement of this PhD. This MSc project was a small (N=6) qualitative study, which was refined and published in the early stages of this PhD. This process of conceptual refinement marked the beginning of this PhD, the aim of which, is to now more amply explore the concept of peer-support, its place in the prison environment, and what it means to prisoners. Throughout this thesis, 'peer-supporters', 'role-holders', and 'peer-mentors' are all used interchangeably to describe prisoners who elected to train and become members of a peer-support programme. In the interests of expanding research in this area, several peer-support programmes are explored in this thesis, all of which are considered to be founded upon a set of definitions and principles that will be discussed throughout. The present chapter, however, provides an overview of the contextual backdrop to this research, and aims to lay the foundations from which each empirical chapter, and its implications for society, can be understood. As such, included here is an overview of the history of peer-support provision and its place in problem communities; a brief discussion of the underlying mechanisms of peer-support systems and why they can be advantageous for certain populations; a breakdown of

each of the peer-support programmes that are to be investigated in this research; a brief literature-guided projection of the potential benefits and problems associated with peer-support in prisons; and finally a justification for this research, which draws on academic and policy objectives. This chapter closes by outlining the research questions, aims, and objectives of this thesis, and mapping out how it will be organised.

## The emergence of peer-support

Though it is arguably impossible to accurately trace the aetiology of peer-support, there have been efforts to trace the more formalised adaptations of it. One such attempt by Davidson et al. (1999) journeys back to a French 18<sup>th</sup> century psychiatric hospital, which recognised the unique value in employing recovered patients as staff. The chief physician at the hospital reportedly noted how these peer staff would carry out their duties in especially “gentle, honest, and humane” ways and how they appeared to be inherently kind and empathetic. Naturally, increasing levels of peer staff emerged in and around healthcare settings in France and beyond, and thus the underlying tenets of peer-helping have been appreciated throughout history (Davidson et al., 1999). Psychiatric settings have since represented the main stage on which peer-support programs have been conceived and expanded (Davidson, Bellamy, Guy, & Miller, 2012). In the contemporary era, the development of the Community Support System in the late 1970s (Stroul, 1993) encouraged community-based networks through which people suffering with mental health disorders could both give and receive support. This community support program heavily promoted formalised peer-support interventions, and played a marked influential role in the expansion of peer-helping within the health sector (Davidson et al., 1999). The objective of this social movement was, and is, to encourage mental health service users to share their experiences and help each other in ways that professionals would not be able to. Peer-support therefore has perhaps flourished due to resource constraints or professionals’ lack of ability to empathise on an experiential level with those suffering with disorders (Davidson, Bellamy, Guy, & Miller, 2012). The gaps that peer-support is capable of filling in this regard is likely the cause of its

exponential growth. Indeed, in more recent years, peer-support has been well-utilised in a wide range of community settings to address a variety of issues such as parenting problems (Day et al., 2012), sexual health (Lazarus et al., 2012), depression, suicidal thoughts and other forms of mental illness (Matlin, Molock & Tebes, 2011), and drug and alcohol abuse (Rowe et al., 2007). Generally, research backs the notion that peer-support programmes represent a unique and valuable form of support, principally due to the reciprocal empathy dynamic that underpins it (Davidson et al., 1999). Widespread research also reveals an extensive variety of benefits for the givers and receivers of help in peer contexts (see, for e.g. Walker & Bryant, 2013; Bean, Shafer & Glennon, 2013) and these will be explored in some depth further along in this chapter. First, an exploration of how peer-support can be defined is explored.

## Defining peer-support

Defining peer-support in the context of prison is a core task for this thesis. The definitions borrowed and manipulated in the early chapters herein should therefore be viewed as provisional and working. These will be revisited and reworked in the closing chapters of this thesis. Nevertheless, a generalised body of research and literature surround the broad construct of peer-support can assist in providing an early framework for understanding the phenomenon under investigation presently.

A review of such research and literature most commonly depicts peer-support as a variation of social and emotional support that rests on the core tenets of mutual reciprocity, shared problem solving, and empathy (Dennis, 2003; Solomon, 2004; DeVilly et al., 2005). Some scholars have attempted to embed expectations of support into definitions, with the aim of clarifying what constitutes ‘mutuality’ and ‘sharing’ for the parties involved in peer-support. Consequently, perhaps the most pragmatic yet wholesome definition is one offered by Mead, Hilton, and Curtis (2001), who have delineated peer-support as “a system of giving and receiving help founded on key principles of respect, shared responsibility, and mutual agreement of what is helpful” (p135). This definition emphasises the importance of balance and equality in peer-support oriented relationships, and

highlights that there should be some awareness of directionality in terms of the support given and received. The assumption here is that support is shared, mutually agreed upon, and not unidirectional. Because of this emphasis on shared and mutually-useful modes of support, it is broadly accepted that peer-supporters must have some joint interest, investment, or prior experience in whatever the context is that enwraps the support being provided (Solomon, 2004). This perhaps presents a need to further broaden accepted definitions of support, so as to include the notion that peer-supporters should be matched in some way in relation to their experiences of personal challenges. So far, this has only been alluded to in descriptions of the core features of peer-support, but not interweaved into the boundaries of what constitutes it. For example, Gartner and Riessman (1982) have aligned peer-support with “instrumental support”, which they describe as a form of support that requires mutual support of those sharing a similar [mental health] condition. It is argued that the mutual closeness to the personal challenge being faced is what makes peer-support especially unique and useful for both parties, and is the feature most likely to bring about desired social or personal change (Gartner & Riessman, 1982). Although the literature diverges in the factors it includes as paramount to peer-support, it converges on several themes. A review of the literature reveals that peer-support should be characterised by equality and bidirectionality in support, recurrent sharing of extant and emerging problems, empathising over a mutually-experienced challenge or condition, and agreement over and respect for the support that is offered and received (Mead, Hilton, & Curtis, 2001; Parkin & McKeganey, 2000; Solomon, 2004). These characteristics comprise a novel and uniquely beneficial level of support, illuminate why peer-support has been increasingly called upon in health contexts in recent years, and why it may have somewhat of a magnified effect in the prison context. This latter assertion is under close investigation in this thesis, and contributes to a key objective in this research.

## The preliminary case for peer-support in carceral settings

Given that one of the key advantages of peer-support relates to resource provision (where resources may otherwise be lacking), peer-led schemes have been traditionally implemented on a supply and

demand basis, i.e. in high risk environments such as those with high poorly educated populations and high rates of unemployment, communities with high crime and deviancy problems, and ethnic minority and low income communities (DeVilly et al., 2005). Research has consistently revealed positive effects resulting from peer-support schemes in problem communities (Field & Schuldberg, 2011; Walker & Bryant, 2013; Bean, Shafer & Glennon, 2013). This, and the well documented problems associated with prison populations and prison culture (Dye, 2010), has led to the introduction of peer-support programmes in prisons, where many have been and continue to be trialled.

Indeed, peer-led programmes in prisons that take focus on a variety of issues have been documented. However, the larger scale peer-support programs in operation in prisons across the UK focus primarily on the areas of HIV/AIDS and health education, drug and alcohol abuse, sexual assault/offending, prison orientation, anti-bullying and anti-racism, and suicide/violence prevention (DeVilly et al., 2005). In general, peer-support in prison envelopes a range of different structures and approaches including peer training, peer facilitation, peer counselling, peer modelling, or peer helping (Parkin & McKeganey, 2000). Within prison settings, peer programs have been commonly described as 'prisoner Listener' or 'prisoner befriender' schemes. The common theme across such schemes is that they are principally founded upon the core tenets of mutual reciprocity, shared problem solving, empathy, and experiential exchanges. There is evidence to suggest that the presence of these dynamics in prisons may have somewhat of a magnified impact. For example, research has convincingly argued that prisoners who uphold peer-support roles internalise them and identify with 'being' a 'supporter'. Consequently, findings have been reported of peer-support volunteers experiencing profound internal changes and attitude shifts, and also developing a range of skills and attributes while incarcerated (Foster & Magee, 2011; Boothby, 2011). Other findings have suggested that prisoners find perspective through supporting others who experience despair, and accordingly utilise their work as a coping strategy (Perrin & Blagden, 2014). However, why peer-support might 'work' in this regard, and what it is about the interactions and experiences prisoners can have via peer-to-peer helping that can galvanise change remains under-explored.

The most common and basic finding regarding the benefits of peer-helping for the helper relate to the general finding that behaviours characterised by altruism and benevolence are rewarding for the individual (Brown, Consedine, & Magai, 2005; Post, 2007; Borgonovi, 2008). This body of research is most pragmatically encapsulated in Post's (2005) paper, entitled "Altruism, happiness, and health: It's good to be good". Indeed, a broad range of research has found that behaving selflessly and carrying out 'acts of kindness' for others enhances self-esteem, lowers morbidity, increases perceptions of social support, produces better health and mental health outcomes, and extends people's social networks (Schwartz, Meisenhelder, & Reed, 2003; Brown, Consedine, & Magai, 2005; Post, 2005). In exploring why altruistic acts bring such benefits to those who carry them out, Erikson's notion of generativity has been applied; it has been argued that acting on concern for those other than the self brings about internal satisfaction, a feeling of autonomy, and an assurance that the individual is making a difference in the world (Schwartz, Meisenhelder, & Reed, 2003). Conversely, those who fail to contribute in generative ways are more prone to 'stagnation', which is characterised by feelings of low self-worth and social disconnect (Slater, 2003). In essence then, those who behave altruistically and out of concern for others strengthen their bond to the society around them, and in doing so satisfy an array of basic human needs such as commitment to other people, maintenance of intimate and familial relationships, and a sense of social belonging and high self-worth (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Additionally, scholars have argued that simply the act of giving, and thereby focusing on the outer, enables people to counter the anxiety and depression associated with obsessing over the self (Schwartz & Sendor, 1999). This phenomenon is said to stem from a process of response shift, whereby intrapersonal values, beliefs, and perspectives of life are disempowered and become more flexible due to the adoption of a more outer-directed stance. In this respect, by adopting a volunteer position such as those akin to peer-support roles, individuals may be enabled to reorganise and reconceptualise their viewpoints regarding life stressors and what is truly important (Sprangers & Schwartz, 1999). This sits in line with some of the early research on peer-support in prisons and perspective making. Perrin & Blagden (2014), for example, found that prison peer-support volunteers

were able to re-story their own worries and concerns and take stock of them, as a consequence of gaining perspective from listening to others. Interestingly, the research that has explored altruism and increased happiness / wellbeing has consistently found that it is specifically acts that involve giving up time and physically helping others that produce the most rewarding outcomes. For example, Borgonovi (2008) used self-report data on perceived health and well-being to examine the impact of volunteering and other acts classed as altruistic on such outcomes. The study revealed that volunteering work that involved contributing more time and energy elicited the most positive outcomes in terms of wellbeing, whereas those who simply donated money or gave blood did not show any signs of enhanced wellbeing.

However, while there is much evidence suggesting that giving up time and ‘doing good’ provides wellbeing enhancements for the ‘givers’, there is an ongoing contentious debate surrounding causality. Researchers have attempted to explore whether the positive association between volunteering and health is indeed causal or instead a product of reverse causality (those who consider themselves to be in good physical and mental health may elect to volunteer because they feel in a position to give). Borgonovi (2008) controlled for reverse causality by utilising self-report measures on health and happiness initially and then pairing results from high and low scoring groups with their volunteering activity over several time points. The results showed that happiness maintained in the high scoring group and increased in the low scoring group alongside volunteering activity, but that health did not change amongst the low scoring group. The study accordingly concludes that only the positive association between volunteering and happiness (not health) is the result of a positive causal effect of volunteering. Still, these are encouraging findings, which Borgonovi explains within a discussion surrounding status. It is suggested that, in line with widespread sociological explanations, volunteering positively impacts an individual’s social networks and social roles, both of which are strong predictors of reduced morbidity, increased perceptions of social support, enhanced self-confidence and self-esteem, and increased happiness (Pinquart & Sörensen, 2000; Wong, Schrager, Holloway, Meyer, & Kipke, 2014). The social role hypothesis adopted in Borgonovi’s study asserts that

volunteering is viewed in high regard by society and thus provides the volunteer with a feeling of high moral and social status, which in turn affects happiness outcomes (Musick & Wilson, 2003).

Again, while these findings are positive and ultimately indicate that 'doing good' might represent a pathway to becoming good, researchers have cautioned that perhaps only certain sections of society are likely or able to engage in altruistic work such as volunteering. For example, Post (2007) found that only those who were socially expected to be altruistic (i.e. church elders or those involved in other charitable causes) engaged in volunteering. These findings suggest a positive belief system, a level of societal investment, and a prosocial network are prerequisites for engaging in socially altruistic behaviours. This again gives rise to the reverse causation hypothesis, indicating that perhaps only those of higher social and psychological functioning are likely to give help. This is not the most encouraging research when looking at the growth potential for peer-support volunteer work in prisons. There is a risk that many or even most prisoners might never have the opportunity or skillsets to benefit from undertaking peer-support roles. Despite these potential barriers, illuminated by the general research on the character profiles of altruistic individuals, the criminological literature provides reason to be optimistic about the willingness and likelihood of prisoners becoming peer-support volunteers while serving time. For example, researchers have recently acknowledged a trend in former drug users and ex-offenders seeking opportunities to become a "professional ex" (Brown, 1991) or a "wounded healer" (LeBel, 2007; LeBel, Richie, & Maruna, 2015; Maruna, 2001). Brown (1991) has described the professional ex as an individual who expresses a desire to re-route and utilise their experience of crime and criminality for good, or to 'give back'. Applied evidence of this phenomenon is the growing presence of initiatives that welcome ex-prisoner volunteers, such as youth crime prevention programmes (Liem & Richardson, 2014) ex-prisoner reintegration mentoring schemes (Rhodes, 2008), and a variety of restorative justice interventions (Maruna, 2016). Scholars exploring desistance from offending behaviour have argued that such initiatives are important in providing offenders with opportunities to 'make good' (redeem themselves) and broaden their prospects of reintegrating back into society. Maruna (2001), for example, has surmised that "the



desisting self-narrative frequently involves reworking a delinquent history into a source of wisdom to be drawn from while acting as a drug counsellor, youth worker, community volunteer, or mutual-help group member” (p. 117). Herein lies one of the ways in which peer-support roles might help to galvanise offenders’ movements away from crime and towards desistance. In order to fully appreciate the various dynamics through which change can happen within peer-support roles, the context in terms of the structures of, and duties associated with, the roles under investigation in this project is provided next. These roles are Samaritans prison ‘Listeners’ (Foster & Magee, 2011), ‘Insiders’ (Boothby, 2011), Shannon Trust mentors, ‘Buddies’, ‘Helping Hands’ Volunteers, Equality Representatives, Prison Advice Line Operatives, and RAPT Mentors.

## The peer-support roles under investigation

### Listeners

The Listener scheme was established in 1991 by the Prison Service Headquarters, in collaboration with the Samaritans. The scheme was initially put in place to provide prisoners with an outlet for their emotional distress, and to essentially help tackle suicide in prisons. Via the scheme, prisoners suffering distress, despair and suicidal feelings are able to call out Listeners and talk face to face about their feelings without judgement and with utmost confidentiality. Prisoners who wish to become Listeners volunteer and go through several weeks of training. Listeners receive a certificate on completion of their training and they sign a contract that binds them to the same policies as Samaritans volunteers. The Listener team establish a rota within each prison with the aim of providing a 24 hour service to anyone who needs it. Wherever possible, support is provided in a private environment to allow complete confidentiality. Prisoners have timely access to Listeners wherever located and the facility to contact them by telephone privately. Listeners needing to debrief after a call-out, or needing confidential support have the facility to contact their supporting Samaritans branch by telephone privately (NOMS and MoJ, 2012). Community volunteers from supporting Samaritans branches attend

two-weekly Listener meetings at their allocated prison(s) in order to provide emotional support for Listeners and to regulate the schemes and address any emerging issues.

As well as listening, members of the scheme also meet weekly to discuss issues relating to 'caller care' and the general running of the scheme. Furthermore, every Listener is given the chance to coordinate the entire scheme, recruit and train new members, and attend safer custody meetings as representatives (Foster and Magee, 2011). Prisoners are not paid for becoming Listeners (or Insiders or Toe-by-Toe volunteers). However, employment in prison is categorised in bands, and each band is associated with different levels of privileges (i.e. extra and improved visits, access to in-cell television, the opportunity to wear own clothes). Listeners and Insiders operate within the 'red band' and are assigned the highest level of privileges (NOMS and MoJ, 2011).

The Listener scheme is currently the foremost peer-support scheme in prisons. In 2011, 648 volunteers in 123 Samaritans branches in the UK and ROI provided support to 157 prison establishments. Listener statistics reveal that approximately 1,774 Listeners were trained in 144 prisons with Listener schemes in the UK and ROI. In 2011, prison Listeners responded to approximately 87,726 calls (Samaritans, 2012).

## Insiders

Research has revealed that initial experiences for new prisoners are traumatic, with around 50% of all prison suicides occurring within the first week of being in custody (Shaw et al. 2004). The Insiders scheme was implemented to address this problem and aims to help reduce anxiety experienced by prisoners during early days in custody. Early in the schemes inception, it was found that bullying constitutes one of the main sources of distress for prisoners, and countering bullying is now one of the primary purposes of Insiders. Volunteers of the scheme provide basic information and reassurance to prisoners new to prison shortly after their arrival. Insiders are not an alternative to Listeners; they offer a different but complementary peer-support service. As such, it is crucial that Insiders and Listeners understand each other's roles and are able to refer to each other. As with the Listener

scheme, the Insiders scheme also involves the vetting and selection of prisoners who then go through training (delivered by experienced volunteers). Insiders are not bound by the same confidentiality procedures as Listeners and the Insiders scheme is more advice and practicality oriented, rather than listening- and emotion-focussed. As a team, the Insiders scheme works very similarly to the Listener scheme. Each volunteer not only fulfils a weekly shift commitment, but also gets the opportunity to run different elements of the scheme, attend standardisation and continual improvement meetings, and represent the scheme at safer custody meetings. As such, being an Insider, as with being a Listener, is viewed as a responsible and substantial level of employment.

### Shannon Trust Mentors

A Prison Reform Trust study conducted in 2008 showed that 48% of prisoners had a reading level at or below Level 1, and 65% had a numeracy level at or below Level 1. Additionally, 67% of all prisoners were unemployed at the time of imprisonment (Clark & Dugdale, 2008). There is no shortage of research that highlights similar findings and the need for education interventions in prison. Indeed, a broad body of research suggests that educated prisoners are less likely to return to prison (Vacca, 2004; King, 2010; Kim & Clark, 2013).

The leading initiative in place to address this is a scheme called Toe-by-Toe. The scheme was first launched in 2000 at HMP Wandsworth by the Shannon Trust, a UK charity whose vision is to help prisoners to better engage in their rehabilitation journeys by helping them to read. Once established, with the support of the Trust, Toe-by-Toe is entirely prisoner-led and only casually overlooked by prison staff. The foundation of the scheme lies in a 'buddy system' first developed in schools, via which older, fluent readers adopt mentor roles and coach lesser able students through a reading programme. In prisons, prisoners wishing to become mentors are trained by the Shannon Trust and equipped with resources (principally a Toe-by-Toe manual). Following this, a team of mentors are allocated a small number of mentees, who they meet with for hourly sessions each week. During these sessions, mentees receive support to develop basic literacy skills, in a journey that aims to enhance the self-

esteem of both the mentee and mentor (Shannon Trust, 2005a). To the best of the researcher's knowledge, and following an extensive literature review, there is currently no research whatsoever exploring Toe-by-Toe. Furthermore, there are limited statistics available relating to the scale of the scheme across UK prisons. Nevertheless, the Shannon Trust website reports that in 2005, Toe-by-Toe covered 95% of UK prisons, with 80% of the schemes in place considered active. The website also reports that at this time, 954 active mentors were working with mentees across UK prisons. However, the actual number of mentors operating presently is expected to be much higher (Shannon Trust, 2005b).

## Buddies

Under the Buddy scheme, security-cleared prisoners can apply and be selected by safer custody departments within U. K prisons to become "Buddies". The objective of a Buddy is to support prisoners with disabilities and accessibility issues and ensure they are not excluded from the full range of resources that prisons offer (i.e. recreational activity and education programs). As such, Buddy schemes help the Prison Service to meet requirements of the Equality Act (2010). The kinds of duties a Buddy may carry out include transporting people around the prison if required, helping to collect meals, delivering applications or other permitted items, and cleaning cells (Le Mesurier, 2011). Unlike Helping Hands volunteers, Buddies do not provide personal care. The level of support is provided on a one-to-one basis and often requires some mediating between the Buddy and staff, so that receivers of support can have their needs addressed by prison staff who have the authority and capacity to make arrangements. Buddies often support older prisoners, but not exclusively so. As well as ensuring the physical needs of service-users are met, Buddies also provide emotional support where necessary and they are trained, to an extent, to do so. However, as with all peer-support schemes, prisoners who uphold roles are encouraged to 'sign-post' to certain avenues of support if they are considered to be more appropriate (Le Mesurier, 2011).

## Helping Hands

Helping Hands is essentially a prison-based domestic care system, which relies on prisoners helping other prisoners with physical care needs, such as dressing, showering, food preparation, and movement around the prison. As with all peer-support roles, prisoners who wish to become Helping Hands volunteers have to be vetted by safer custody departments and cleared to apply. There is direct crossover between the roles of Buddies and Helping Hands volunteers, but the fundamental difference is that Helping Hands roles involve some level of personal care duties, and some training is provided in this regard. It is important to note however that there is no published or readily available information regarding this service, and the information gathered has largely been a product of verbal discussions with prison safer custody staff.

## Equality Representatives

The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) recurrently emphasises its committed to ensuring equality to all under its care. After describing its “moral duty” in ensuring the fair, honest, and transparent treatment of offenders, NOMS increased numbers of prisoner equality representatives across U.K. establishments (MoJ & NOMS, 2009). These ‘equality reps’ operate in such roles as disability representatives, as spokespeople for gay prisoner forums, and in anti-prejudice and discrimination capacities. Information regarding the status of quality reps is scarcely available, but as of 2008, 249 prisoner representatives operated across prisons in England and Wales (Ibid). This number is thought to be considerably higher currently. The daily duties of an equality rep involve gathering information from prisoners who have related concerns and compiling reports for discussion in monthly meetings with prison staff and external representative. On a more personal level, however, equality reps can be requested by fellow prisoners who wish to report issues they are struggling with or situations they have been involved in that might contravene equality related protocols.

## Prison Advice Line Operatives

Prison Advice Line Operatives, or “PAL reps”, are responsible for disseminating prison information to fellow prisoners. This might include giving instructions on how to apply for visits, jobs, education programs, or may relate to helping new prisoners get to grips with the general structure and procedures of the prison. In providing this service, PAL reps alleviate much of the resource burden that would otherwise be placed on prison staff. The level of support provided is primarily informational and advisory, but can also become more nuanced in cases where prisoners have recurring issues, or their cases are related to emotional needs.

## RAPT Mentors

The Rehabilitation of Addicted Persons Trust (RAPT) provides a range of services in prisons across England and Wales (it does not currently run throughout other parts of the U.K.) but is particularly well known for its drug and alcohol treatment programs. The RAPT Substance Dependence Treatment Program (SDTP) is a rolling, abstinence-based treatment program lasting between 16 and 22 weeks. This program is based on the Twelve Steps principles of AA and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) and has been adjusted specifically for prisoners and offending populations. RAPT trains recovered prisoners (those who have completed the Twelve Steps program) to serve as mentors. These mentors provide support to recovering prisoners through advice, guidance, and effective modelling of pro-social recovery attitudes and behaviours.

## Potential benefits of peer-support in prison

Research in the area of prison peer-support has generally focussed on the recipients of the support and whether or not such support alleviates the emotional impact of imprisonment and provides a coping strategy. Findings are encouraging and many studies have concluded that peer-support schemes are indeed effective in reducing stress and anxiety in prisoners. In an investigation into the Listener scheme, Jaffe (2012) concludes that prisoners who talk to Listeners are able to counter, to

some degree, a negative build-up of feelings, heightened by confinement in a cell. Jaffe provides evidence of a cathartic effect resulting from talking to Listeners, as a consequence of the release of feelings. Prisoners feeling less burdened by their problems as a result of speaking to Listeners are consequently more able to focus on their prison experience and their options in terms of personal growth. Findings from Boothby (2011) endorse the Insiders scheme in the same way. Boothby reports that prisoners who are able to moderate the stress and anxiety of initially entering the prison system are better prepared to cope with prison and have a more constructive experience. Research exploring other types of peer-support programmes remain consistent in terms of positive findings. For example, Sirdifield's (2006) research into prison Health Trainers suggests that receiving Health-related education in prison may contribute towards removing some of the barriers associated with offending, such as health problems, low self-esteem and self-confidence, low self-worth and a lack of prosocial interests.

Although research has principally focussed on the recipients of peer-support, Davies (1994) has suggested that the implications of peer-led schemes go well beyond their initial inceptions and impact on the quality of relationships with other prisoners and prison staff. A small amount of research has expanded these findings and suggests that peer-led programs can be also examples of internal formal support. Research has shown that peer-led schemes are beneficial not only for the prisoners taking part in them but also for the peer-supporters themselves. For example, some studies have reported that such schemes increase peer-supporters' insight into their own lives and empower them to change their offending behaviour and lifestyles (Keller 1993; Maruna 2001; Parkin & McKeganey 2000; Snow, 2002; Sirdifield, 2006). Regarding this, Keller (1993) described a process in which peer counsellors naturally associate their own attitudes, behaviours, and experiences with those of their clients. In doing this, Keller argued that they are able to reflect on their own situations, behaviours, and motivations and consequently progress through a form of self-rehabilitation. Some other research has echoed such findings, and has also suggested that prisoners are able to find purpose, meaning, and constructive inputs in their lives via peer-support work. Perrin and Blagden (2014), for example,

explored Listeners' views of their roles. In this qualitative study, all participants described ways in which they changed as a result of becoming a Listener. All participants emphasised the importance of being able to 'give something back', and to feel trusted and useful. It is suggested that these outcomes are representative of a constructive resource that may assist offenders' distance processes by allowing 'headspace' and contributing to 'redemption scripts' (Blagden et al., 2011; Vaughan, 2007). Indeed, feeling trusted, personal development, and having meaning and purpose are key indicators for measuring a prisoner's quality of life (Ross et al, 2008; Liebling with Arnold, 2004).

In light of this early research, it appears that peer-support schemes may represent a new and innovative approach in terms of rehabilitating offenders. Traditionally, within the offender rehabilitation framework, the offenders themselves are seen as passive recipients of 'treatment' (Deville et al., 2005). As such, there is a form of doctor-patient role assumption in treatment, which involves the offender being externally advised and coached through the professional's proposed course of action. This approach has been found to elicit frustration and resentment in offenders (Perrin & Blagden, 2014), who feel they deserve to contribute towards their own process of change. This aligns with McHugh's (2002, in Snow, 2002) assertion that offenders themselves represent an expert yet underused resource, capable of positively influencing their own desistance journey. Perhaps the fundamental implication here then, is that peer-support has the potential to legitimise attempts from offenders to take control over their own rehabilitation.

### Potential problems with peer-support in prison

There is a narrow amount of prison peer-support research in general, and so research exploring the potential problems associated with it is narrower still. Nevertheless, select exemplary studies illuminate some potential barriers and dilemmas associated with peer-support schemes in prison. One of these studies, which is closely aligned to this research in that it explored the roles of Insiders, appears to highlight three key strands of peer-support problems. Boothby's (2012) exploration of Insiders, and their views of their roles, reveals issues associated with staffing and resource shortages,



problems emerging from an apparent conflict of interest between Insiders' links with the 'system' and their duty to fellow prisoners, and 'burden of care' dilemmas and related issues such as burnout and the potential for secondary trauma.

The Insiders interviewed in Boothby's study described how staffing problems and a shortage of basic resources represented a significant barrier in terms of the success and efficiency of the scheme. Participants also suggested that this led to further issues, such as tension between staff and Insiders, a general lack of staff awareness regarding the roles of Insiders, and a lack of staff 'buy in' in terms of the purpose of the scheme. Also, emerging from issues relating to staff/prisoner dynamics was the idea that a conflict of interest can exist within peer-support schemes. Whilst Insiders are largely free to coordinate their own scheme and their own rotas, they are providing a service that is approved and overlooked by the Prison in which they reside. As such, their activities are monitored and in some cases determined by prison staff. On this, Boothby's participants described a frustrating catch22 scenario that involves meeting the needs of 'callers' or clients whilst also following prison guidelines and staff requests, which can often be divergent. Jaffe (2011) has also alluded to this issue in a study that focuses on Listeners. Jaffe argues that the conduct of volunteers inside the prison walls is more crucial than on the outside, because they are permanently visible by their service users, whether on duty or not. As such, 'impression management' represents a very fragile scenario for peer-support staff, who are tasked with finding a precise balance between being viewed as a staff member and being viewed as a fellow prisoner. This scenario presents a set of difficulties for peer-support staff in terms of establishing professional and personal boundaries, establishing trust with callers, and protecting the image of the peer-support schemes in general. The complexities associated with this scenario seem never-ending, and certainly require deeper exploration.

Perhaps the most worrying of the problems described in Boothby's research relates to 'burden of care', burnout, and secondary trauma. Participants described some of the situations they can find themselves in when supporting highly distressed prisoners. Extracts in Boothby's study cite self-harm, suicide, and mental health related issues, all of which are discussed in terms of their impact on the

well-being of the Insiders themselves. In the general literature on those who support others, a consistent finding is that while those who give help are likely to feel more positive, the association between those who become overwhelmed by others' demands is more drastic; the less common negative experiences people can have are more extreme than the positive ones (Post, 2007). Indeed, an extensive study carried out by Warner (2011) exploring the impact of being a Samaritan Listener 'on the outside' highlights important secondary trauma implications for Listeners who are repeatedly subjected to the traumatic life stories of their callers. The repercussions of prisoners, already associated with complex levels of emotional difficulties and heightened vulnerability (Roberts, 2014), carrying out such roles are likely to be exaggerated and far more complex. On this, Jaffe (2011) has commented that whilst some research describes peer-support in prisons in a very positive light in terms of it being personally beneficial for volunteers, it is important not to ignore the possibility that the role may be burdensome. Jaffe went on to argue that some of the positives associated with upholding a peer-support role (i.e. enhanced self-confidence, improved emotional regulation) may actually invert, particularly in situations where callers do not improve or appear 'helped' after receiving support. At present, therefore, the scarce literature available on peer-support in prisons is characterised by several diverging themes in terms of its impact on prisoners. The hope that lies in the potentially un-tapped utility of peer-support in prison, as well as the possible risks it poses, are two primary justifications for this investigation.

### Justification and potential contributions of this research

The scarcity of extant research on peer-support as well as its apparent divergence in certain areas mark clear justifications for this thesis. However, more broadly, relative to quantitative methodologies, there is a shortage of qualitative research that explores offending behaviour. This is surprising given the ample benefits of conducting qualitative research in forensic settings (see, for e.g., Hedderman, Gunby, & Shelton, 2011; Maruna, 2015; Webster & Marshall, 2004). One reason for the shortage may be that a fundamental preoccupation of forensic psychology and criminology is the investigation of

risk and risk assessment (Craig, Browne, & Beech, 2008; Kemshall, 2003). Research in this area often seeks to illuminate causal links between any number of variables and recidivism rates, and is therefore largely reliant on quantitative measures. This has led some to argue that crime and criminal behaviour research is becoming distant from offenders' perspectives, and runs the risk of disenfranchising and disempowering prisoners and ex-offenders (Dhami, 2005; Juliani, 1981; Nee, 2004). Quantitative approaches also tend to neglect a fundamental aspect of qualitative research, namely that of interpretation. Rarely is it the content of what people say that is of the utmost interest, but the process by which the person comes to articulate things in such a way (Yalom, 1991). This is particularly important in empirical chapters four and five in this thesis, which explore the ways in which prisoners who uphold peer-support roles make sense of their self-identities in past, current, and future terms. This form of second order sense making is uniquely valuable and common within qualitative interpretative traditions (Eatough & Smith, 2008). Here in lies another justification and contribution of this qualitative investigation: it offers an insight into life stories of a variety of people who have offended, and an interpretation of how these life stories can be made sense of, re-storied, or re-constituted through the introduction of an external influence (peer-support). Gleaning these richly qualitative insights from offenders regarding offending is not achieved often in forensic psychology and criminology (Kemshall, 2003). As such, a key objective of this thesis is to contribute, to academic research, an understanding of how offending behaviour can be qualitatively influenced by peer-support. This is important because of the potential impact peer-support may have on offender behaviour change, but also because it marks a route away from traditional views of impact and evidence. In this thesis, it will be argued that the stories of offenders (how they view themselves) constitute evidence, and how they are interpreted can have significant impact (Maruna, 2015).

As such, this thesis does not attempt to be broad-based or to generalise findings to wider populations. Rather, the three studies in this thesis are purposefully limited in focus to smaller samples of mixed offenders (study 1), sexual offenders (study 2), and a convenience subset sample of these participants (study 3). The thesis does not, therefore, attempt to measure the impact of peer-support

in any quantifiable way. In fact, research on this topic is so much in its infancy, and the construct of peer-support in prison is so little-understood, that this seems unfeasible at present. Quantitative impact measurements of peer-support in forensic settings cannot occur until there are sufficient and adequate understandings of the phenomenon. The generation of such understandings is a main aim of this thesis: the overarching focus here is on understanding prison peer-support roles from offenders' perspectives, to gain an insight into their sense-making and self-construal processes, and to generate data pertaining to the structural properties of peer-support in prison. Knowledge in this area is fragmented, requires clarity, yet shows early signs of academic and practical significance (Boothby, 2011; Foster & Magee, 2011; Perrin & Blagden, 2014). Employing an ideographic approach, this thesis will provide such knowledge, using a phenomenological qualitative methodology to understand the lived experiences of the participants. This thesis could be considered explorative as it aims to better understand a poorly demarcated and under-researched topic. Through this process, recommendations relating to the potential utility of peer-support in carceral setting will be offered.

## Research questions, aims, and objectives

### Research questions

Constructing this thesis was a process guided by several overarching research questions, all of which correspond to the overall aims of the investigation and the methods selected to achieve those aims. These questions represented guidance for the construction of the interview schedules used in this research, and thus led the exploration of the lived experiences of the participants from start to finish. The questions are as follows:

- What are the participants' personal experiences of upholding peer-support roles in prison?
- What psychological and psychosocial factors underpin the dynamics of peer-support in prison?

- How do peer-supporters in prison make sense of imprisonment? Does this sense-making differ in any significant way to imprisonment before having a peer-support role?
- In what ways do peer-supporters construe their place in prison and their relationships with other prisoners and prison staff?
- What are the thoughts, feelings, and attitudes of peer-supporters towards rehabilitation, treatment, prison staff (psychology, prison officers, and probation officers), and their own behaviour?
- To what extent does having a peer-support role impact on the behaviours, values, and beliefs of people who offended?
- What are the problems with peer-support / being a peer-supporter in prison?

While the principal aims of this research were to address the above questions, it is worth noting that this research is exploratory in nature. As such, the purpose was always to provide an understanding of how peer-supporters feel about their roles, and how such roles might influence both experiences of prison, and the prison environment itself. To this end, the following aims and objectives are set:

#### Aims

- To contribute an understanding of the lived experiences and perspectives of incarcerated people who uphold roles as peer-supporters.
- To gain an insight into the construal and sense-making processes of imprisoned peer-supporters, and how these processes might influence offending behaviour.
- To provide a review of the definition of peer-support that is responsive to relevant theory and the prison context
- To cultivate knowledge, from the views and perspectives of imprisoned peer-supporters, on the potential impact of peer-support in the prison environment.

## Objectives

- Utilising the lived experiences and perspectives of imprisoned peer-supporters, provide an analysis of the psychological, psychosocial, and structural factors that influence both how peer-support is experienced and how it is institutionally positioned.
- Investigate the ways in which participants viewed themselves prior to taking up peer-led roles, how they view themselves in the present as peer-supporters, and how they view their future both inside and beyond prison.
- To analyse and discuss how peer-supporters in prison view imprisonment, rehabilitation, prisoner and staff relations, and their own existence within these contexts.
- Utilise the accounts of participants to review the theoretical underpinnings and general definition of peer-support in a way that encompasses the context of prison.
- Based on an analysis of participants' accounts, construct a set of recommendations for researchers, prison staff, and policy makers that relate to the ways in which peer-support programs in prison can be utilised within the offender rehabilitation framework.

## Structure of thesis and outline of chapters

This thesis is comprised of seven chapters. Chapter one is the introduction and has provided a context and backdrop to this research, as well as a rationale for the studies throughout and an outline of research aims and objectives. Chapter two reviews the literature on peer-support and presents some early links to offending behaviour. The concept of peer-support and the theoretical frameworks it is underpinned by are presented here too, along with a framework for understanding its potential influence in the arena of criminality. Chapter three details the methodological approach underpinning this thesis and the process issues involved in designing and constructing this research. Chapters four to six will present the empirical studies of this research, and will take the form of analytical commentaries that feature data extracts and relevant literature. Chapter four is the first empirical study, and focuses on participants' experiences of upholding peer-support roles, primarily from a

personal, subjective, and self-narrative stance. Chapter five (study 2) follows on from this but takes a focus on sexual offending, with the aim of exploring the impact of peer-support across a specific offence-type which is often the subject of intense treatment and change intervention. Chapter six moves away from the agency-based accounts of peer-support in prison. It presents the third study, which asks questions about prison structure and the institutional dynamics that may impact peer-support in prison. Chapter seven presents a general discussion and draws conclusions that interweave findings from the three studies. This chapter also details the implications and limitations of the present research and highlights possible avenues for future research.

## Chapter 2: Literature review and theoretical framework

### Introductory comments

This thesis investigates peer-support from the perspective of what it means to prisoners, and thus what it can mean for the broader environment of prison. The first task of this chapter, therefore, is to provide literature- and theory-informed framework for what peer-support is and how it operates. While chapter one offered a discussion on how peer-support can be defined, this chapter explores the

dynamics that underpin it and the theory underlying its usefulness for those who 'do' peer-support. It will then contextualise the type of peer-support being investigated here, by way of discussing its place in prison and how it can be influential in this environment. Previous research has alluded to ways in which peer-support might constitute a mechanism that could encourage behavioural change in those serving time in prisons. To be able to explore this claimed influence further, there is a need to engage with theories that sit within the forensic psychology and criminology literature. This will be another key objective of this chapter, and the literature and theoretical perspectives discussed here will be those considered to most closely represent the aims of this thesis. This will be informed by extant studies on peer-support and the theories that have been alluded to. The literature and research discussed here is therefore not exhaustive – this chapter simply provides one theoretical foundation within which the ensuing empirical findings can be interpreted and understood. Thus, the theoretical stance of this thesis should be considered a working one, which will progress throughout the ensuing chapters. The research and literature discussed here, therefore, will be revisited in the empirical and discussion chapters that follow.

### A working definition of peer-support

Before immersing into the research and literature discussed in this chapter, it is important to frame the understanding of peer-support that this thesis will adopt. Chapter one reviewed many of the principles considered to be defining in terms of conceptualising peer-support (Dennis, 2003; DeVilly et al., 2005; Gartner & Riessman, 1982; Mead, Hilton, & Curtis, 2001; Solomon, 2004). Based on these widely-accepted factors, this thesis incorporates the following definition: *peer-support is a system of social and emotional support that rests on the core tenets of mutual reciprocity, shared problem-solving, and empathy. Peer-supporters are to be considered as such when they engage in mutually agreed problem-solving with another person facing a relatable challenge or experience.* This definition will be revisited in the concluding chapters of this thesis, with the aim of embedding into it the accounts of prison peer-support participants.



## Understanding peer-support and what it is used for

In general, peer-support envelopes a range of different structures and approaches, including peer training, peer facilitation, peer counselling, peer modelling, or peer helping (Parkin & McKeganey, 2000). There are many different forms that peer-helping can take. Solomon (2004) has assimilated these into six categories: self-help groups, internet support groups, peer-led services, peer-run or operated services, peer partnerships, and peer employees. Self-help groups constitute the most traditional variation of peer-support, and is the only category that is transferable to the prison environment. Such groups have been defined as small voluntary-based groups made up of people wishing to provide mutual assistance to overcome common handicaps or challenges (Katz & Bender, 1976). Classic examples include Narcotics Anonymous (Peyrot, 1985), Alcoholics Anonymous (Tonigan, Toscova, & Miller, 1996), Schizophrenics Anonymous (Ryback, 1971), National Depressive & Manic-Depressive Association groups (Kurtz, 1988), and a range of other illness-specific setups (see Solomon, 2004, for further examples). Such groups exist in the prison environment, and are made up of prisoners who conduct peer-support in group settings but also in one-to-one pairings.

Historically, these kinds of groups have adopted face-to-face levels of support (Gartner & Riessman, 1982). However, more and more online support groups that can utilise internet-based and social network-oriented avenues of support are emerging (Eysenbach, Powell, Englesakis, Rizo, & Stern, 2004). No such programs run in prison, but one of the programs under investigation in this research (the Prisoner Advice Line) involves high levels of telephone-based support. The fundamental difference between this type of support compared to face-to-face intervention is that individuals can remain anonymous and therefore confide in others with limited risk of social repercussions (Davison, Pennebaker, & Dickerson, 2000). This can be useful in the prison context, which is characterised by a heightened state of social tension which in turn commands that prisoners keep a low profile (Crewe, 2011; Ekland-Olson, 1986). Still, almost all peer-support programs that operate in prisons take the form of one-to-one or small group face-to-face intervention.

Formal implementations of these models of support have emerged in prisons only within recent decades (DeVilly et al., 2005), but have been traced back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Davidson et al., 1999). During this period, peer-support programs were primarily used in mental health contexts, where they afforded and continue to offer uniquely helpful mechanisms of support for people suffering with a range of illnesses. As such, peer-support, both theoretically and structurally, has largely been conceived and expanded within the psychiatric setting (Davidson, Bellamy, Guy, & Miller, 2012). This may go some way to explaining the exponential emergence of peer-support programs in the health and mental health sector, but also why peer-helping appears to be synonymous with social and emotional support (Stroul, 1993). Indeed, peer-support programs have been implemented in a broad range of health contexts in recent decades and, when evaluated, have shown to have significant impact on indicators of coping and well-being. In a qualitative study examining a cancer support group in Australia, for example, Ussher, Kirsten, Butow, & Sandoval (2006) interviewed and held focus groups with 93 group members. Interviewees collectively described cultivating a unique sense of community, enjoying unconditional acceptance in a non-judgemental environment, and sharing mutually beneficial problem-solving skills. These findings sat in contrast with how participants characterised their battles with cancer prior to or outside of the peer-support group. In this context, they discussed feeling frequently isolated and alone, having a fear of rejection and of not being understood, and having anxieties about locating reliable information. Groups were also depicted as regularly emotionally challenging, whereas family and friend contexts were described as ‘normalising environments’, where emotions were avoided rather than engaged and explored (Ussher, Kirsten, Butow, & Sandoval, 2006). These findings give credence to the theoretical link between peer-support and reciprocal emotional exchange; peer-support contexts appear to innately offer space for ‘the things we can’t talk about’ to be talked about (Davidson, et al., 2012).

One of the most significant findings from Ussher and colleagues’ (2006) study was that participants appeared to develop an enhanced sense of self-confidence and personal agency. This consequently afforded headspace for coping, and provided group members with some satisfaction

that they were relieving their burden of care from family and friends. Across the peer-support literature, these findings show remarkable consistency, even when yielded from wide-varying peer-support groups. Funck-Brentano et al. (2005), for instance, quantitatively explored a peer-led HIV support group. The authors found that group members reported significantly higher levels of self-esteem and significantly reduced levels of worry and anxiety, compared to an out-of-group control. Group members also scored higher on an indicator of general emotional well-being, and this appeared to interact with medical outcomes, with group members showing higher rates of undetectable viral loads, compared with non-peer group members. Recurrent findings indicating increased self-worth and self-confidence, enhanced hope and optimism, and extended social networks have been revealed from explorations into peer-support and diabetes (Fisher et al., 2012), depression (Pfeiffer, Heisler, Piette, Rogers, & Valenstein, 2011), schizophrenia (Duckworth & Halpern, 2014), and a broad spectrum of anxiety disorders (Faulkner, 2017).

Peer-support is not just a western-centric construct either, but a globalised model of support that appears to offer its beneficial and novel outputs to a vast range of cultures and contexts. In a Hong Kong study (Mok & Martinson, 2000), for example, 12 interviews and a series of observations were carried out with members of a cancer support group over 6 months. All participants interviewed associated their mutual peer-helping roles with a sense of empowerment, increased hope, and heightened self-confidence. They also recurrently pointed to a greater sense of interconnectedness with others and consequently described feeling more motivated to engage in social activities. With striking similarity, ample investigations into peer-support have revealed many benefits that peer-supporters are able to cultivate. These benefits seem to be characterised by improved psychological and emotional wellbeing. This is important given that increased wellbeing has been linked to many other positive life outcomes, such as increased productivity at work (Oswald, Proto, & Sgroi, 2015), general motivation (Baard, Deci, & Ryan, 2004), more stable and supportive romantic relationships (Weinstein, Rodriguez, Knee, & Kumashiro, 2016), enhanced goal attainment (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999), and generalised life happiness (Dogan, Totan, & Sapmaz, 2013). As will be discussed later in this

chapter, the relationship between peer-support involvement, enhanced wellbeing, and improved life outcomes may have important implications in the offender rehabilitation context. Firstly, however, it is important understand what is uniquely valuable about peer-support.

### Theories underpinning what peer-supporters do

Mutual reciprocity, shared problem-solving, and agreed social support are three fundamental tenets embedded in most accepted models of peer-support. These are the principles that enable peer-support to boast a degree of inimitable value. These principles govern how peer-support is done, and engender three main levels of service: experiential learning exchange, the provision of mutual benefits, and the giving and receiving of natural social support (Solomon, 2004). A review of the literature reveals recurrent references to a number of psychosocial processes that are considered to underpin the utility of peer-support. Salzer et al. (2002) point to five theories in particular that underpin these processes: social support, experiential knowledge exchange, the helper-therapy principle, social learning theory, and social comparison theory.

Social support refers to the availability of people (friends, family members, other figures) who can provide help or emotional support in times of struggle, crisis, or illness (Langford, Bowsher, Maloney, & Lillis, 1997). Core modes of support include emotional support (in the form of listening, being present, offering reassurance), instrumental support (offering tangible goods or services), and informational support (advice, guidance, information specific to the challenge being faced) (Jacobson, 1986). offers advice, guidance, and feedback). Peer-support constitutes a level of perceived social support for individuals seeking help, and this can be instrumental in boosting their sense of control and agency over life stressors. Indeed, research has demonstrated that peer-supportive relationships can help to alleviate anxiety towards adversities, as per the buffering hypothesis (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Such adversities can include medical, psychological, and broader social problems.

Another psychosocial process embedded in the theoretical model of peer-support is experiential knowledge exchange (Borkman, 1990). Here, possessing experience of overcoming a

personal challenge or illness is a prerequisite for peer-supporters who wish to help others overcome similar challenges. This is what drives a mutually beneficial experiential learning exchange (Borkman, 1999). Peers in the process of recovery can learn how to negotiate their difficulties in a number of ways within this setting. First and foremost, they can learn directly from observing and replicating others who are dealing with matched issues. Through processes underpinned by Bandura's conceptualisation of behavioural modelling and 'imitative learning' (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963), peer-supporters can, advertently or otherwise, train others to emulate their strategies and behaviours. This is where the notion of experiential learning unites with social learning theory (Bandura, 1978). This feature of peer-support has been well-utilised in health contexts, with widespread evidence revealing that patients' self-efficacy and confidence in their ability to manage their illnesses improves when observing the effective methods of others (Bandura, 1991; Fisher et al., 2012; Lorig et al., 1999; Repper & Carter, 2011). As well as direct imitation, peers can also learn techniques from others and adapt them to their own circumstances, through mechanisms of schematic adaptation and assimilation (Spiro, Feltovich, & Coulson, 1996). Peer-supporters can also learn more about themselves as a product of sharing experiences, as a consequence of reciprocally engaging in self-reflection and problem-solving (Keller, 1993).

By helping others, peer support services also afford individuals the opportunity to help themselves. This phenomenon has been tagged the "helper-therapy principle" (Riessman, 1965; Skovholt, 1974). The principle can be traced back to the phenomenon of the "wounded healer", a notion that observes how people who have undergone traumatic events are likely to be especially adept and also inspired to help others experiencing similar trauma (Groesbeck, 1975; White, 2000). Riessman (1965) conceptualised the "helper therapy" principle following observations of Alcoholics Anonymous and similar peer-led groups that adopted relatable programs. Riessman noted that those who were continually investing in helping others appears to be directly helping themselves, by way of transforming a troubled past into a source of applicable wisdom (White, 2000). Skovholt (1974) concisely surmised a number of personal gains that can stem from helping others: 1) the helper feels

an enhanced sense of accomplishment and self-efficacy for having positively impacted someone else's life 2) the helper recognises that helping others yields an equal return 3) the helper receives individualised and problem-specific learning as a product of helping someone with a relatable problem 4) the helper often cultivates an enhanced sense of self-confidence from appraisals of the help they have provided. The helper therapy principle, then, embodies a cycle typified by feeling good from 'doing good'. It also enables honing of problem-solving skills, and a range of other opportunities for personal growth and well-being (Riessman, 1965).

Another underpinning theoretical tenet governing the usefulness of peer-support is social comparison theory. According to the theory, people collate information about themselves and critique their own behaviour and performance by making comparisons to others (Festinger 1954). Information harvested from such comparisons can then be used as an indicator of closeness to or distance from behaviours that are construed as beneficial or desirable. In the context of Alcoholics Anonymous, an individual who compares their progress to someone further along the recovery process may identify helpful strategies that enabled abstinence and model them (White, 2000). As such, the kinds of social comparison situations that peer-support systems engender can help individuals garner insight into their own limitations, capabilities, and goals (Buunk, Gibbons, & Buunk, 2013). Interacting with perceived superior others in this way can stimulate an upward spiral of skill acquisition. This can in turn afford individuals an enhanced sense of hope and optimism (Salzer, 2002; Salzer & Shear, 2002). Ultimately, the underlying mechanisms of support described here denote a system of continuous reciprocal learning, which creates an environment characterised by 'learning through osmosis' (Peffley, 2000).

### Situating peer-support within criminology and forensic psychology frameworks

Whilst there is no intention here to pre-determine the impact that peer-support might have on behavioural change in offending contexts, a small amount of extant research provides an insight into what theoretical standpoints might be most useful in explaining the empirical findings that will ensue.

Chapter 1, for example, highlighted early research that has synonymised peer-support with personal growth, changes in self-esteem and self-identity, and general improvements to markers of subjective well-being (Boothby, 2011; Foster & Magee, 2011; Schwartz & Sendor, 1999; Sirdifield, 2006). These findings appear to be amplified in offending contexts (Jaffe, 2012), and nuanced in the sense that the peer-supporters themselves may stand to gain great insight into their own lives and behaviours through the inherently self-reflective work they do (Parkin & McKeganey, 2000; Salzer, 2002).

Drawing from some of the discussion across this sparse range of literature connecting peer-support with behavioural transition, there are subdivisions of the psychological and criminological literature that can offer a context for exploring the impact of peer-support in carceral settings. Of these, much of the research exploring persistence and desistance in offending behaviour may be insightful. Such research has commonly emphasised the importance of life-course events and changes that influence offending trajectories (i.e. Sampson & Laub, 1992), and also the changes to one's self-narrative in the process of leaving a life of crime behind (Maruna, 2001). Respectively, these standpoints have been concerned with *what* happens in an individual's life that may propel them into a journey away from crime, but also *why* that journey is often taken and thus why desistance happens. Knowledge from these realms of thought can uncover how the mechanics of peer-support can influence the lives of offenders. Under the umbrella of desistance enquiry, theoretical and practical implications for how offender rehabilitation can be done have emerged. Two that have dominated the ongoing debate surrounding best practice are the Risk Needs Responsivity (RNR) principle and the Good Lives Model (GLM) of offender rehabilitation, and with these has come further discussion pertaining to offence risk and protective factors. These approaches and constructs will be discussed and may help to illustrate some indicators of potential utility for peer-support. Given that the research across this thesis features mixed offence type participants, there will be an attempt throughout the following sections to borrow the most relevant bodies of research and literature: mainly those exploring violent and sexual offending behaviours, and how rehabilitative change can be encouraged within these groups. This contextual backdrop will be synergised with the discussion already

presented concerning the structural and theoretical principles of peer-support. To this end, this chapter will introduce and explore a proposed link between peer-support and offender change. To illuminate this potential association further, this chapter concludes with some speculative discussion concerning the potential impact of peer-support in the prison environment.

### **Desistance: The life course perspective**

Desistance research first hinged on views of crime from the perspective of the age-crime curve. Indeed, when official crime rates are plotted against age, offending behaviours appear to peak at around age 17 and then begin to decline (Hirschi, & Gottfredson, 1983; Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998). This is a consistent finding, with research continually revealing that offending individuals desist at a rate of around 50% in the early 20s, and around 85% by age 28 (Kruttschnitt, Uggen, & Shelton, 2000). This strand of research brought about questions regarding the impact of life-course events on offending persistence and desistance. Accordingly, seminal works from researchers such as Blumstein and Cohen (1987), Farrington (1992), and Sampson and Laub (1992) expanded the concept of the age-crime curve and began to interrogate the viewpoint that one can “age out of crime”. Research exploring this assumption has illuminated offence-specific risk factors, and circumstances that make an individual more likely to become a certain type of offender. In turn, this has educated treatment approaches, and has shaped rehabilitative frameworks (Ward & Brown, 2004; Wormith & Olver, 2002).

While the study of desistance, as it currently stands, embodies a relatively young strand of research, questions regarding the decline of offending have long been investigated. History has seen declines in offending behaviour attributed to male status anxiety (Matza 1964), biopsychosocial changes that occur over time and reduce deviant motivations (Gove 1985), sociological factors highlighted under viewpoints such as rational choice theory and routine activities theory (Gartner & Piliavin, 1988), and even wider political and institutional factors (Gurr, 1970). More recently, however, desistance researchers have become more focussed on the individual and thus there has been growing reliance on self-control theories, “turning points”, and protective factors in explorations of offending



cessation. The discussion surrounding the propensity for an offender to change and eventually abstain from crime, therefore, has been dichotomised by explorations of offending behaviour as either a stable trait or a dynamic process that can start and stop throughout the life-course.

Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990), in their influential work on the general theory of crime, have argued that because low self-control is established early in life, criminality should be viewed as stable trait over the life course. Resting on the assumption that crime provides easy and immediate gratification, Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) work asserts that crime, and associated deviant behaviours, is a product of low self-control. Therefore, the general theory of crime would see early career offenders (adolescents) also engaging in analogous deviant behaviours such as smoking, excessive drinking, dangerous driving, gambling, etc. Such behaviours are considered analogous because they also provide immediate gratification. These assertions have shaped classic control theories and investigations hinged on the question "why don't they do it?" in the context of what prevents people from committing crime. It is at this point that Gottfredson and Hirschi argue that the problematic behaviours associated with deviance and eventually crime begin in childhood, as a product low self-control. Hirschi's (1969) social bond theory frames low self-control as consequence of absent social processes, or what are now commonly referred to as "social bonds". Under the general theory of crime and social bond theory, a lack of legitimate social bonds (i.e. commitment to education, mastery in work, a constructive use of leisure time) in childhood represents a pathway to crime (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Hirschi, 1969). It is argued that failed social bonding begins in childhood due to weak parental controls. The logic here is that active and involved parents are able to identify and punish problematic behaviour, which in turn teaches children about self-control and the rewards associated with delayed and earned gratification. Less attentive parents may pave the way for early deviance in children, who may develop a propensity for risk taking, impulsivity, and immediate gratification as a result of weak or non-existent boundary setting. Hirschi and Gottfredson (1995) argue that these traits can become stable in early childhood and can persist throughout the life course, leading to persistent crime and delinquency. It is evident how this mode of enquiry has paved

the way for much of the more recent work on risk factors and offence prediction (see for e.g. Evans et al., 1997; Lösel & Farrington, 2012; Perrone et al., 2004), and protective factors and risk reduction (de Vries Robbé et al., 2015; O'Brien et al., 2013).

In terms of risk factors for delinquency and offending, the control perspectives of Gottfredson and Hirschi would suggest that individuals presenting offending-analogous behaviour, such as impulsivity and risk taking behaviours, will be less likely to resist the easy, immediate gratification that crime offers. Indeed, a wide variety of research has drawn links between these offending-analogous traits (risk factors) and offending (see for e.g. Beech et al., 2002; Quinsey et al., 1998). However, a point of divergence has emerged from the debate surrounding whether or not such traits are static or dynamic; that is, whether or not such traits can be changed at any point throughout the life course. In line with social control theory (Hirschi, 1969), individuals conform to the wider conventional tenets of the society around them via social bonds (i.e. to education, to stable employment, and to mutually beneficial relationships). For Gottfredson and Hirschi, such bonds need to be developed in childhood. Sampson and Laub (1992), however, consider possible the reestablishment of informal social controls, through the adoption of social bonds, in adulthood. This concept of change being possible throughout the life course has been influential in more recent research surrounding desistance, and has prompted some researchers to shift focus from risk factors to protective factors. The work of Sampson and Laub (1992), concerned with identifying the types of mechanisms responsible for the cessation of offending, has been instrumental in explorations of the latter. While the authors accept that deviant childhood behaviours have important ramifications in later adult life, their divergence begins with the claim that traits associated with deviant and criminal behaviours, and thus criminal behaviour itself, are stable across the life course (Sampson & Laub, 1992). Two central concepts lie at the foundation of this divergence, and thus the life-course perspective; trajectories and transitions. Trajectories can be viewed as pathways that ensue over the life span, and may consist of lines of development such as a careers, marriages, parenthood, and criminal behaviour. Trajectories commence following transitions (represented by specific life events such as beginning a new job and getting married) (Laub, Nagin, &

Sampson, 1998). Of course, some transitions are age-graded and some are not, and this is an important factor in determining normal stages of development across the life course (Jessor, 1993). The assumption here is that specific transitions and resultant trajectories should occur at certain intervals across the life span, and therefore, individuals who fail to enter normative trajectories at key times may experience difficulties in later life. Analysing an individual's life-course, therefore, would involve exploring the duration, timing, and sequence of their major life events, and inferring from this what the consequences may be in terms of later social development (Caspi, 1987).

Transitions and trajectories naturally interlock and can represent "turning points" for individuals. How individuals respond to such turning points is likely to be vastly differential, but this adjustment to change is crucial and will likely impact upon trajectories. Traditional viewpoints centred on the life course perspective highlight the importance of childhood experiences and behaviour in adulthood. However, the more flexible viewpoint popularised by Sampson and Laub (1992) suggests that turning points in an individual's life can modify trajectories and prompt behaviour change. It is this proposition that desistance researchers have found most encouraging. Indeed, if turning points in an individual's life can prompt behaviour change, it is surely possible to capture the mechanisms surrounding key life transitions and operationalise a form of trajectory modification. Social institutions and life events that may modify trajectories include school, work, the military, marriage, and parenthood. Such institutions and events represent opportunities for individuals to engage in something meaningful and legitimate, and thus to conform to conventional social outlets. Engagement with such opportunities has been depicted as the beginning of the desistance journey for offenders (Carlsson, 2012; Sampson & Laub, 1992).

Sampson and Laub's work has prompted the development of a body of research exploring what might constitute a turning point for the offending individual (see for e.g. Hughes, 1998; McGloin et al., 2011; Stewart, Livingston, & Dennison, 2008). However, this realm of enquiry is not exactly new. Historically, research has investigated a variety of factors that may reduce crime and criminal behaviour. Much of this research began with explorations of the influence of socio-economic factors

on crime increase and decrease. Newman & Franck (1980), for example, reported extensively on many factors and their influence over crime rates, such as population size, family income, community factors such as cohesiveness and alertness, and architectural influences. Osborn (1980) found that individuals who moved out of London had a lower risk of reoffending than those who remained, and Yeager (1979) cites episodes of unemployment as a causal factor in increased rates of incarceration. Some of this research was closely linked with the concept of individual turning points. Knight et al. (1977), for example, found that whilst marriage did not reduce offending in individuals, it did reduce what Hirschi and Gottfredson (1995) would have termed crime analogous behaviours (excessive drinking and drug use). Furthermore, Rand (1987) found that joining the armed forces had a mixed effect on crime, with some subjects demonstrating increased future offending and others showing reductions.

Some of these earlier works exploring factors associated with offending behaviour have been invaluable, but more recent years have witnessed a shift towards exploring more individualised, development factors and offending. These works have taken on more of a life course perspective, and dig deeper in terms of exploring the influences of specific turning points. Uggen (2000), for example, observed that prior research surrounding the relationship between employment and crime had been inconclusive, and set out to bridge the gap. His study factored in age in terms of the impact of work and likelihood of offending. Uggen found that subjects aged 27 or older were less likely to offend when provided with marginal employment opportunities, but found no such effect for subjects in their teens and early twenties. The study concludes with a discussion contrasting arguably the two most prominent standpoints within the area of desistance; criminality as a static characteristic, developed in early childhood and likely unchangeable (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Hirschi, 1969), and criminality as discrete events in the life course that are dynamic and malleable (Sampson and Laub, 1992). Uggen finds support for the latter, and provides evidence that work experience (and potentially other turning points) later in life can change the behaviour of older criminals. A study from O'Connell (2003) supports these findings; data from a drug treatment follow up study revealed that employment and school attendance were negatively associated with drug use and arrest. Not only work and education

has been presented as a turning point in this context. Marriage, for example, has also been heavily explored. McGloin et al. (2011) produced research that demonstrated the impact of marriage on offending variety. Marriage, for the subjects in their sample, narrowed offending behaviours significantly. Marriage as a turning point, though, has been made sense of in terms of the wider lifestyle changes that it may promote. McGloin and colleagues discuss how marriage is preceded by a growing commitment to a relationship, which involves shifting routines and engaging in new behaviours and activities. Marriage, therefore, may represent an avenue for increased social control; offenders may simply become more constrained to specific social routines (and networks) via marriage, and this may contribute to changes in trajectories for some offenders. Indeed, what is emergent amongst the research exploring crime across the life course is the linkages between proposed turning points and how these may help to solidify social bonds. This reciprocal mechanism appears to lie at the heart of the argument for crime as a dynamic and changeable phenomenon (Sampson & Laub, 1992). Turning points may simply represent an opportunity for offenders to begin conforming to legitimate social norms and behaviours.

While life-course perspectives on desistance have provided an invaluable framework for exploring offender-change across time, they have contributed a relatively narrow explanation of why crime might occur and why criminals might stop offending (Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002). This explanation has hinged on social control theory, and has emphasised the ways in which a close marital bond or stable job (or any 'turning point') can influence offending behaviour by bonding an individual to a set of social norms (Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998). It has been argued that this perspective provides a valuable but incomplete account of the offender change process (Bushway, Piquero, Broidy, Cauffman, & Mazerolle, 2001). What is fundamentally missing from traditional life-course viewpoints is an explanation for *how* desistance is accomplished by the offenders themselves, i.e. what the cognitive processes are that enable a person to suddenly desist from offending. Indeed, not all individuals who experience 'turning points' go on to leave a life of crime. Those that do likely experience fundamental shifts in identity, changes in self-construal, and adaptations in personal

meaning (Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002). This is also likely to prompt the (ex)offending individual to reassess the desirability of criminal behaviour, and question why crime no longer fits into their world view. Ultimately then, to understand why criminals leave trajectories of crime, there must be attempts to understand the narratives they construct around their experience of desistance. An early assumption of this research is that offenders' narrative constructions can be influenced by upholding peer-support roles. Maruna (2001) has championed this investigation into 'cognitive shift' and identity transformation, and such processes are considered to best represent the proposed influence of peer-support in prison in this thesis. Accordingly, notions and perspectives from this field of enquiry are interweaved in the latter part of the following section, within a projection of the potential utility of prison-based peer-support.

### The potential impact of peer-support in prison

More and more peer-led programmes in prisons are being introduced (Deville, Sorbello, Eccleston & Ward, 2005). Meanwhile, the UK government are acknowledging that prison needs to be less about punishment and that there is a need for meaningful and purposeful opportunities to be presented to prisoners. In a Prison Reform Trust report, Edgar, Jacobson and Biggar (2011) emphasise the contribution of 'active citizenship' roles and suggest peer-support offers opportunities for prisoners to prosocially interact with others and engage in personally meaningful activity. Coates (2016) has also emphasised the importance of individualised and person-centred activity in prison, and asserts that prison education is more successful when it addresses inmates' personal goals and ambitions. Peer-led programmes focus on a variety of issues in prisons, such as health education, drug and alcohol abuse, sexual offending, prison orientation, anti-bullying and anti-racism, and suicide prevention. In general, peer support in prison is characterised reciprocal helping (Parkin & McKeganey, 2000). Some research has argued that prisoners who uphold such roles experience profound internal changes and develop a range of skills and attributes that could energise desistance (Foster & Magee, 2011; Boothby, 2011; Perrin & Blagden, 2013).

When considering its widespread implementation across prisons, research investigating the impact of peer-support on offenders is incredibly limited. The phenomenon of 'being' a peer-supporter in prison (what it means for the prisoner and how this may contribute to their rehabilitation) is under-researched. In an investigation into the 'Listener' scheme in prisons (a large scale emotional support scheme), Foster and Magee (2011) briefly posit that Listeners receive a great deal of satisfaction from their work and experience significant personal growth. However, such notions are not expanded in the research and the impact that being a Listener has on the individual or the meaning it has on their prison life is not illuminated. Davies (1994), in research into the same scheme, has suggested that the implications of the scheme go well beyond the prevention of suicide in prison and that the scheme impacts on the quality of relationships with other prisoners and prison staff. Similarly, Boothby (2011) explored the views of members of the 'Insiders', a scheme which involves volunteers providing reassurance and practical support to new prisoners. Boothby's findings suggest that being an Insider significantly benefitted prisoners in that they developed a sense of accomplishment, a positive self-image and enhanced self-confidence. Stevens (2012), reaches matching conclusions in a recent paper which reviews therapeutic community prisons (TCs). Stevens highlights the importance of 'rep jobs' (where a prisoner assumes some responsibility for matters that impact other prisons, i.e. anti-discrimination or anti-bullying regulations) in TCs because they provide meaning and purpose for prisoners as well as a range of skills and attributes. Such jobs necessitate effective communication skills, interpersonal and organisational skills, and being responsible and reliable (Stevens, 2012). These findings are consistent amongst a range of different peer support schemes such as health trainer schemes (Sirdifield, 2006; Brooker & Sirdifield, 2007), HIV support schemes (Collica, 2010), and anti-bullying and anti-racism schemes (Deville, Sorbello, Eccleston & Ward, 2005). However, the majority of prison peer-support research appears to focus principally on the recipients of support. As such, any findings relating to the peer-supporters is often presented secondarily and not exclusively unpacked. Given the recurrence of glancing suggestions that peer-support could have great personal impact on offenders, more consideration of its potential utility for offender reform is warranted.

Devilly et al. (2005) have argued that peer support as a concept has often been presented alongside theories such as social learning theory (Bandura, 1986), social inoculation theory (McGuire, 1968), and differential association theory (Sutherland & Cressey, 1960). However, an emerging range of theoretical standpoints positioned in desistance literature can be called upon to build a more comprehensive framework in terms of how peer-support volunteer work may be of significant value in terms of offender change and rehabilitation. This framework may centre on the theoretical assumptions of the 'good lives' model (Ward & Brown, 2004), Maruna's (2001, 2004, 2007) work on offenders' transformative experiences (through cognitive shifts), the concept of offending/desisting self-narratives (Vaughan, 2007), and extended notions of 'possible selves' (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Clininbeard & Murray, 2012; Blagden, Winder & Hames, 2012). These notions have widely been employed to explain transition in sexual offenders (Blagden, Winder, Thorne & Gregson, 2011), desistance from delinquency and gang crime (Laub & Sampson, 2001), and movements away from a vast array of other crimes such as burglary (Mullins & Wright, 2003), drugs related offences (Best, Irving, & Albertson, 2017), terrorism (LaFree & Miller, 2008), and white collar crimes (Benson & Kerley, 2000; Piquero & Benson, 2004). It is useful to explore these standpoints further in order to identify where the area of peer support lies within current desistance research.

#### Protective factors and peer-support

Some of the research that has explored the effects of prison peer-support roles on the role-holders has consistently reported a range of skills, attributes and personal changes associated with holding such roles. These have included organisational skills, communication skills, problem solving, being professional and reliable, team work, being empathetic, increased confidence, heightened self-esteem, the ability to build relationships and many more (Foster & Magee, 2011; Boothby, 2011; Stevens, 2012). Such skills and attributes have been broadly categorised as 'protective factors' and linked with crime desistance (Hoge, Andrews & Leschied, 1996; de Vogel, de Vries Robbé, de Ruiter & Bouman, 2011). Pollard, Hawkins & Arthur (1999) outline protective factors as anything that mediates



and/or moderates the effect of risk factor exposure and reduces problem behaviours. In a study exploring protective factors in released offenders, Ullrich & Coid (2011) present ‘belonging to a group, club, or organisation’; ‘closeness to others’; ‘relationship building’; and ‘being in work, training, or education’ as possible protective factors. Recent research exploring a range of peer support schemes has consistently associated upholding peer support roles with successful relationship building, prosocial activity that leads to high self-worth, increased confidence, and the acquisition of practical skills and ‘life tools’ (Perrin & Blagden, 2014). As such, the link between upholding peer support roles and protective factors is worthy of further exploration.

#### Peer-support, cognitive shift, and desistance narratives

Maruna (2001) points to the importance of the individual being able to ‘re-story’ criminal pasts, and make sense of why change has occurred. He argues that this process is often facilitated by a narrative of ‘making good’ and consequently ‘going straight’. These narratives are linked to “redemptive episodes”, whereby the negative past self is reconstrued as positive because it has led to the transformation of that person; the past self is construed as qualitatively different from the changed self (McAdams, 2006). This shift in identity is often encompassed by a ‘redemption script’ (Maruna, 2001) – an internal narrative that desisting offenders use to explain why reformation is occurring and why crime no longer has a place in their life story. Such scripts are characterised by a need to “give something back” to society – an endeavour that enables the desister to prove to themselves that they are truly changing for the better and ‘making good’ a harmful past. Such redemptive narratives can restore moral agency, in turn empowering the narrators to imagine and pursue generative futures. They allow for “real selves” to be emphasised and for negative past incidents to be reconstrued as life experiences that made them stronger, wiser, and better prepared for the future (Stone, 2016). Along these lines, researchers have acknowledged a trend in ex-offenders seeking opportunities to become “wounded healers” (LeBel, Richie, & Maruna, 2015) – ex-offenders who seek to help others with life challenges that may have led them on their own offending pathways. All of these narrative processes

could potentially be fuelled by the meaningful activity that prison-based peer-support affords incarcerated individuals. In becoming a peer-helper, prisoners may be able to construe themselves in a more positive light. Indeed, Stone (2016) highlights the importance of identity-repairing narratives in the desistance process and how the internalisation of oppressive master narratives may restrict opportunities for desistance. Thus, allowing offenders to enact/portray “good selves” can lead to “living” those roles as people tend to act in line with the stories they present about themselves (Blagden et al., 2014; Friestad, 2012; McAdams, 2013). It is possible that prisoners could utilise their peer-support roles in this capacity – as a tool for ‘re-storying’ a criminal past and working towards being a better ‘self’.

Vaughan (2007) has written extensively on desistance narratives. He emphasises the importance of potentially desisting offenders constructing effective narratives of change, whereby the individual is able to reflect on past events and discriminate between who they used to be and who they want to be. In doing so, desisters are able to commit themselves to an ideal future self. Vaughan argues that change narratives require continuous validation and that this is principally provided through giving back. When desisting offenders are able to visibly evidence their giving back, their internal desistance narrative is validated and the individual gains satisfaction in the knowledge that they really are on the road to desistance (Vaughan, 2007). Possible selves derive from representation of the self in the past and representations of the self in the future. These possible selves are a cognitive manifestation of goals, motivations, aspirations, hope and fears (Markus and Nurius, 1986). Through enacting a prosocial peer-support role characterised by helping others, prisoners may be able to contribute to these constructive narrative processes and contribute to viable reform stories.

#### Peer-support as a change of rehabilitative approach

Although being a peer-supporter appears to elicit positive change within prisoners (see e.g. Dhaliwal and Harrower, 2009), research on such schemes is necessary as prison is often associated with recidivism and, as such, there is a need to understand the opportunities offenders have for personal

development and growth (Johnson, 2010; Leibling with Arnold, 2004). Indeed far from reducing recidivism as per the deterrence effect, prison may actually increase recidivism for some offenders (Cid, 2009; Cullen, Johnson & Nagin, 2011; Gendreau et al., 2008; Losel, 2007). Compounding this, many prisoners experience the 'pains of imprisonment', which are associated with depression, loss of autonomy, lower levels of self-esteem and self-worth and prison suicide (Cohen and Taylor, 1972; Liebling, 1999). Typically, research that has focused on schemes/interventions for prisoners have focused primarily on offender behaviour programmes designed to address offending behaviour. Such programmes target empirically-based criminogenic needs and have been found to decrease recidivism rates (see e.g. Hanson et al, 2009; Losel and Schmucker, 2005). However, these programmes have been criticised for focusing too much on people's 'bads' i.e. their deficits and not enough on people's 'goods'. The good lives model (GLM) of rehabilitation conceptualises 'goods' as positive states or experiences that are obtained via legitimate means. They enable the offender to achieve 'goods' from prosocial activities and behaviours. When the offender is able to do this their psychological well-being improves as they are more likely to experience a sense of autonomy, purpose, friendship and excellence in work and play (Ward, Mann & Gannon, 2007). Some of these 'goods' may act as protective factors (Walker, Bowen, & Brown, 2012) with activity such as peer-helping allowing for opportunities to achieve meaningful primary goods (Ward, Mann, & Gannon, 2007).

There has been a small amount of prison research on peer-support schemes. Boothby (2011), for example, found that being an Insider significantly benefitted prisoners' sense of accomplishment, self-image, and self-confidence. Using differential association theory, Boothby suggests that in the same way individuals learn to offend from those able to teach the required skills, offenders in peer support roles can help other offenders change their offending lifestyles. He concludes that peer support programs are important resources within the prison system and contribute to prisoners' rehabilitation (Boothby, 2011). Stevens (2012), reaches similar conclusions in a paper exploring 'rep jobs' (where a prisoner assumes some responsibility for important policies and procedures such as anti-discrimination, anti-bullying etc.) in therapeutic community prisons. It was found that such roles

provide meaning and purpose for prisoners as well as a range of skills and attributes. These same attributes are also required in prison Listeners (Foster & Magee, 2011) and likely a range of other prison-based peer-support roles. Research supports the notion that the skills practiced in peer support roles are associated with successful societal reintegration (Dalkin & Padel, 2004; Graffam et al., 2004; Omoni & Ijeh, 2009), and this requires further exploration.

Furthermore, there may be ways in which peer-support roles can trigger motivations to desist. Bottoms et al. (2010) describe a process whereby offenders become motivated and make a decision to try to desist. In doing so, they begin to think differently about themselves, receive reinforcement of the new positive elements of themselves by other people, and have experiences of redemption (e.g. wanting to give something back). In reversing thinking patterns such as “I’m a bad person who does bad things”, offenders are able to challenge the belief that “that’s just the way I am” and open up to positive events (Maruna, 2004). Similarly, the GLM rests upon the idea that people offend as a means to secure some kind of valued outcome in their life which is innately human and normal. However, when deficits within the offender and their environment prevent the offender from securing desired ends in prosocial ways, they will resort to inappropriate and damaging means (Ward et al., 2007). In practice, therefore, the aim is to provide opportunities for offenders to accumulate desired outcomes via prosocial means, thus reducing criminogenic needs (Purvis et al, 2011). If peer-support roles do indeed generate increased self-confidence, personal and social skills, enhanced staff and peer relations, and other prosocial outcomes (Davies, 1994; Dhaliwal and Harrower, 2009), then such roles could pave the way for ‘good lives’.

#### Peer-support and desistance from sexual offending

As this research features research with sexual offenders, it is necessary to explore areas in which desistance processes can be specific to this group. Much of the work carried out in the area of rehabilitating sexual offenders has focused on treatment, and, while contested, research has demonstrated that sex offender treatment programs (SOTPs) can reduce the number of sex offenders

who are reconvicted (Hanson et al., 2002; Lösel & Schmucker, 2005; Schmucker & Lösel, 2015). Specifically, programs that take a risk–need–responsivity approach have been found to be the most successful (Hanson, Bourgon, Helmus, & Hodgson, 2009). Consequently, there is now a good understanding of the dynamic risk factors associated with sexual offence recidivism (Mann, Hanson, & Thornton, 2010). Recently, there has been a move within the sex offender literature to not just consider the risk and criminogenic needs of the offender but also to understand the process of sex offender desistance and the need for individuals to address protective factors, for example, positive self-identity (de Vries Robbé, Mann, Maruna, & Thornton, 2015). Protective factors are social, interpersonal, and environmental factors, as well as psychological and behavioural features that are empirically linked to sexual offending (de Vries Robbé et al., 2015).

A central aspect of the desistance process is the transformation and changes in the narrative identity of crime desisters (Maruna, 2001). Most research that has considered sex offenders' identity has either focused on the shame and stigma associated with sex offender labels and the negotiation of those labels (Blagden, Winder, & Hames, 2014; Blagden, Winder, Thorne, & Gregson, 2011), or on changes in sex offenders' narrative identities as they negotiate their way through the criminal justice system and associated treatment programs (Hudson, 2013; Ward & Marshall, 2007). Farmer, Beech, and Ward (2011) conducted a qualitative study that compared the narratives of potentially desisting sexual offenders with those considered still potentially active in their offending. They found that desisters had a stronger sense of personal agency, stronger internal locus of control, and described treatment as a turning point. Perhaps even more significant was the finding that desisters felt a sense of belonging and a place in a social group/network, whereas the active offenders described themselves as socially alienated or isolated. Harris (2014) in her study found that sexual offender desisters had gone through a "cognitive transformation," that is, a process of identity transformation, largely as a consequence of treatment. The concept of narrative identity is important for sex offender rehabilitation and crime desistance as those lacking a coherent narrative identity are often thought more likely to continue to offend (Ward & Marshall, 2007). In the literature, shifts in personal identity

have been argued as important for sex offender desistance (Göbbels, Ward, & Willis, 2012). As such, redemption scripts and the notion of the wounded healer (Maruna, 2001) can hold some significance for sexual as well as 'mains' offenders. However, as desistance is about discovering agency, interventions need to encourage and respect self-determination; this means working with offenders, "not on them" (McCulloch, 2005). The importance of prisoners "owning" their own rehabilitation, being invested in it, or having a stake in it should not be underestimated. This has led some to argue that there is a need for offenders to do desistance and not just talk desistance (Blagden & Perrin, 2016). Peer-support roles have been found to assist with desistance-based narratives and contribute to self-determination and "active citizenship" (Perrin & Blagden, 2014). Indeed, "purposeful activity" in prisons can enable offenders to make positive contributions toward their own rehabilitation (Blagden, Perrin, Smith, Gleeson, & Gillies, 2017). Enacting peer-support roles can increase the supporters' ability to reflect on their own circumstances and change their offending behaviour and lifestyles (Maruna, 2001; Parkin & McKeganey, 2000; Sirdifield, 2006; Snow, 2002). Although some research on peer support and desistance has been carried out, none of it has focused on a sample of sexual offenders. Early research highlighting the protective factors associated with peer-support roles encourages the application of such roles with sexual offenders. Such offenders are the most highly stigmatised and the role of constructing adaptive narrative identities has been emphasised in sex offender desistance and rehabilitation (Göbbels et al., 2012; Ward & Marshall, 2007). Peer-support could potentially influence identity adaption in this sense.

## Summary

This chapter has presented a review of the literature and theory specific to peer-support, and how it can potentially encourage change in offenders. It has ultimately argued that peer-support work offers a number of benefits for those who uphold roles, not least of which the chance to build self-confidence, problem-solving skills, and enhanced well-being. In the prison context, peer-support roles could enable prisoners to distance themselves from unwanted pasts and harmful labels. This might be a

consequence of developing a sense of meaning through enacting a helping role and moving towards more desirable and prosocial identities. There appears to be great potential utility for peer-support in the prison environment, principally through the way it may assist offenders' in building constructive narratives of change. The bodies of literature and the theories presented within this chapter may help to frame the participants' accounts that will be analysed in the forthcoming empirical chapters. Those that sit most closely to the experiences of the participants will be relied upon. The next chapter presents the methodology underpinning this research, and describes how participant data was collected, analysed, and interpreted.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### Introductory comments

This chapter outlines the methodological approach selected for this research. In doing so, comparable approaches, along with their offerings and shortfalls in the context of this research, are evaluated. By discussing varied research approaches and through reviewing some of the challenges faced during the design phase of this research, a rationale and justification for all methodological decisions is provided. This rationale is presented under a backdrop of previous literature and several exemplary research studies. The adopted research paradigm for this project, data collection and analysis

procedures, sampling methods, and ethical considerations comprise the main focal point of this chapter.

## Methodological approach

Traditionally, a qualitative approach is adopted when attempting to investigate a poorly understood or under-researched phenomenon (Berg, Lune, & Lune, 2004). As such, qualitative research is exploratory and is applied to research topics that do not present clear examinable variables (Stebbins, 2001). This type of approach is often applied to newly discovered research topics, or topics that have never or seldom been explored with particular groups of people or with emphasis on specific theoretical perspectives. Peer-support schemes in prisons, and the influence of peer-support roles on the attitudes, beliefs, and values of prisoners, has been the subject of little research. Little is known about how prisoners upholding peer-support roles make sense of such roles and as such, this research required a qualitative approach capable of revealing an in-depth understanding of the participants' 'life-worlds' (Creswell & Clark, 2007; Kvale, 1983). The selection of research methods in this project was guided by a set of principles derived from research philosophy literature.

Research philosophy is an umbrella term which envelopes many, varied approaches that researchers take when aiming to develop knowledge capable of explaining the different ways in which people view the world (Bryman, 2012). These varied and complex approaches have been categorised into three groups: ontology, epistemology and methodology (Creswell, 1998). Ontology is principally concerned with the nature of reality, i.e. what exists in the world, and how this reality can be interpreted and categorised. Epistemology is concerned with what can be regarded as acceptable knowledge in a particular field of study. As such, epistemology asks questions about how reality can be known (and by who and in what capacity), how such knowledge is attained (via what methods and findings), and if this knowledge can be shared and expanded upon by others (i.e. the reliability of findings). Methodology is a label given to the rules and protocols associated with specific methods of inquiry, which are guided by ontological or epistemological decisions (Bryman, 2012).



Ontology encompasses two standpoints that have received ample debate in the social sciences: objectivism and subjectivism. The former is concerned what is publicly observable, and what can be considered replicable facts. As such, this standpoint is synonymous with the scientific method and often quantitative approaches. The latter is centred on the viewpoint that the fundamental and unique characteristic of human behaviour is its subjective meaningfulness, that is, behaviour governed not by stimuli or causes but by subjective factors (Sandberg, 2005). As such, subjectivists have argued that science cannot ignore meaning and purpose in human action, and can therefore not rely solely on objective approaches (Gurwitsch, 1964; Langdridge, 2007). Rather, science of humans must understand subjective action from the standpoint of the actor, whose context, environment, and personal history should be subjects of analysis (Diesing, 1966; Ehrich, 2003).

Concerned with the experiences of peer-support role holders, and the meaning that offenders derive from such activity, this research adopts a qualitative and subjective stance. In terms of research philosophy, this research is phenomenological and interpretivist. Phenomenology is a philosophical stance often associated with existentialism, and thus concerned with describing human experience as lived and conscious (Ashworth & Chung, 2007; Smith, 2007). Methods derived from such a position enable the researcher to gain knowledge and understanding from the lived experiences of social actors. In doing so, within the context of a generally under-researched topic, this research sits in the domain of interpretivism. A key assumption for the interpretivist is that there are fundamental differences between the natural world and the social world (Sandberg, 2005). In the natural world, specific actions repeatedly produce specific results. Conversely, in the social world, human agents interpret situations and act on the basis of these interpretations (Dilthey, 1977). It is the aim of interpretivism, therefore, to provide a framework for understanding this dialectical between social actors' sense-making processes and the way in which they think and feel about their surroundings and experiences (Ponterotto, 2005).

This position is well-aligned with the overarching aims of this research, which are phenomenological in nature. As such, the studies set out in this research aim to explore how

participants make sense of their personal and social worlds (Smith, 2011). This approach has been under-used in research with offenders. Abrams (2010) has cited logistic and practicality issues in doing research in prisons as a contributor to this. Indeed, researchers operating in this field commonly refer to the barriers faced when conducting prison research (see, for e.g. Schlosser, 2008). Such barriers include access issues during the recruitment of participants, issues with attaining informed consent, difficulty establishing researcher-participant rapport, heightened cautiousness in terms of avoiding conflict, laborious additional steps to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, and contrasting interests between researchers and prisons / regulators (Blagden & Pemberton, 2010). In terms of the latter, Miller (2005) has argued that the scarcity of qualitative projects with offenders may be due to the fact that large scale crime research is often funded by government agencies. Projects falling under this remit carry the expectation of direct policy relevance, and thus tend to favour traditional methods of scientific rigor. The 'what works' agenda, enveloped by a preference for prison 'programs' and statistical impact evaluations has been cited as a movement prototypical of this trend (Raynor, 2003, cited in Maruna, 2015). This may go some way to explaining why research with offenders has been primarily nomothetic, and has been dominated by theory testing models, often involving comprehensive datasets and advanced statistical techniques (Miller, 2005). Such research has been and continues to be invaluable, particularly that investigating risk assessment and recidivism. The identification of different types of risk (i.e. static, stable dynamic, and acute dynamic) and the implementation of specific risk measures and assessments are notable achievements in this area (Craig, Browne & Beech, 2008; Craig & Beech, 2009).

Nevertheless, over-reliance on nomothetic approaches has left a void in offender research and there remains great scope for developing understandings of offending that are embedded in data that exposes participants' 'stories'. Indeed, some scholars are beginning to challenge what constitutes 'evidence' in the evidence-based climate which has primarily demanded causal research (Maruna, 2015). With this in mind, this research intends to present participants' 'stories' as evidence of the influence peer-support roles may have on offenders' attitudes, beliefs, and experiences of

imprisonment. Limited research exists in this area generally and research that has investigated peer-support has primarily focussed on the recipients of the support. This has centred on whether such support alleviates the emotional impact of imprisonment and provides a coping strategy for those who are supported. Findings in this area are encouraging and many studies have concluded that peer-support schemes are indeed effective in reducing stress and anxiety in prisoners. In an investigation into the Listener scheme, for example, Jaffe (2012) concludes that prisoners who talk to Listeners are able to counter, to some degree, a negative build-up of feelings, heightened by confinement in a cell. Whilst the research from this perspective is valuable, this project is concerned with the influence of peer-support on the supporters, or role-holders.

Research in this area is very scarce, and no such research has been undertaken on samples comparable to those featured in this research and on the scale that this thesis deals with. Though this is the case, this project is educated from some of the studies that have explored peer-support roles in general offending populations. Boothby (2011), for example, explored the views of members of the 'Insiders', a scheme which involves volunteers providing reassurance and practical support to new prisoners. Boothby's findings suggest that 'Insiders' developed a sense of accomplishment and enhanced self-confidence as a result of their 'meaningful' work (Boothby, 2011). However, the notion of meaningful work is not fully elaborated. Furthermore, the research concentrated on a small sample (n=3) in one prison, and concludes by calling for multi-site research. Similar findings have also been revealed via investigations into the Listener Scheme. Studies by Davies (1994) and Dhaliwal & Harrower (2009) have found that 'Listeners' experience great personal growth and develop attributes such as empathy and increased self-confidence. Again, however, what appears to be missing so far is research that amply expands on previously alluded concepts like 'personal growth' and 'meaningful activity'. What is required here is in-depth, phenomenological research, and analysis that offers insight into the lived experiences of peer-support role holders residing in prison, as well as their sense-making and self-construal processes. This is the overarching objective of this thesis, which will be addressed in the three empirical studies that will ensue and that are outlined below.

## The empirical studies

This PhD thesis is comprised of three qualitative empirical studies. These studies are guided by the overarching research questions, aims, and objectives that underpin this thesis. The main purpose of this research is to shed a more phenomenological light on participants' experiences of peer-support and how they think it can be utilised in the prison context.

### Study 1

This study (chapter four) opened the empirical investigation into peer-support in prison. As such, it was holistic in focus and utilised a large (N=22) sample in qualitative research terms. This sample was comprised of all male prisoners from HMP Lowdham Grange, a category B prison in the U.K., and two category C U.K. prisons (HMP The Mount and HMP Brixton). Through semi-structured interviews and a subsequent thematic analysis, participant data was explored with the aim of uncovering how peer-support roles are delivered, experienced, and assimilated into prisoners' personals and subjective worlds. The study aimed to extract an understanding of the dynamics underpinning peer-support roles in prison and their utility amongst offenders. The analysis within this study revealed that peer-support roles afford prisoners opportunities to secure meaningful activity that can be used to cope with prison, enhance well-being, and contribute to self-construal and self-change processes. Fundamentally, this study showed that peer-supporters in prison experience their roles in deeply phenomenological ways and consequently contribute to personally meaningful sense-making processes.

#### Study 1: Research questions

1. How are peer-support roles experienced by mixed (violence, drugs, theft) offence-type prisoners?
2. To what extent does having a peer-support role in prison impact on offenders' behaviours, attitudes, and views of themselves?

3. How do incarcerated individuals who uphold peer-support roles make sense of imprisonment, and how do they construe their past, current, and future selves?

## Study 2

This study (chapter five) took an explicit focus on a smaller sample (N=15) and on sexual offenders. It took place in HMP Whatton, a category C sexual offender treatment prison in the U. K. The reason for focusing on a smaller sample was because the findings from study 1 indicated that participants were engaging with inherently personal and subjective sense making processes. This inspired the decision to use IPA in this study, which would allow for a more in-depth exploration of the dynamics underpinning participants' sense making of peer-support in the context of their 'life worlds' (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The decision to focus on sex offenders was broadly based on the fact that sexual offenders are under-researched generally (Laws & Ward, 2011). There is no research exploring the impact of being peer-supporters with a sample of sexual offenders, yet this sample experience a much more treatment-oriented and reflective time in prison (Ware, Frost, & Hoy, 2010). This context was considered an important one in which to explore the seemingly introspective dynamics of prison peer-support. As such, this study was once again about exploring peer-support from a personal agency perspective. The research questions specific to this study ultimately replicate those from study 1 and are as follows:

### Study 2: Research questions

1. How are peer-support roles experienced by incarcerated sexual offenders?
2. To what extent does having a peer-support role in prison impact on sexual offenders' behaviours, attitudes, and views of themselves?
3. How do sexual offenders who uphold peer-support roles in prison make sense of imprisonment, and how do they construe their past, current, and future selves?

### Study 3

This final study (chapter six) focused on peer-support as a broader level of intervention that might be formally assimilated into the prison context. Therefore, this study aimed to glean information from participants relating to the structural properties and factors associated with prison-based peer-support. Here, a convenience-sampled subset of participants (N = 15) from studies 1 and 2 were follow-up interviewed and their thoughts about the status and potential utility of their peer-support programs were explored. Problems and challenges associated with peer-support were also explored with participants, with the hope of eventually offering recommendations to practitioners and policy makers. To these ends, participants' general understandings of peer-support, rehabilitation, imprisonment, and how these constructs interact were explored in semi-structured interviews. This final research study, then, attempted to tie the personal agency-oriented findings from studies 1 and 2 with findings relating to the structure and status of prison peer-support and how it can be used in the offender rehabilitation framework. Providing an understanding of peer-support from both a personal agency and a broader structural perspective in this way was a key aim of this research. This chapter is especially concerned with the latter; how the structural properties and implications associated with peer-support interact with those who experience it, and what this can mean for the utility of peer-support in the context of offender rehabilitation.

#### Study 3: Research questions

1. What is the status of peer-support in prison? How is it viewed by prisoners and prison staff?  
What are its main contributions to the prison context?
2. How does peer-support fit within the framework of offender rehabilitation?
3. What are the challenges faced by peer-support in prison? In what kind of prison environment would peer-support be best-utilised?

## Ethics

Before arriving at key decisions associated with participant recruitment and data collection (described later in this chapter), several ethical guidelines were consulted and underlined the design stage of this research. Careful ethical consideration is crucial in research exploring the lived experiences of participants. This is especially true when researching vulnerable populations such as those serving time in prison (Moore & Miller, 1999; Blagden & Pemberton, 2010). Each stage of this research was guided by a set of ethical frameworks that ensured all appropriate procedures were adhered to. Before any research was carried out, this project required approval from the National Offender Management Service (via submission of Integrated Research Application System (IRAS) documentation), a research manager representing the Samaritans, and an ethics committee at Nottingham Trent University. The latter is led by the 'Framework for Research Ethics' (2012), which also follows the British Psychological Society's (BPS) ethical guidelines (2009).

All of these processes required continuous reflection and a persistent awareness of several ethical guidelines. This ensured that the research was carried out in a sensitive and careful manner and with the safety of the researcher and participants in mind at all times. To this end, a number of risks had to be accounted for. Such risks were categorised into the following areas: confidentiality and anonymity; the potential for emotional discomfort or physical threat; communication techniques; consent and debriefing processes; and sensitive and secure data handling. It was also essential to keep in mind the individual circumstances of the participants, and remain mindful of participants' cultures when communicating with them about their lives and experiences. It has been argued that this is essential in qualitative analysis, as it enables the researcher to stay close to the 'insider's perspective' and to keep participants' subjective realities at the heart of any interpretations (Madill, 2011; Smith, 2011). One of the biggest risks of this research was the potential for emotional discomfort for both the researcher and the participants. Data collection methods required the elicitation of information potentially relating to serious and sexual offences, and likely relating to participants' innermost thoughts and feelings, as well as relationships with close ones. This

emphasised the importance of the extensive ethics process, and the need to carry out sensitive research (Burke Draucker, 1999; Lee, 1993). The steps taken to ensure this was the case are outlined below.

#### Inclusion / exclusion

To be included in the research, participants were required to have upheld a peer-support role at the time of, and 6 months prior to, participation. This was set to ensure that participants had relatively substantial experience of their peer-support role. It was a possibility that intellectually disabled (ID) offenders would opt to participate. Whilst this was not the case in the end, protocol was in place. In such circumstances, the prison programs department would have been liaised with, and all materials were already subjected to readability tests and written in plain English. These criteria were outlined in information sheets and passed on to peer-support scheme coordinators who disseminated them. All of this information, along with details the research and all ethics procedures was reiterated at several points throughout the research.

#### Consent

In line with the British Psychology Society's (BPS, 2009) guidance, informed consent was sought from all participants. Researchers have argued that while participants in psychological research do not expect to be affected physically, unlike in many medical experiments, there other serious risks to consider. There are many examples of studies in which psychology subjects have had their emotions manipulated, their moods changed, or abilities questioned (Mann, 1994). As such, it is essential that participants receive and understand informed consent measures. Henn, Weinstein and Foard (2006) assert that robust consent procedures are not only vital for participant safety, but also a prerequisite for credible and trustworthy research.

With these propositions in mind, all participants were given informed consent and information sheets during an initial meeting. All research materials were written in plain, jargon-free



English and subjected to readability checks. Participants read the consent form (or the researcher read the form to participants with literacy deficits) and key points were verbally repeated by the researcher in all cases. This form contained information summarising the purpose of the research, participants' rights to withdraw, anonymity and confidentiality measures, data storage protocols, and the university contact details of the researcher and the director of studies. Participants were also made aware of how they would be referred in the analysis and asked to select a pseudonym. All participants were given time to ask questions and think about whether they want to take part in the research. Explicit consent for audio recording was also sought, and a signature was required on all forms.

### Confidentiality

Cowburn (2005) describes a conflict that researchers working with offenders often face. This conflict emerges from a need to ensure participant confidentiality and anonymity, but also generate data in a way that allows participants to think and speak freely. This has to be done cautiously in order to generate as true accounts as possible from subjects, while not compromising participants' details or eliciting prior or potential victim information by failing to take action following any disclosures or causes for concern. Cowburn suggests that in order to manage this, clear boundaries regarding what is confidential and what circumstances may result in confidentiality waiving must be implemented. In line with these recommendations, participants were made aware at several stages throughout the research that confidentiality would be broken following any disclosures indicating any self-harm or harm to others, crimes for which the participant had not been tried, or prison rule breaking.

Participants were also made aware, at the consent stage, of the potential risk of being identified due to the small sample size used in this research. It was made clear to participants, however, that although the results of the research were to be published and may include extracts from their data, that any identifiable information would be omitted or altered to ensure anonymity. Participants' names were not mentioned at any point once audio recording had commenced (names

mentioned accidentally were not transcribed). A unique identifier was allocated to each participant, in case of any withdrawal requests. Interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone and resultant files were stored on a password protected desktop PC in a secured and locked university office. During data transcription, any identifiable information was removed or changed (i.e. names, locations etc.). Dialogue which is transcribed verbatim runs some risk in terms of revealing identifiable detail (Oliver et al., 2005). However, transcription is essential in terms of gathering data on a little understood topic, such as the experiences of being a peer-support volunteer in prison. Nevertheless, active efforts were made to remain alert to possible ways in which participants may have been identified.

All data collection materials were labelled with a unique identifier, anonymised, and stored in a locked filing cabinet. The principal investigator used discretion and was guided by a team of project supervisors when deciding which extracts of the data were to be used in the thesis. Any excerpts deemed to feature potentially identifiable information were omitted. In order to safeguard these processes further, the prison was given the opportunity to view a final draft of the research prior to thesis submission and any publications.

### Security

The principal investigator in this research was fully vetted and key trained at HMP Whatton and HMP Lowdham Grange. Prison staff at the other prisons supervised the research visits as a security measure but did not attend any interviews. All interviews were conducted on a one to one basis. The principal researcher and all members of the project supervision team possessed varying levels of experience working in prisons and all were familiar with extensive safeguarding protocols. One of the key concerns in this regard was the management of the data collected from participants. For this purpose, interviews were recorded using a digital Dictaphone. It was permitted that this could be transported from all prisons to the university office for transcription and analysis, except for the case at HMP Lowdham Grange, where transcripts were written up within the psychology department in

the prison. These transcripts were then saved to a USB device which was transported to the university office and original audio files were deleted.

In accordance with prison policies, the following data protection measures were exercised: (1) the Dictaphone used to record interviews was password protected and accessible only by the research team; (2) the data remained on the Dictaphone at all times whilst in the prison, except for at HMP Lowdham Grange. The Dictaphone was kept either with the principal investigator when in use or in a locked drawer, along with any research paperwork (i.e. consent forms / debrief notes); (3) the Dictaphone was transported by the principal investigator directly from the prison sites to the university using a locked briefcase; (4) the data was transferred into a password protected file on a designated computer at the university and this data was not held on any other computer; (5) transcription was carried out in a private cubicle room at the university (again, except for at HMP Lowdham Grange, where a private office was provided) and headphones were used; (6) all transcripts, data, and paperwork will be destroyed following PhD completion (June 2017) or once the research becomes inactive (if publication is ongoing following PhD completion). The British Psychological Society's code of conduct (BPS, 2009) and HM Prison Service guidelines are embedded within these steps and were abided at all times with regard to the storing and use of data.

#### Risk of harm to participants and the researcher

There was a risk that participants may have felt that participation was compulsory. To minimise the risk of potential participants feeling forced or influenced to participate against their will, participants were explicitly made aware at all stages of the research (on the information sheet, at the first meeting with the researcher, when gaining consent, before interviews began) that their participation was entirely voluntary. The consent form reiterated this and all this information was explained to participants verbally. Another potential risk was that some of the questions could have caused emotional distress. This was unlikely due to the fact that the questions asked about participants' experiences of peer-support only – their offences remained private to them. Nevertheless,

participants were made aware of this prior to data collection and of their right to refuse or withdraw at any time, which was again explained verbally. In the event of participants becoming distressed or uncomfortable, participants were allowed to continue with the research if they wished to do so, but were given 'time out' intervals if requested. There were no such cases in this research. It may have been appropriate to close the research down entirely in some cases. Whilst this did not happen, participants were assured that this would not affect them negatively in anyway. Avenues of support were included in the debrief sheet, in case participants experienced any emotional distress following interviews. This sheet also guided a formal debriefing process, via which some participants chose to discuss their interviews and ask questions about the research.

The data collection period required full time placement for three months across two of the prison sites in this research (HMP Lowdham Grange and HMP Whatton). Throughout this period, certain procedures were followed in order to minimise physical and emotional risk. In terms of physical risk, travel around the prison was minimised and travelling during prisoner movement time was avoided entirely. The interview room was located in a well-staffed department and had a panic button. In terms of emotional risk, the lead researcher was surrounded by a support network throughout the entire PhD. This network consisted of three experienced supervisors, an internal assessor, the psychology staff at the prison, and a number of close colleagues and friends. It was important that the researcher had the opportunity to 'download' any concerns or worries to members of the network. This was mostly carried out in monthly supervision meetings and in one to one pastoral support meetings with the researcher's director of studies. The researcher was also encouraged by prison psychology staff to engage in formal reflective practice sessions at the prison, during which dialectical between the researcher's own thoughts and experiences were contrasted with the research process and the findings that were being elicited. This was undertaken throughout the time spent across both prisons.

## Justification of research

Despite some of the ethical concerns and some of the risks that were associated with this research, the trade-off was that there was an opportunity to generate important data relating to the impact of peer-support roles in prisons. This research aimed to further investigate the implications of prisoners adopting peer-support roles within the broad framework of offender rehabilitation. There is a paucity of research that exists in this area generally, but some has presented a case to be hopeful in terms of the potential utility of peer-support with offenders (Boothby, 2011; Davies, 1994; Dhaliwal & Harrower, 2009; Perrin & Blagden, 2014). There are early signs to suggest that peer-support schemes may represent an important resource in terms of encouraging change and transition offenders.

Although the overarching aims of peer-support schemes are not directly linked with reducing reoffending, there is evidence to suggest upholding a peer-support role may, at the very least, help offenders build self-esteem and a sense of belonging. It has been argued that this type of personal growth is particularly beneficial for sex offenders in terms of protective factors (Yoon, Spehr & Briken, 2011). There are several other bodies of offender reform and desistance literature that may underpin the potential utility of peer-support in the prison context. These are contrasted in detail alongside participant data across the next three empirical chapters. As it stands, however, peer-support roles in prisons have not been explored in the context that this thesis sets. Furthermore, the scarce amount of research that does exist on this topic has not sufficiently unpacked claimed linkages between peer-support roles and offender reform. There is also much divergence across this literature, with some citing great benefits of peer-support roles (see, for e.g. Boothby, 2011; Davies, 1994; Perrin & Blagden, 2014; Sirdifield, 2006) and some warning of risks (Foster & Magee, 2011; Jaffe, 2011).

As such, this research aims to explore precisely what it is about upholding a peer-support role that may foster offender change. This will be achieved by staying close to the life worlds of the experts – the participants themselves (Smith, 2011). As will be discussed later in this thesis, peer-support roles potentially represent a cost effective, self-sufficient, offender-led, and individualised counterpart to traditional rehabilitation pathways. The significance of this, on an academic and practical level, cannot

be understated. Furthermore, there have been persistent yet largely unanswered calls for the implementation of 'active citizenship' initiatives in prisons (Anderson, 2013; Edgar, Jacobson, & Biggar, 2011; Levenson & Farrant, 2002). This research responds to these calls, and is well-timed in attempting to offer a unique and significant contribution to policy and practice. In addition to these academic and applied offerings, this research provides its participants with the opportunity to voice their opinions, share any positive experiences, and raise any concerns relating to upholding peer-support roles in prison. This, in its own right, is a significant contribution of this research, and relates to the importance of including prisoners in the discursive surrounding prison reform (Dhami, 2005; Juliani, 1981; Nee, 2004).

### Sampling strategies

The methodological foundation of this thesis is both phenomenological and interpretative, with the research adopting an interpretative phenomenological analytical approach in one empirical study, and a phenomenologically oriented thematic analysis in another. The sampling strategy was directly affected by the methodological approach of this research. There are no prescriptive sample sizes in either thematic or interpretative phenomenological analysis, though it is generally argued that, as these methods are idiographic in nature, they should utilise small sample sizes. IPA sample sizes have ranged from 1-35 (Cassidy, Reynolds, & Naylor, 2011), though the mean sample size of IPA research is (N=15) (Reid, Flowers and Larkin, 2005). Thematic analysis is naturally more flexible in terms of suitable sample sizes, and studies employing it have ranged significantly, from single figures to hundreds (Bryman, 2012). However, the phenomenological strand of thematic analysis used in this research requires close attention to each transcript and thus smaller sample sizes. Braun and Clarke (2006) and Smith and Eatough (2006) affirm that data collected from up to 15 participants can be reliably subjected to both thematic analysis and IPA.

Sampling in this research utilised the three most common types of sampling in qualitative research; convenience, snowball and theoretical (Bryman, 2004). Marshall and Rossmann (1999) point

out that qualitative researchers often begin with accessible sites (convenience) and then build upon and elaborate on these through connections made from early data collection (snowball sampling). Indeed, many of the participants were initially identified from Safer Custody and psychology staff referrals. Others were approached through peer-support program leaders (who were also participants) and this represented a good use of snowball sampling. The overarching sampling strategy used for selecting research participants was purposeful and homogenous. In small N research, there is little use for random sampling, as qualitative researchers should try to attain a closely matched sample for which the overarching research questions will be significant (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). This view essentially mirrors the concept of theoretical sampling, which emphasises the importance of participants being selected on the basis that they are reliably able to shed light on a particular phenomenon (Henn, Weinstein, & Foard, 2006). This type of sampling is therefore ideally suited for small sample research that utilises phenomenological approaches.

## Participants and recruitment process

Following submission of Integrated Research Application System (IRAS) documentation, this research was approved by a panel representing the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and the Governors at each U. K. prison site. A research manager representing the Samaritans also approved this research, given that the project explored the Samaritans Listener scheme. This was the only scheme governed by its own research approval process, and so other peer-support programs did not require this two-tiered level of approval. Data collection was facilitated by the Safer Custody departments within the prisons. All participants were males convicted of a range of offences (see table 1 for demographic and offence-related information). Each participant was required to have held a peer-support role for at least 6 months prior to participation and have served a minimum of two years in prison. These criteria were set to ensure that participants had substantial experience of both prison and their peer-support role.

Table 1: Participant information (entire sample)

	Pseudonym	Role*	Prison**	Age	Offence details	Sentence (years)	Time served (years, months)
1	Jeremy	L	LG	58	Drugs	28	5, 9
2	Billy	HH	LG	43	Murder	16	9, 8
3	Scott	ST/B	LG	43	Attempted murder	25	7
4	Oliver	ST/B	LG	37	Customs & excise	11	4, 10
5	Mickey	ST/B	LG	45	Attempted murder	13	5, 6
6	Bob	B	LG	37	Murder	15	7, 8
7	Javid	B	LG	53	Theft	13	4, 10
8	Imran	ST	LG	35	Drugs	15	4
9	Khan	B	LG	38	Conspiracy to defraud	19	4, 5
10	Nikita	ER	LG	40	Kidnapping	11	3
11	Jackson	B	LG	34	Murder	17	8, 9
12	Sanjay	PAL	LG	50	Drugs	25	7
13	Joaquim	ER	LG	35	Attempted murder	8	5
14	Nova	B	LG	47	Murder	18	3, 6
15	Harry	R	B	35	Attempted robbery	5	2



16	Joel	R	B	52	Drugs	15	6, 2
17	Victor	R	B	38	Robbery	7	3, 4
18	Liam	R	B	28	Drugs	6	2
19	Jesse	R	TM	32	Theft	9	4
20	Shay	R	TM	44	Drugs	10	4, 7
21	Alex	R	TM	51	Attempted murder	18	7, 8
22	Hamad	R	TM	26	Drugs	9	3, 2
23	Jason	ST	W	39	Possessing indecent photographs	7	2, 5
24	Charles	ST	W	60	Sexual assault	Life (99) (extended)	27, 6
25	Jamie	ST	W	64	Sexual activity with a child	IPP	7, 6
26	Ash	I	W	32	Sexual assault on a female under age 13	IPP	2, 6
27	Stewart	I	W	59	Rape	15 (extended)	6, 6
28	Simon	I	W	28	Rape on a female under age 13	IPP	7, 6
29	Charlie	I	W	56	Murder	Life (99)	27, 6
30	Drew	I	W	33	Rape	10	5, 6
31	John	L	W	59	Rape on a child	Life (99)	8

32	Ryan	L	W	47	Rape on a child	IPP	6, 6
33	Tom	L	W	44	Sexual assault	IPP	5, 6
34	Nick	L	W	64	Sexual assault on a child	12	3
35	Patrick	L	W	62	Sexual assault on a male under age 13	IPP	7
36	Darren	L	W	52	Attempted rape on a child under age 13	Life (99)	10
37	Gary	L	W	42	Murder	Life (99)	23

\*L = Listener; HH = Helping Hands Volunteer; ST = Shannon Trust Mentor; B = Buddy; ER = Equality

Representative; PAL = Prison Advice Line Operator; R = RAPT Mentor

\*\*LG = HMP Lowdham Grange; B = HMP Brixton; TM = HMP The Mount; W = HMP Whatton

Due to the sensitive and confidential nature of the content of many peer-support interactions, it was important to ensure that each scheme was not compromised by service-users fearing any disclosures. As such, usual avenues such as posters or broadcasting via the prison radio were not utilised as blanket measures. Instead, scheme coordinators were contacted during monthly meetings and encouraged to share details of the research with all volunteers. Coordinators agreed to collate a list of volunteers who expressed interest and pass this on to the lead researcher. Those who expressed interest were contacted by letter via the internal postal system at the prison. This letter included an information sheet, a list of available meeting dates potential participants could select from, and a preaddressed envelope so potential participants could respond with such details. Potential participants who were still interested in the research at this point were invited to attend a consent meeting where all research aims and ethical protocols (voluntary participation, confidentiality, right

to withdraw) were explained. Participants were also given the opportunity to ask any questions relating to the research, and some time to make a decision about whether or not they wished to take part.

## Methods of data collection

### Semi-structured interviews

A semi-structured interviewing technique was adopted for all studies in this research. This interviewing style is recommended for analysis that take a phenomenological stance because it enables “rapport to be developed; allows participants to think, speak and be heard; and [is] well suited to in-depth and personal discussion” (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005, p 22). Throughout semi-structured interviews, interviewees are encouraged to communicate informally, like friends rather than strangers (Madill, 2011). As such, a conversational style of interviewing was employed (Rubin & Rubin, 2011) and all interviews were conducted on a one to one basis in purpose-built interview rooms at the prison sites. This environment was a private and safe environment in which participants were able to openly discuss their lived experiences of their peer-support roles (Smith, 2011). Interviews were recorded on a Dictaphone and later transcribed. No notes were taken during interview, as this can damage attempts to build rapport and connect with participants (Turner III, 2010). As per the protocols outlined earlier, participants were given details about their interview schedules and consent was obtained prior to interview commencement.

The interview schedules were divided into four main sections, each designed to facilitate good interview flow and produce rich data from which super-ordinate and subordinate themes can be extracted (Myers & Newman, 2007). Interview schedules were constructed with reference to Leech’s (2002) recommendation to begin with ‘grand tour’ questions and then progress to more specific, probing questions. This allowed participants to broadly introduce the issue to be explored and then ease into the interview (Leech, 2002). As such, the first section of the schedules (‘introductory questions’) explored general details of participants’ prison lives and how they felt when first coming

to prison. For the follow-up interviews in study 3, this section was brief and focused more on transitioning from the purpose of the first interview to that of the second. The content and purpose of each question was aligned to the fundamental research questions underpinning the investigation, and was also be guided by previous research exploring peer-support schemes. Davies (1994) and Dhaliwal and Harrower (2009), for example, have proposed that prisoners' worldviews and attitudes noticeably change after adopting Listener roles. Therefore, the second section ('views and attitudes regarding peer-support roles') for the schedules in studies 1 and 2 focused on participants' perceptions of their peer-support roles before and after they became peer-supporters. The third section ('the impact of peer-support roles on the individual') for these first two studies aimed to extend knowledge and understanding of the underlying dynamics of peer-support and how these can influence how participants make sense of themselves. Here, questions such as "do you think that becoming a member of the team has changed you in any way?" targeted participants' thoughts of any temporal changes in the self that might have been triggered by upholding peer-support roles. Finally, the fourth section ('future') was directed towards participants' feelings about leaving prison and whether they felt their peer-support roles had any bearing on such feelings. As some research has alluded to peer-support schemes having positive implications regarding reintegration outcomes (Boothby, 2011; Edgar et al., 2011), this section also aimed to explore any mechanisms that could potentially influence such positive outcomes. The overarching aim of all interviews was to obtain rich data capturing how adopting a peer-support role in prison may impact a prisoner's 'self' and their experience of their social world. On completion of interviews, participants were debriefed and given the opportunity to discuss their interview and ask questions.

## Methods of analysis

This study adopted thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in two studies and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith & Eatough, 2007; Smith, 2011) in one. These methods were selected according to both the sample sizes of the studies in which they are used and also the

objectives of each study. Justifications for selecting to use these methods are outlined in this subsection. To this end, the research philosophies underpinning both methods are discussed.

Both thematic and interpretative phenomenological analysis have been described as 'contextualist methods', sitting between the two poles of constructionism and realism (Madill, Jordan, & Shirley, 2000). As such, these strands of qualitative analysis are concerned with the ways in which individuals make meaning of their experience, and, in turn, the ways in which the broader social context impinges on those meanings. Data analysed using these methods have therefore been described as reflecting 'reality' (Braun & Clarke 2006; Smith & Eatough, 2007). Thematic analysis offers greater theoretical freedom when contrasted to IPA, with the latter requiring a closer connection to the hermeneutics of participants' discourse (Shinebourne, 2011). This is why it was selected for use in studies 1 and 3. Study 1 utilises a large sample and opens the investigation into peer-support in prison. As such, IPA was considered to have potentially narrowed the focus too much in this study and to have presumed too much about the ways in which participants may have been experiencing peer-support. Still, this study adopted a phenomenologically oriented strand of thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). This empowered the analysis to remain close to participants' subjective self-narratives. This was important, as this study aimed to explore the dynamics of peer-support from a personal agency perspective (what it meant to participants and how it impacted their processes of self-construal). This remained the focus in study 2, which utilised IPA due to the fact that the participants in study 1 appeared to be deeply phenomenologically engaged with their peer-support experiences. Study 3, in moving to analyse peer-support from a structural perspective, did not require this closeness to self-sense-making processes, and therefore adopted thematic analysis.

While the analytical techniques used in this thesis differed in terms of the levels of interpretation they relied upon, the processes the data were subjected to were consistent, and adhered to the principles outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). Data analysis began with detailed readings of all the transcripts, and then initial coding of emergent themes. A process of sorting initial patterns then took place, and this was followed by the identification of meaningful patterns in the

data, and then an interpretation of those patterns (Miles & Huberman 1994). It is here where this method deviated (in study 1) from traditional thematic analyses, and where it was of central significance in study 2. While taking these steps, the data was viewed through a phenomenological lens.

### Phenomenological and hermeneutic influences

It is important at this juncture to discuss the phenomenological and hermeneutic foundations that underpin much of the analysis in this research. Any study utilising a phenomenological approach needs to make at least some acknowledgment of the philosophical traditions that underpin the research (Ehrich, 2003).

The crux of phenomenology is that 'conscience' (how things appear to us in consciousness) should be the focus of inquiry (Ehrich, 2003). There is general consensus among phenomenological researchers that methods of hard science (particular physics) do not provide us with 'cast iron' laws of social reality (Gurwitsch, 1964). For Husserl (1962) the fundamental error of contemporary psychology was its attempts to 'naturalise' consciousness. Naturalism, according to Husserl (1970), is a doctrine that only recognises the physical. Essentially, reality is construed as a dichotomous construct in that there is an actual (naturalised) physical reality or there is no reality. Husserl rejected this view and argued "it is precisely by naturalising consciousness and ideas, however, that psychology defeats itself. The objectivity which it presupposes, without which it could lay no claim to being scientific, is essentially ideal and therefore a contradiction of naturalism's own principles" (Husserl, 1965, p9). Langdridge (2007), has asserted that one fundamental tenet that phenomenology rests upon is a rejection of the subject-object dualism most visible in positivist science. That is – an object only enters our reality when we perceive it and it is present in our consciousness. This is an important notion as it posits that experience is always 'of something' and situated in lived existence (Ehrich, 2003). Husserl (1962) illustrated this with his concept of 'intentionality' (the complete meaning of an

object; desires, beliefs etc.) to demonstrate how our consciousness is always 'directed' towards something.

Phenomenology in qualitative research methods draw heavily on Heidegger's 'hermeneutic phenomenology'. The cornerstone of Heidegger's philosophy is on 'being', or rather, 'dasein' (existence). According to Heidegger "everything we talk about, everything we have in view, everything towards which we comport ourselves in, any way, is being; what we are is being and so is how we are" (Heidegger, 1962/1980, p26). Heidegger goes on to argue that to understand 'being' we (the inquirer/observer) must make an entity transparent in our being. It is through 'dasein' of the entity that we begin to uncover and thus bring ourselves closer to understanding the phenomenon under investigation. This is where Heidegger's phenomenology begins to become hermeneutic in that the observer is making a subjective interpretation of 'something which is'. Thus Heidegger's phenomenology is concerned with how things appear to us in existence, reality is thus an experiential one (Eatough & Smith, 2007). Researchers using phenomenological methods such as IPA, therefore, are concerned with how things appear to the participant and how they make sense of things.

The 'interpretative' elements of the phenomenologically-oriented thematic analysis and IPA used in this study are also heavily influenced by hermeneutics, especially the work of Gadamer (1960, 2004) and Heidegger (1962, 1980). There is an important corollary in the work of Gadamer and Heidegger which relates to the hermeneutic circle. In that the understanding of the part and whole of a phenomenon is a dialectical process with the two aspects needing to be understood relative to each other. Gadamer (1960, 2004) reinforces the sentiments of Heidegger by contending that correct interpretation must guard against:

"arbitrary fancies...habits of thought, and it must direct its gaze 'on the things themselves'...For it is necessary to keep one's gaze fixed on the thing throughout all the constant distractions that originate in the interpretator himself...[A] person who is trying to

understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as initial meaning emerges in the text.” (Gadamer, 1960, 2004, p269).

Gadamer argues that a person always ‘projects’ when making an interpretation, including interpretation made about the whole from initial meaning. This highlights the importance of continually revisiting interpretations to ensure participants’ worlds are not being replaced by the interpreter’s (Schutz, 1962). Gadamer’s sentiments here also remind us that making our preconceptions apparent before doing the interpreting may not always be possible; as one may only get to know their preconceptions once analysis is underway. Hermeneutic inquiry is then a dynamic process (Smith, 2008). In this research, these philosophical guidelines were implemented as quality assurance measures, and underpinned the double-interpretation process that participants’ data was subjected to. In phenomenological analysis, the researcher attempts to make sense of what the participant is making sense of (Aresti et al., 2010). The researcher must be cautious here to maintain awareness of the distinctions between the participant’s account and the researcher’s interpretation (or projection) (Gadamer, 1960, 2004; Schutz, 1962; Smith, 2011). Here, it is recommended that a form of inter-rater reliability is performed on the data, which involves the analysis being ‘audited’ (Lincoln & Guba 1985 as cited in Seale, 1999, p467) by the co- author as well as an independent researcher. This process ensures that interpretations hold validity. This measure was utilised across all studies in this research.

### Doing phenomenological analysis

Phenomenological inquiry rests upon the assumption that how things appear to us in consciousness should be the focus of inquiry (Ehrich, 2003). As such, phenomenological analysis is concerned with the meanings that particular experiences, events and states hold for participants (Smith & Eatough, 2007). In order to generate a phenomenological understanding of a concept, therefore, researchers



must be able to glean insights from the subject expert (in this case, peer-supporters experiencing prison) and seek to illuminate the insider perspective (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006).

While there are no prescribed ways of doing phenomenological analysis, the processes adopted in this thesis were guided by previous precedents (see Smith & Osborn, 2003; Storey, 2007; Willig, 2008). Flowers and Langdridge (2007) have warned against selectively using extracts from transcripts in order to affirm the researcher's assumptions. For these reasons, in this research, each transcript was read in full repeatedly in order to generate a thorough understanding of participants' responses in their entirety. A three-tiered analysis system was then adopted. Initially, notes relating to initial interesting thoughts and ideas were made in the left-hand margin of transcripts. The next level of analysis focused more on psychological concepts and the transforming of initial thoughts and ideas into more specific phrases or labels. Finally, a data reduction strategy was carried out, via which emerging notions were redefined and categorised under superordinate and subordinate themes. Thus, each superordinate theme was connected to underlying themes which were, in turn, connected to the original annotations and extracts from the participant (Chapman & Smith, 2002). The same process was repeated for all transcripts, with equal attention dedicated to each. These thematic methods of coding are considered more suitable for the sample sizes selected for in this research (Braun & Clark, 2006), but do not detract from the key objective of this research, which is to examine the experiences that are of "existential import to the participant" (Smith, 2011, p9).

## Reliability and validity

Quantitative approaches are typically assessed as rigorous through the traditional canons of reliability and validity. Reliability is achieved through stability (the stability of the measure over time); inter-observer consistency (consistency between raters on the recording of observations) (Field, 2006); and internal reliability (the consistency of respondents' scores with their scores on other indicators) (Bryman, 2004). Validity in experimental research is usually split into two categories, internal and external. Internal validity refers to the things that affect whether a true measurement has been

obtained using the measuring instrument. While external validity is concerned with the generalisability of the findings to the intended population (Henn, Weinstein, & Foard, 2006).

The task of achieving reliability and validity in qualitative research is not as straightforward, with some arguing that the 'unscientific' approach of qualitative research makes achieving them problematic. However, the view that qualitative research is 'unscientific' implies that it cannot possess any rigor and that the quantitative orthodoxy has the monopoly on 'what science is' or scientific knowledge. Woolgar (1996) is critical of this assumption, principally pointing out that definitions of science are not static and in fact change over time. Indeed, historically science was concerned with replacing conjecture and opinion with provable facts. However, when Popper (1959) introduced the criterion of 'falsifiability', he purported the opposite; a defining element of scientific theory was that it was falsifiable. Scientific practice and knowledge production is not, then, the simple application of a technical method (Woolgar, 1996).

Detailed qualitative research focuses on 'thick description' of the case rather than boasting the power of generality (Geertz, 1973). This was a trade-off made at the design level of this research. As Munck (2004) points out, qualitative research will always be limited to small numbers of observations gleaned from small samples of wider populations. If a qualitative researcher tries to compensate these small numbers by increasing the amount of observations, this can cause problems in terms of concept-stretching (a shift away from the recurring findings within focused the unit of analysis). When this occurs, concepts that fitted into one category tend to transcend that domain and thus no longer fit (Munck, 2004). Geertz (1973, p25) argues "the essential task of theory building...is not to codify abstract regularities but to make thick description possible, not to generalise across cases but to generalise within them." Implicit here is the detailed understanding of individuals' positions and a focus on their lived experiences and perspectives. Although traditional notions of reliability and validity are primarily quantitative concerns, such notions can be reconceptualised for assessing rigor in qualitative research. Adhering to such protocols can bolster credibility and can constitute a rebuttal to the criticisms of qualitative research. The criterion of trustworthiness, for example, embodies an

analysis-checking system underpinned by credibility, dependability, transferability, and conformability (Bryman 2004). By adopting trustworthiness in this research design and employing verification strategies, this research will be able to (as far as reasonably practicable) stand up to the rigors of reliability and validity.

In terms of validity, the fundamental task in this research is to affirm that data analysis and interpretations adequately reflect the phenomena (Henn, Weinstein, & Foard 2006). Henn, Weinstein and Foard (2006) argue that for qualitative research to achieve reliability and validity it needs to guard against 'reactivity', 'subjectivity', 'going native', and must promote reflexivity. Reactivity is being mindful of the way participants (consciously or unconsciously) modify their behaviour because they are aware they are being 'researched'. Psychology is well-aware of this issue and has been mindful of the influence of demand characteristics and social desirability effects in research (see Orne, 1991; Paulhus, 1984). For the issue of subjectivity, researchers must account for and justify the choices they make, such choices (the designing of research, the participants who are sampled, what information is recorded, how interpretations of data are generated) are in some way rooted or influenced by extant assumptions and knowledge. 'Going native' results when prolonged exposure to participants' worlds can lead to close identification with them and with the investigation. This can limit the objective stance of the researcher and consequently lead to distorted interpretations (Henn, Weinstein, & Foard, 2006). This is an important point, given that the researcher will be spending significant time in the prison environment. However, while some participants will be follow-up interviewed and will therefore have more contact time with the researcher, the maximum amount of interview time will be 3 hours across two sessions. This is not akin to the considerable time a researcher would spend within a focus group or when conducting ethnographic research (Bryman, 2012). Consequently, there is a low risk of the researcher 'going native'. Nevertheless, protocols are in place to ensure the researcher maintains a level of objectivity and distance from the investigation. These consist of undertaking formal sessions of reflective practice during the data collection phase, and subjecting sections of data analysis to a mode of inter-rater reliability (undertaken by the director of studies).

A credibility measure introduced through reflective practice was implemented by the researcher. Here, a diary, along with a journal of the fieldwork experiences, was routinely maintained during data collection. This ensured a level of mindfulness over the impact of the interviews on the participants but also the interviewer. It also ensured that early interpretations were noted in the purest form and not 'stretched' by latency effects. Dependability was achieved through auditing. This involved keeping detailed records of problem formation, observations, and interpretations, and offering them to a peer scrutinising procedure (Bryman 2004). Research findings and interpretations were also presented at conferences over the last 4 years, at HMP Whatton, internally at university seminars, and at supervision meetings. This ensured that findings were being captured and interpreted coherently and accurately, and allowed for the input from wider experts in the field. This is important, as transferability is dependent on how useful findings may be to other researchers in similar areas (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). It is believed that by investigating an underdeveloped area of applied forensic psychology, that this thesis will have transferability. Indeed, there are published peer-reviewed articles from this thesis.

This thesis also adopted verification strategies in order to bolster reliability and validity. This thesis adopted 'methodological coherence' as a verification strategy, where the research questions matched the research method chosen, which in turn matched the data collection and analysis procedures. Thus, research questions, decisions, and their convergence with analytical procedures were continually affirmed through an iterative process (Morse, Barret, Mayan, Olsen, & Spiers 2002). This research also adopted 'sampling sufficiency', which is a verification strategy that recognises that sampling must be appropriate and utilise those who best represent the research topic (as such, it closely mirrors theoretical sampling). The most appropriate participants were used for studies in this research. In chapter four, a broad sample of mixed offence type participants from three different prison sites were recruited. This sample was suited to the fundamental aim of this opening study, which was to explore the general dynamics of peer-support on a relatively broad level; to glean an understanding of what peer-support means to participants and how it 'looks' in the prison context. In

chapter five (study two), there was a need to move closer to the sense-making processes that participants appeared to be phenomenologically engaging. There was also novel utility in focusing on sexual offenders, and a chance to gain unique insights into how such offenders can re-story their 'selves' through enacting peer-support roles. As such, the smaller sample of sexual offenders was considered ideal here. As alluded to earlier, the studies in this thesis also adopted a measure of inter-rater reliability, which consisted of the research supervision team checking the interpretations of the main researcher. All interpretations made, which comprised the themes extracted from participants' transcripts, were deemed to hold consistency.

## Summary

This chapter has outlined the overarching methodological approach for this thesis and offered both a rationale and justification for the research design. It has detailed some of the main issues and challenges that can surface when carrying out qualitative research with offenders, and described the ethics and broad project protocols that were in place to overcome these. The procedures adopted for participant recruitment, data collection, and analysis have been fully outlined. Issues related to reliability and validity, and the trade-offs made at the design level of this research have also been discussed. In concluding this chapter and setting the methodological framework for this research, this thesis now progresses to the empirical chapters of this investigation.

## Chapter 4: Study 1 – Doing good, being good

### Introductory comments

This is the first of three empirical chapters in this thesis. As such, the data and analysis presented herein are intended to introduce the phenomenon of peer-support and how it exists in prison. To this end, a relatively large sample of participants gave their accounts in semi-structured interviews. A thematic analysis was performed on the transcripts resulting from these interviews, and the aim was to generate a broad but extensive understanding of what peer-support is, how it is experienced, and

what it can mean for the rehabilitation of offenders. To best outline how this aim has been achieved, a background of the previous research findings and literature most-aligned to the intentions of this chapter is provided. Following this, details of the participants interviewed in this study are presented, as is a reminder of their peer-support roles. A summary of the methods of data collection and analysis is then detailed, before the analysis and discussion, and finally a section of concluding comments are presented. The remaining two empirical chapters will also follow this structure.

## Background

This section recaps on some of the key points from the previous chapters, with the aim of fully framing the empirical findings that follow. As discussed by way of rationale, prison-based peer-support programs have existed in U. K. prisons for decades. While this is the case, such programs have received very little attention in the context of offender rehabilitation and desistance. Scholars have perhaps resisted such explorations due to the limits of any implications that can be drawn from desistance research that does not feature follow-up studies or re-arrest statistics. Indeed, research that does not adopt such methodologies cannot link the outcomes of a prison-based intervention with reduced reoffending. However, a shift in desistance research especially over the last two decades has seen greater importance attached to (ex)offenders' self-narratives – the way in which they make sense of 'going straight' (Laub & Sampson, 2001; Maruna, 2001; Vaughan, 2007). Moreover, growing attention is being given to the aetiology of the mechanisms that trigger an offender's decision to leave a life of crime (Maruna, 2001). Findings in this area depict desistance as a personal and subjective process, not characterised by a swift and abrupt 'knifing off' of a criminal past (Laub & Sampson, 2001; Maruna & Roy, 2007), or solely a set of reconstructed social bonds (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990), but a complex journey that involves a myriad of social and subjective changes (LeBel, Burnett, Maruna, & Bushway, 2008). Extensive research from desistance scholars (see Maruna, 2001 and Vaughan, 2007 especially), for example, has emphasised the importance of reintegrating offenders building subjective desistance narratives around their lives to help them understand why crime may no longer fit into their life-story.

Maruna (2001) posited that two main forms of such narratives can either see a person locked into a life of persistent offending or on the journey to 'going straight' and 'making good'. Persistent offenders, for instance, are more likely to engage 'condemnation scripts', which are characterised by helplessness, low locus of control, and a feeling of being condemned to a life of criminality (Ibid; McCulloch & McNeill, 2008). Conversely, desisting offenders construct optimistic 'redemption scripts', which afford individuals a sense of control over their futures and an opportunity to make sense of how and why such big transition (leaving behind a life of criminality) is happening. These latter narratives, Maruna argues, can provide offenders with hope, optimism, and the drive to continue striving for positive change when things get tough (Maruna, 2001). Maruna's work is especially important to this research, as it gives rise to the importance of the 'working identity' and acknowledges desistance as a gradual process which "tends to involve incremental shifts rather than a wholesale overthrow of the previous self-story" (Maruna, 2001, p86). It is this notion of 'incremental shift' that this research is particularly focused on, and in this chapter, questions regarding the impact of peer-support on such incremental change will be asked. The trade-off for neglecting to follow offenders through the gate, then, is the collection of rich and in-depth data from offenders whose narratives may illustrate very early *movements towards* desistance. This is important even with an absence of reconviction data, because, as Maruna asserts, "although ex-offenders do not describe themselves as desisting, they do talk about 'going straight', 'making good', or 'going legit'. These phrases imply an ongoing work in progress. One *goes* legit. One does not talk about having *turned* legit or having *become* legit. The 'going' is the thing" (Maruna, 2001, p26). The data in this chapter reflects the 'going'; how offenders can 'do good' within their peer-support roles and how this can provide them with the hope that they are going legit.

Along with the importance attached to desistance narratives, scholars have highlighted the role of subjective as well as social changes in the desistance process (LeBel, Burnett, Maruna, & Bushway, 2008). 'Turning points' such as marriage, a new job, relocation, or becoming a father (Laub & Sampson, 1993) are often categorised as social changes. Conversely, subjective changes may take

the form of shifts in personality and self-concept, and feature phrases from offenders such as "new person" or a "new outlook on life". Subjective changes have been described alongside words such as 'cognitive', 'internal', and 'identity', and refer commonly to personally meaningful goals, value systems, beliefs, and motivations (LeBel, Burnett, Maruna, & Bushway, 2008, p133). The distinction between these two forms of change is important, and promulgates the more contemporary and sophisticated definition of desistance as a long journey that can begin well before the cessation of criminal activity can be truly claimed. This definition highlights the need to understand an individual's mind-set before they may begin to consciously rationalise 'going straight' or 'making good', and before they may have lasted a sustained period of time without offending (Maruna, 2001). Put simply, exploring movements *towards* desistance is crucial in understanding and encouraging actualised desistance (Perrin & Blagden, 2014). This chapter, therefore, is especially interested in exploring the early narratives of incarcerated peer-supporters, and whether such narratives depict a potentially new and novel avenue through which desistance might be influenced in prison.

## Participants

This research project was approved by the Governors of three U. K. research sites (HMP Lowdham Grange, a category B male prison; HMP Brixton, a category C male prison; and HMP The Mount, also a category C male prison). The research was also passed through the National Offender Management Service's research application system. Recruitment was supported by the Safer Custody departments at all prisons, and featured leaflets which were disseminated to each of the peer-support program leaders. Following responses, forthcoming participants (N = 22) were security cleared by Safer Custody staff and letters were dispatched outlining the research. All participants were required to have relatively substantial experience of their peer-support role (6 months or more) and be active volunteers. They also needed to have served a total of two years in prison. These conditions were set so that quality explorations of the effects of upholding a peer-support role in prison could be



generated. Participants were offered no benefits in exchange for their involvement and participation was purely voluntary. Demographic information is presented in table 2.

*Table 2: Study 1 participant information*

	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Role*</b>	<b>Prison**</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Offence details</b>	<b>Sentence (years)</b>	<b>Time served (years, months)</b>
1	Jeremy	L	LG	58	Drugs	28	5, 9
2	Billy	HH	LG	43	Murder	16	9, 8
3	Scott	ST/B	LG	43	Attempted murder	25	7
4	Oliver	ST/B	LG	37	Customs & excise	11	4, 10
5	Mickey	ST/B	LG	45	Attempted murder	13	5, 6
6	Bob	B	LG	37	Murder	15	7, 8
7	Javid	B	LG	53	Theft	13	4, 10
8	Imran	ST	LG	35	Drugs	15	4
9	Khan	B	LG	38	Conspiracy to defraud	19	4, 5
10	Nikita	ER	LG	40	Kidnapping	11	3
11	Jackson	B	LG	34	Murder	17	8, 9
12	Sanjay	PAL	LG	50	Drugs	25	7

13	Joaquim	ER	LG	35	Attempted murder	8	5
14	Nova	B	LG	47	Murder	18	3, 6
15	Harry	R	B	35	Attempted robbery	5	2
16	Joel	R	B	52	Drugs	15	6, 2
17	Victor	R	B	38	Robbery	7	3, 4
18	Liam	R	B	28	Drugs	6	2
19	Jesse	R	TM	32	Theft	9	4
20	Shay	R	TM	44	Drugs	10	4, 7
21	Alex	R	TM	51	Attempted murder	18	7, 8
22	Hamad	R	TM	26	Drugs	9	3, 2

\*L = Listener; HH = Helping Hands Volunteer; ST = Shannon Trust Mentor; B = Buddy; ER = Equality

Representative; PAL = Prison Advice Line Operator; R = RAPT Mentor

\*\*LG = HMP Lowdham Grange; B = HMP Brixton; TM = HMP The Mount

## Peer-support roles

Theoretical models of peer-support, as described by DeVilly et al. (2005), are founded upon values such as mutual reciprocity, shared problem solving, and empathy. Two strands of prison peer-support schemes, 'prisoner listener' or 'prisoner befriender' schemes, place these values at their core. Whilst there is no clear definition of peer-support, especially in prison contexts, it is generally accepted to be a system of giving and receiving help. 'Help', in this regard, is widely talked about in terms of meaningful emotional exchanges (Mead, Hilton, & Curtis, 2001). As such, it appears that prison peer-support schemes can be differentiated from conventional employment on the basis that they are

centred on the values listed above, that they require some form of emotional exchange as a method of support, and that the support being provided is not entirely unidirectional. The peer-support roles included in this study were considered to fit within these parameters and as such, all possessed similarities to one another. The aim of this exploration is not to distinguish between each peer-support role but to present research relating to the experience of the participants whose roles lie within this dynamic. As such, the qualitative data in this study is representative of the sample as a whole and of peer-support as a holistic notion. Information relating to each peer-support scheme is presented in table 3.

*Table 3: Study 1 peer-support scheme details*

<b>Role title</b>	<b>Nature of support</b>	<b>Description</b>
Listeners	Emotional	Volunteer Listeners who are trained by the external charity Samaritans provide face to face emotional support to prisoners who request help (see Samaritans, 2012, for further information).
Buddies	Emotional & practical	Buddies can be paired with new prisoners who may require emotional support and also practical assistance when first adjusting to life in [a new] prison.
Helping Hands	Personal care	Helping Hands volunteers care for those less able to do so for themselves. This role can involve personal care duties as well as emotional and practical support.
Equality Representatives	Prison policy / prisoner rights	Equality 'Reps' intermediate between the prisoners they represent and the prison staff tasked with

		<p>ensuring equality related objectives are met. As such, this role requires some mediation between prisoners and prison staff with regards to equality issues. Race equality, all forms of discrimination, equality of opportunity, disability equality, gender equality, and the elimination of unlawful harassment are all core concerns for equality reps, and issues that they are likely to deal with on a daily basis (see MoJ, 2011, for further information).</p>
Shannon Trust Mentors	Educational	<p>The Shannon Trust is a UK charity that regulates a scheme whereby fluent readers are paired with those less able. Through this set up, Shannon Trust mentors help students through a reading program often over a period of several months (see Shannon Trust, 2005a, for further information).</p>
Prisoner Advice Line Operators	Prisoner advice and guidance	<p>‘PAL reps’, to which they are informally referred in the prison, are responsible for relaying or clarifying information relating to the running of the prison to fellow prisoners. Information such as how to submit certain application forms, or how to arrange a visit is typical of the advice PALs may provide to callers. PALs often operate in teams of two or three at any one time, for shifts up to 8 hours. All advice and guidance is given via telephone, from a designated room in the prison.</p>

RAPT Mentors	Substance abuse related emotional and practical support	RAPT mentors (prisoners who have completed an adjusted Twelve Steps substance abuse program) provide support to recovering prisoners through advice, guidance, and effective modelling of pro- social recovery attitudes and behaviours.
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## Data collection

Following ethical clearance, semi-structured interviews were conducted in purpose-built interview rooms at the research sites. Semi-structured interviews allow for the “exploration of the perceptions and opinions of respondents regarding complex and sometimes sensitive issues, and enable probing for more information and clarifications of answers” (Barriball & While, 1994, p330). For this reason, semi-structured interview schedules should begin with open, ‘grand tour’ questions and progress to specific lines of inquiry that feature add-on questions (Knight, Wykes, & Hayward, 2003). With this recommendation in mind, the interview schedule was divided into four sections and covered the following areas:

- Introductory questions – arrival into prison, initial perceptions of prison life, first encounters with peer-support schemes.
- Views and attitudes regarding peer-support work – initial perceptions of peer-support schemes, first involvement, motivations for volunteering.
- Impact of scheme involvement on the person – thoughts and feelings regarding peer-support role, exploration of how the role impacted on the individual and their experiences of imprisonment.
- Future – views of future in the context of the peer-support role, exploration of how this role has shaped thoughts about future self.

As this research used in-depth interviews, steps were taken to minimise researcher bias. Firstly, questions were open-ended and designed to be nondirective, allowing participants to describe their experiences in their own words without the views of the researcher being imposed on them. In addition, participants' own words are used to describe the phenomena of this investigation (Phillips & Lindsay, 2011). In order to try and minimise selection bias, the researchers actively recruited a mix of participants and attempted to reach as many prisoners within the prison as possible.

### Analytic technique

A phenomenologically-oriented strand of thematic analysis was adopted for analysis of the transcripts in this study. Braun and Clarke (2006) have defined thematic analysis as a qualitative method which focuses on how "individuals make meaning of their experience, and [how] the ways in which the broader social context impinges on those meanings, while retaining focus on the material and other limits of 'reality'" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p9). As such, thematic analysis is concerned with the sense-making processes that participants utilise to understand their experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is where this method of analysis directly aligns with the aim of this study, which is to elicit and develop an understanding of the participants' experiences of peer-support and the place of these experiences in their life stories.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a 6-step process. These steps were closely followed in this study. As such, analysis began with the reading and rereading of the whole texts (transcripts). Step two involved initial coding of the transcripts. This required the noting of emergent general constructs in the left margin, and more nuanced and recurring characteristics of the transcripts in the right. Step three required an initial sifting process, whereby emergent constructs were categorised into potential super-ordinate or sub-ordinate themes. This reduced and visual representation of the dataset aided step four, which was a process of reviewing (checking and contrasting with the data) the themes identified and the interactions drawn between them. Step five was to finalise the labels for the themes, and this involved associating them with extant literature and

concepts in order to capture their essence. The final step was to select extracts that would typify the participants' (as a sample on the whole) perceptions and experiences underpinning each theme, and then contextualise these within an analytical commentary. What follows is this commentary.

## Analysis and discussion

The perceptions of peer-support roles from participants, and their descriptions of their related experiences, are represented in the three super-ordinate themes and inclusive subordinate themes presented in table 4. The following section is a research- and literature-informed analysis. As such, participants' responses here are interpreted alongside extant theories, notions, and findings offered from scholars in the areas of imprisonment, offender rehabilitation, and desistance.

*Table 4: Study 1 superordinate and subordinate themes*

<b>Super-ordinate Themes</b>	<b>Subordinate Themes</b>
Doing desistance	Doing good being good Earning trust Pathways to good lives Doing redemption
Identity shift	Becoming a 'new me' Identity maintenance Receiving appraisals
Cultivating wellbeing	Collecting positivity Being needed Development of meaning and purpose Building resilience

## Superordinate theme 1: Doing desistance

This superordinate theme details some of the ways in which peer-supporters were able to prove to themselves and those around them that they were changing as a consequence of their work. Participants described the satisfaction that their roles provided them, and this seemed to stem from the fact that they were making a difference in the prison by helping others. Accordingly, they spoke about feeling better about themselves, being perceived as better people, and consequently feeling that they were 'doing good'. All of this amounted to a sense that participants were 'doing' change, and this seemed important to them in terms of how they were able to fuel redemptive episodes.

### *Doing good being good*

Extracts categorised under this theme related to the ways in which participants were not just 'talking good' but 'doing good'; they were demonstrating ample pro-social behaviours via their peer-support roles and enjoying the resultant impact they were having on the environment around them. Increasingly, there is recognition amongst the desistance literature, and in practice, that those serving time for offences must be provided with opportunities to demonstrate that change is occurring or has occurred. This is evidenced within the growing reliance on paid and unpaid 'active citizenship' roles within prison (Edgar, Jacobson, & Biggar, 2011) and the continual emergence of 'hands on' treatment programs that adopt primarily kinaesthetic teaching and learning techniques. Examples of these include sex offender treatment programs (SOTPs) and controlling anger and learning to manage it (CALM) programs, which have both incorporated techniques founded on art therapy, psychodrama, and role play principles. Such interventions not only allow for wider engagement from prisoners in terms of learning style differentiation and inclusivity, but also enable professionals to better monitor that change is truly taking place (Akerman, 2008). The participants in this study articulated how they were demonstrating positive behaviours via their peer-support roles that were unfamiliar to them previously.



*I can survive without a job if I have the mentor thing. I can pass my time and it's self-satisfying enough and it gives me enough reassurance to myself...I get my fix of redemption out of that. But, if I never had this job I would be unemployed and I'd just be banged up with nothing. To pass the time is important, but you have to do something good with it. If you were to do bad all the time, then you're a bad person. But committing a crime doesn't make you a bad person, you have to do something good along with it. That's redemption. Balancing the good with the bad. Saying to people how can I help you? Giving up your time. Imran*

Imran clearly articulates his desire to *do* something with his time in prison. He links his mentor role, which in its most basic functioning keeps him busy, with survival and with what appears akin to coping. Imran is upfront enough to admit he gets his 'fix' of redemption from doing his role, which seems to afford him some reassurance that he is not innately 'bad'. He goes on to distinguish the inherently 'bad' (those who persistently do bad things), with those who try to redeem themselves – who try to dilute the bad by helping others and giving up time to affect the environment in a positive way. In exploring the life stories of ex-offenders who 'went straight', Maruna (2001) found that reformed offenders often found fulfilment in generative behaviours and acting out of concern for others. Maruna identified a "prototypical reform story", within which reformed offenders had been able to find a "silver lining" in the negative situation resulting from crime. In Maruna's research, this silver lining was often characterised by utilising the experience of criminality and imprisonment as a source of wisdom to help others and continually 'give back'. This re-storying of the criminal career is said to enable offenders to make sense of a vast period of their lives which would otherwise remain meaningless and a source of despair. Imran is able to make sense of his imprisonment as a time to 'do good' and he alludes to how this distances him from 'doing bad all the time' and therefore *being* bad all the time. He speaks about how balancing the good with the bad (giving up time, trying to help others) represents a form of redemption. Imran presents something of a 'reform tale' here, and whilst preliminary and in its infancy, it may signify a crucial part of his desistance process (Maruna, 1997).

*It makes you feel good about yourself if, there is a case of someone that, that really needed your help and you can see that the help was needed, so it makes you feel good about yourself because, obviously, you are a prisoner that helps another prisoners, so it's...it's a good thing...it's not really like I see people on a regular basis, it's only a few occasions you know, there was a suicide guy that needed someone to talk to and I felt that he really benefited you know, and you know, as long as people need people like me, it's good isn't it.../...because they're much more open in front of us than the staff, especially in this prison, where the staff are quite ignorant to what is happening. They just come to tick the box. Oliver (Shannon Trust Mentor & Buddy)*

Oliver's extract is broadly about being needed and about self-worth – he describes his satisfaction in the knowledge that people need people like him. This points to the importance of basic human needs being fulfilled in prison, and to the well-being implications of having purpose and being autonomous, effective, and instrumental in some kind of operation or goal. Crucially though, the operation or goal for Oliver is characterised by doing good – helping people and offering a service that is much needed, 'especially in prison'. The dynamics of peer-to-peer helping enables Oliver to enact a good, prosocial, and helpful self, which affords him a heightened sense of self-worth. It's not important to Oliver that he is not able to make this difference on such a regular basis. He is simply grateful for whatever opportunity he gets to help. He cites helping someone with suicidal thoughts and how he felt good that the person benefitted. These types of experiences were recounted time and time again throughout all transcripts, and they point to the mechanics of the 'possible self'. A possible self, as described by Markus & Nurius (1986), is a future-orientated construct formulated by an individual in relation to hopes, fears and aspirations for the future. Possible selves draw on versions of the self in the past and those desired in the future (Meek, 2007). Participants in this study described feeling a great sense of reward from helping others, from 'doing good'. This appeared to offer some momentum

and desire to continue doing good and to consequently live up to *being* good. Peer-supporters get the chance to live up to better versions of themselves by convincing themselves that they can indeed behave like people they desire to be.

*The fact that you're helping, you're no longer seen as an animal, you're seen more as a carer, and overtime you become what your perception is really...so the officers come to me if they need help...you're seen as a sensible person or you have something to offer society, and therefore you start to believe you have something to participate...something to offer society, and...as people's perceptions of you change, your perceptions of yourself will change over time.*

Khan (Buddy)

Khan's extract explains how participants appeared to be constructing and moving towards possible selves through their roles. By behaving in prosocial and helpful ways, peer-supporters begin to be perceived as just that. Over time, this belief from external sources becomes internalised, and individuals gain a sense of fulfilment from morphing into improved versions of themselves. For many participants, this became something of a cyclic Pygmalion effect, with higher expectations continually yielding higher outcomes (Maruna, Lebel, Mitchel, & Naples, 2004), and possible selves becoming even greater possible selves. Promisingly, this was a dynamic enjoyed by many participants, who might otherwise have become consumed by the juxtaposed Golem effect (low expectation, lower outcome), i.e. being viewed as an animal and then behaving like one (Maruna, Lebel, Mitchel, & Naples, 2004). Through his peer-support role, Khan's character steadily becomes synonymous with someone who is sensible and has something to offer to the environment around them. This elevates Khan's self-worth but also leads to him "becoming what his perception is" (actualising the traits and behaviours that are expected of him). In this sense, peer-support roles appear to afford prisoners the opportunity to carve out pathways to desired selves (good people), which they can then focus on travelling ('doing good').

### *Earning trust*

Earning trust in a prison context is important for prisoners and can prompt positive change in offenders and feed into their narratives of desistance (Vaughan, 2007; Blagden, Winder, & Hames, 2014). The extracts within this theme display how important it was for participants to build trust and in doing so nourish their transitioning selves. Presser and Kurth (2009) have argued that the presentation of moral and trusted selves allows one to live up to such selves, it also enables a narrative that distances oneself from a negative identity.

*The staff request me to go in to speak to them, and use me as an intermediary...to be honest it's nice to have a position of trust, because when you're in prison, the one thing that first happens to you is that, there's an air of "them and stuff" with the staff and inmates. So it's nice for the staff to actually recognise that I'm a reasonable human being and that I'm approachable, and that I'm able to intermediary for them, and that I'm actually respected by them, because of what I do and achieve, so that's nice.* Nova (Buddy)

When Nova articulated his extract, he emitted a sense of relief at the notion of being able to move away from a position of distrust and from the divisive mechanics of prisoner/staff relations. He describes how his role encourages perceptions of him as a reasonable human being, and that this equates to a level of respect that would otherwise be difficult to generate. Nova defines his role as one of an approachable intermediary who is respected by prison staff, all of which is "actually recognised". He goes on to conceive these perceptions of him as products of what he does and achieves. Whilst perhaps not explicitly making the connection, Nova is describing a process characterised by 'doing good' and consequently enacting a 'good self', which receives validation from the appraisals of external actors. There is a body of literature within the realm of desistance that encourages this kind of process. For example, once again here, the enhanced expectation and trust in

Nova appears to embody the Pygmalion effect (high expectation high outcome) described by Maruna et al. (2009). This was a particularly buoyant phenomenon across all participants' accounts.

*Trust and respect. Trust...I mean there's not really much they can give you but you get respect, and that means you're doing well...you've behaved. And so when you're a mentor they look at you and say he's behaving, he's doing well. And you can get enhanced but I don't bother with all that. I can't even be arsed to apply for it. For me it's a mental thing. That's enough for me. For me, I don't get the enhanced out of it, I get the teaching the guy.* Imran (Shannon Trust Mentor)

As per Imran's extract, peer-support role holders seem to become recognised as good people, and this seems to have a self-fulfilling effect. Previous research in this area has also highlighted these types of processes. Stevens (2012), for example, researched 'rep jobs' (where offenders primarily residing in therapeutic community prisons are given some responsibility for policies or procedures within the prison) and found that the expectation placed upon participating prisoners often resulted in a range of previously non-existent prosocial behaviours. Whilst narratives of trust in offending contexts are often associated with how offenders make sense of change and transition (see, for e.g. Perrin & Blagden, 2014, p907-910 on untrustworthy 'old me' versus trustworthy 'new me'), extracts from both Nova and Imran more closely convey the experience of living up to a desired or 'possible self' (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Nova wants to be recognised as a trustworthy, reasonable, and approachable human being and he is being afforded the opportunity to do so via his role. Imran is also trusted and he continually justifies this faith in him. He gets respect for this, along with reiterated confirmation that he is behaving and doing well. For Imran, all of this is more important than the enhanced status he is eligible for and ultimately, he is simply happy "teaching the guy".

### *Pathways to good lives*

This subtheme relates to how participants verbalised the link between doing good things via their peer-support roles and consequently accumulating the satisfying outcomes that they may once have acquired from illegitimate avenues. This theme appeared therefore to rest on the theoretical underpinnings of the Good Lives Model of offender rehabilitation (Ward & Brown, 2004). Participants repeatedly alluded to how peer-support unearthed positive traits in those who upheld roles, and at times explicitly described accumulating states akin to ‘primary goods’ from carrying out their peer-support roles.

*It's good because I think everybody is good at something, I think some people don't realise what they're good at, and need help to realise that. But once people realise what they're good at they should receive help to promote what they're good at, because that gives them self-worth. I don't need to be in a gang if I'm a good hairdresser because I'm a good hairdresser. But if I'm a nobody, I'll carry on with these guys because they give me some worth – the gang are giving them some value aren't they, you're part of a gang where you've got a group identity, it's not an individual identity...but you've got some identity and some value. Whereas as, a nobody doing nothing on his own, doesn't have any value. Khan (Buddy)*

When asked what was good about being a Buddy in prison, Khan spoke about how the role has the propensity to extract skills that individuals may not even realise they have. Khan asserts that this is something that should be encouraged – that strategies should in place to both extract and then harness the prosocial skills that prisoners might have to offer. Unawares, he goes on to adequately describe the core tenets of the Good Lives Model, using the example of a gang member striving for identity and finding it in the wrong places. He illuminates how peer-support provides a sense of self-worth and value for those who uptake roles, and how individuals who are able to secure these positive states from legitimate avenues ultimately remove the motivations driving their gang membership (or

otherwise deviant pursuits). Khan's extract raises an important apparent feature of peer-support, one that was affirmed by other participants in the sample. This feature relates to how peer-supporters cultivate positive and prosocial identities by realising and honing a normative skillset. Two of the eleven primary goods described by Ward and Marshall (2004) (later refined with the assistance of Purvis, 2010) are useful in contextualising Khan's observations. Under the GLM, securing excellence in work and establishing connections to wider social groups (Ward & Brown, 2004) are considered crucial goals that desisting offenders must be able to work towards. As peer-supporters, the participants in this study were able to "realise and promote what they're good at"; they were able to surface skills and craft them (secure a form of excellence in work), within a network that they could establish a common bond with (connect to a wider social group). These goals are said to feature in the daily lives and motivations of all humans, who are intrinsically driven towards attaining the basic needs laid out in self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, in line with the fundamental assumption of the GLM, it is likely that those who offend at some point across the life course do so because legitimate pathways towards basic human needs (or primary goods) are blocked or unavailable (Ward & Brown, 2004). As such, while non-offending individuals may secure primary goods from belonging to constructive social networks (i.e. sports clubs or community centres) or having strong familial or intimate relationships, offending individuals may source them from illegitimate and damaging structures. According to Khan's observation, peer-support roles represent a prosocial structure and network that individuals can develop goals around and achieve primary goods from. Peer-support in this sense is an archetypal 'secondary good' – a socially legitimate avenue of routine activity that stimulates internal capacity building and skills accumulation (Ward & Gannon, 2006). Recurrent extracts from participants echoed the notion that peer-support empowers the individual to satisfy primary human goods in socially acceptable ways.

*Some people could definitely benefit by helping other people out, definitely. Because you know, like, the gang culture you got here. If you were intelligent you could tune that in the right way*

*because they always say they're there for each other because they always say, gangs, they're like family, but if you could twist it in the right direction...because the community sense, it's a good thing, but they just use it in the wrong direction, in terms of violence. But if you direct it in the right direction...because societies and communities are good things...so if you could twist it a little bit...but it takes someone who wants to do it you know. Who will sit and think how to do it you know. Oliver (Shannon Trust Mentor & Buddy)*

Oliver essentially outlines the practical application of the GLM. He discusses how an offender's deviant pursuits (i.e. through gang membership) can be rerouted by identifying the primary good that is being targeted and providing an opportunity for it to be secured elsewhere. He explains that a deviant gang is simply an illegitimate derivative of an otherwise pro-social community, and that if an individual's desire to be in a gang can be "twisted", then perhaps they can feel the same sense of community and belonging within a constructive environment. Oliver attests that the twisting is the thing; someone (practitioners or program facilitators) just needs to "sit and think about how to do it". He appears to suggest therefore, that peer-support may represent a route away from a criminogenic to a pro-social secondary good for some individuals. While Oliver verbalised this notion from the perspective of an onlooker rather than someone themselves harnessing the secondary good that is being described, others appeared to internalise the process he elucidates with some precision.

*When you save up for things...like if you wanted a car, you save up for it. You save every 2 or 3 weeks. If I wanted a car I'd go sell some drugs or I'd commit a crime to go and buy the car, but a normal person would save slowly slowly and buy the car and be rewarded. There's nothing more satisfying than getting what you want that way, and fulfilling your dreams...but criminals just take what they want. I realise now that's the wrong way of living. That's a jungle lifestyle. This mentor scheme has been good for that...and for me, I do it to progress...I get more*



*satisfaction from that than dreaming up some criminal scheme or being involved in other stuff.*

Imran (Shannon Trust Mentor)

Imran details how the methods he once relied on for accumulating his material wants belonged to a “jungle lifestyle”, within which he could take what he wanted. He acknowledges that the secondary goods – the illegitimate channels – that prototypical offenders might utilise to secure primary goods exist only in “the wrong way of life”. True satisfaction is not obtained from those channels, but rather from meaningful activity that denotes real progress. Imran seems to allude here to the superficial nature of criminal pursuits, and the idea that such pursuits do not equal those which require honest toil and determination (i.e. saving “slowly slowly” to buy a car). Imran voiced the words “dreaming up some criminal scheme” through a weary tone when he spoke, and emitted a sense of relief in having found the mentor scheme he is now a part of. Amongst other primary goods, the GLM stresses spirituality (finding meaning and purpose in life), pleasure (feeling good in the here and now), and creativity (expressing oneself through alternative forms) (Ward & Brown, 2004). Imran’s narrative departure from the “jungle lifestyle” appears to have aligned him to a more meaningful existence characterised by taking satisfaction from prosocial activity and deriving pleasure and basic needs from a better “way of living”. For many participants, peer-support gifted the same transitional opportunity.

### *Doing redemption*

An adjunct feature of ‘doing good’ across the transcripts in this study was ‘doing redemption’. This feature related to how peer-supporters were able to assure themselves that they were making amends in some way for the harm they accepted they had inflicted through the commission of their crimes. Importantly, however, participants were not only verbalising redemption or expressing a desire to make amends, they were *doing* it. In ‘giving back’ something positive through their peer-support roles, participants were effecting and evidencing their redemption – something they expressed a great longing for. As such, participants’ objectives to become ‘redeemed’ or at least

‘redeeming’ selves were being met by the routine normative behaviours they carried out within their roles. These behaviours were discernible and idiosyncratic, and were commonly described by participants as ‘giving back’, ‘helping’ and ‘making a difference’.

*It's self-satisfying when you look at someone like my person that I'm teaching...he couldn't speak a word of English, I mean a word. My man couldn't speak anything...and now he can speak, he can communicate. He works in the workshops, times are changing for him now. So now, I feel, when I look at him and I speak to him and that...it's satisfying in a way that I helped him. His life has changed, the way he communicates with people, he gets integrated more into the prison society and he doesn't need help no more. When you see him doing stuff like that it's satisfying that obviously you're the person that taught him...you're the person who helped him get that far. It makes me feel happy. In a way it's kinda like redemption, it's a way of giving back, you know, giving back to people less fortunate than you. It's kinda like, a way for you to come to prison and redeem yourself.* Imran (Shannon Trust Mentor)

Imran's extract denotes an archetypal 'redemption script' (Maruna, 2001). The redemption script has been defined as a "personally and culturally persuasive identity narrative" that desisting offenders use to "make good" a troubled past and edge closer to a "reformed self" (Maruna, 2001, p87). Such scripts are characterised, therefore, by a need to "make something positive out of a negative" (Perrin & Blagden, 2014), to "give something back" to the society in which harm was done, and to consequently fuel a viable and logical "recovery story" which can be used to validate claims of a "reformed me" (Maruna, 2001, p86). While Maruna and Ramsden (2004) have observed that offenders are often construed as self-centred and unable to empathise, they describe redemption scripts as an "inversion of this [apparent] egocentrism" (ibid, p142). Such narratives, then, are characterised by frequent themes of reciprocity, mutual helping, and making amends (i.e. 'giving back'). These themes underpin the meaning behind Imran's extract, which describes the self-satisfaction he feels from helping

someone to make improvements to their life. Imran can see the redemption he is doing all around him, especially in the interactions his mentee is now able to have because of his intervention. Imran himself directly tags this as a form of redemption, and goes on to make sense of his peer-support role as a chance to redeem himself in prison. Prison, consequently, takes on a new meaning for Imran because of the meaningful work he is able to enact through his role. This was a recurrent notion across the transcripts in this theme, and is important in that relates to the coping aspect of the redemption script. Considerable research reveals how individuals who experience life-threatening illnesses attempt to make sense of their adversity by searching for some form of benefit that can stem from what would otherwise be meaningless trauma (Holman & Silver, 1998). Maruna and Ramsden (2004) have argued that through a similar coping mechanism, offenders can assimilate their unwanted pasts and subsequent experiences of prison into a redemption narrative. This narrative can help offenders assign some utility to an otherwise prolonged period of wasted time, and can also represent a personal and subjective journey away from crime. In other words, redemption narratives, characterised by reciprocity and giving back, allow for the reconciliation of unwanted criminal pasts while simultaneously providing hope for the future (Maruna & Roy, 2007). This appeared to be why redemption scripts were so eagerly constructed by the participants in this study, and internalised with great satisfaction.

*I think, having done the peer-mentoring, to actually sit down with genuine empathy...I guess that's what I get out of it, I've realised skills, people skills that I've developed that I didn't have before. I have, a patience I didn't realise I had, teaching, hence why I feel I've got a career path when I get out...if, I get the same breaks. And there is you know, to be mundane...you do get a feeling of well-being and self-satisfaction, that you've been able to help someone. You know, they've been people who quit on me as well, they've not all been success stories but you know, if you can help one person during your time you know, without sounding too erm...if you can make a difference then, it's a lot better surely. If I can spend time passing on a few skills that I*

*do have to people, you know, through toe-by-toe, then I would hate to have gone through prison and not done that. I think that's kind of what I worry about, leaving with the same that I went in with. Or leaving with less than I came in with.* Mickey (Shannon Trust Mentor & Buddy)

Mickey describes how self-satisfying it is for him to be able to help people while serving time in prison. He admits that it's not always a case of "success stories", but that simply helping one person "would make a difference" – it would signify a more constructive and meaningful period of incarceration than that which many others experience as purposeless. Mickey depicts the notion of transforming a traumatic past into something constructive and applied. Within the depression literature, Taylor (1989) produced research showing that individuals who are able to engage the process that Mickey describes (essentially turning traumatic life experiences into something positive) are significantly less likely to suffer psychological distress and are less prone to depression than those who are unable to reconcile previous trauma. The 'positive illusions' that traumatised individuals can create for themselves thus constitute an effective coping strategy (Taylor, 1989). This has been a recurrent finding (Anderson & Bang, 2012; Fivush, 2005; Holman & Silver, 1998), and is important in understanding how peer-support affords prisoners the headspace to re-story otherwise wasteful and unwanted pasts into wisdom for the future (Maruna, 2001). Many participants in this study emitted a sense of self-satisfaction but also relief at having not wasted their time in prison and ultimately "left with less than they came in with".

*A lot of people just the do a job for the money...to be honest, but I'm not bothered if I do it for free...like I told you before, there are always Polish or Lithuanians or Russians coming to the jail and they're always asking me to help, and, even losing gym sessions and stuff like that, I do it...to help. Just for the help. Simple. Because I know how bad it is. I went through that so I know what it means.* Nikita (Equality Rep)

*I've got more experience and understanding of some of the stuff than some of the guys, so I'll give my feedback and that's what I'm here for, just try and give a bit of constructive feedback as well, try and build them up a little bit. I've been there myself you know...so I'm just there to offer them a bit of hope as well. That's part of my job.* Victor (RAPT Mentor)

The extracts from Nikita and Victor point to the importance of re-storying and re-assimilating trauma or significant challenges of the past. Both participants allude to having gone through the challenges that they now support others through. As such, they appear to have effectively reconstituted difficult experiences and created applied purposes for them. The satisfaction from doing this is evidenced in the assertion from Nikita that he would “do it for free”, and Victor’s assertion: “that’s what I’m here for”. There appears to be a cyclical relationship between the reconciliation of troubled histories, the utilisation of these for assisting others, and the fortifying of redemption. Participants in this study were ‘doing redemption’ (helping others) by utilising their deviant histories and this represented viable change and a movement away from an offending identity.

Shapland and Bottoms (2011) have illuminated the significance of this process, drawing on the findings of the Sheffield desistance study. Their model denotes a seven-stage desistance journey whereby, initially, persistent offending is in some way interrupted by triggering event (i.e. becoming a peer-supporter). This elicits the wish to try to change (wanting to give back, help others, feel redeemed), which connects to the way in which the offender thinks about themselves of their surroundings (feeling qualitatively different from a previous offending self). This shift in self-narrative leads to the offender taking action towards desistance (engaging in the recurrent prosocial behaviours associated with peer-helping). In circumstances where these attempts to desist are threatened by obstacles or temptations to return to crime, the desister must engage mechanisms that maintain momentums of change (McNeill, 2006). One of these change-reinforcing factors may be the ability to continually apply a criminogenic past, and the deficits that come with it, to helping others avoid similar challenges and barriers. Participants were doing this via their peer-support roles.

## Superordinate theme 2: Identity shift

This theme relates to the way in which peer-support roles influenced how prisoners viewed themselves. The peer-supporters in this study appeared to be re-storying their sense of self according to their roles. The routine activities and behaviours that came with such roles encouraged deep self-reflection in the participants, who observed how their prior selves might never have 'been able' to undertake such activities. As such, interviewees were hinging their working identities on their peer-support roles, and construing their selves according to the behaviours they were enacting through such roles.

### *Becoming a 'new me'*

'Being' a peer-support volunteer and becoming a 'new me' was a transitional experience alluded to by most participants in this study. Every participant described various ways in which they changed during imprisonment. These changes appeared to be heavily supported by peer-support roles in that such roles acted as a form of verification and validation that change had occurred. The 'new me' theme typifies the notion of personal transformation and is characterised by statements relating to qualitative differences in an acknowledged 'old me' and a 'new me'. In outlining such changes, participants often made comparisons between their past and new lives, and described the process of change they experienced. Participants' recognition of a past life and a subsequent process of change allowed them to reflect on their 'old me' and differentiate the 'new me'. All participants consistently talked about their old, offending selves as 'bad', 'destructive' or 'careless' and their new selves in prosocial terms such as 'positive', 'caring', and 'respectful'. In this sense, peer-support roles appeared to contribute to shifts in self-identity.

*The only thing I could say is, I just feel a bit better about myself really. I'm not an aggressive person, I'm not really, erm, in your face or nothing like that. So it's just really about my*

*personality I think, and how I can listen and help somebody, whereas before, I wouldn't have even thought about things like that. If I was out there, maybe it was because I was younger but, I didn't have no focus or anything. I was just a bit of an idiot; work, drink, work, drink, work, drink. I just don't think out there, if somebody had been talking to me about a problem, I'd have just said "yeah, yeah", and not really thought anything into it. But now, like yesterday, I seen someone twice in the morning, and he wanted to see me again in the afternoon, and you could tell it's part of me, the Buddy thing, because I knew he was abusing it. Because he didn't want me for any other reason other than he wanted a cigarette, so I'm not gonna waste my time seeing him. But I know for a fact, if there was a problem I'd have happily gone to see him. So I do feel like, being a Buddy is a little bit of a part of me now. I do feel that yeah. That's what I've noticed, I'm more of a caring person now than I was before. Jackson (Buddy)*

Jackson draws comparisons between some personality traits that defined his previous 'self' and some that he feels define him now. His 'old me' was characterised apathy towards people, especially the problems they might have had. He alludes to his past life taking the form of a general routine of unrewarding activities ("work, drink, work, drink"). The overall picture here is of a life of lethargy, in which Jackson confesses to being "a bit of an idiot". He emits a general sense of unfulfillment when discussing his old self, especially when he switches to reflecting on his current self. Jackson's 'me now' is more caring, but also more invested in something. He describes being relatively defensive over the integrity of the Buddy scheme – something he conceptualises as "part of me now". Here, Jackson has attached his self-identity to his role as a Buddy, and has consequently created a structure for new personality traits and behaviours to surface.

A sense of identity metamorphosis was emitted here (see Robinson & Smith, 2009). In terms of narrative storytelling, the peer-supporters in this study seemed to be fostering something of a 'rebirth' plot, whereby the individual makes sense of and eclipses a previous problematic identity or 'life story' with a more desirable and fulfilling one. This transformative process has been described as

a post-trauma coping mechanism that enables individuals to reconcile haunts of the past or unwanted histories (Holman & Silver, 1998; Robinson & Smith, 2009). It has also been linked to redemptive experiences, through which negative pasts are reconstituted as useful and positive (McAdams, 2006). This narrative of reconstruction was consistently elucidated by the participants in this study, who seemed to recognise the 'new me' as a consequence of realising the failings of the 'old me'. Importantly, these failings seemed only to be acknowledged as such retrospectively. By becoming peer-supporters and realising personal capabilities, participants were able to position 'old selves' in the context of new and improved ones. This appeared to afford participants with a sense of hope in terms of what might be possible in the future (i.e. the fulfilment of desirable future selves). Essentially then, peer-support provided many participants with an optimism about the capabilities of the self. In each of the participants' transcripts, there was an innate sense of pride in having become a 'new me'.

*Now. I feel like I've got time for people but before I didn't, before it was all about myself...it's helped me grow up. Like I said, it's helped me think about the bigger picture, it's helped me think...helped me realise it's a big world out there, it's a massive world out there. And there's people that need help, you know what I mean. I'm one person. And if I can help as many people as I can I will, because I think the reward for that is...I wouldn't say easing my conscience, but it's sorta...I think it makes me feel a better person, about myself. I think I feel...cleaner. D'you know what I mean? I think, my conscience feels cleaner. I think, if I can help somebody I will. But, before...I'd help someone if there was the opportunity, but now I think I'd look for it. I think I'd look for it now. Billy (Helping Hands)*

Billy's old and new me qualitatively diverge on the construct of selfishness. In a similar way to how Jackson spoke of his old self, Billy also alludes to once being "all about himself". This was a buoyant theme across all participants' accounts – they described transitioning from being internally-oriented and self-centric to becoming more socially active and caring of others. This is especially evident in how



Jackson observed himself as “more caring now than before”, and how Billy attests to taking advantage of any opportunity to help people – in fact, he “looks for it now”. Billy alludes to feeling rewarded by his newfound perspective on life and his objective to help others. He makes a connection to his conscience. The narrative here is reminiscent of that embedded in a prototypical redemption script (Maruna, 2001), and this is a testament to how many of the processes underlying peer-support in this study interact. Billy feels “cleaner” as a product of his work, and this appears to generate his motivation to keep searching for opportunities to help people. He appears to be enjoying a cycle of prosocial behaviour, followed by episodes of redemption, which in turn motivates further prosocial behaviour. This cycle contributes to the affirmation and viability of the ‘new me’, which appears of great importance to participants in that it allows for the construction of desired selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Meek, 2007) and the forward momentum required to actualise them.

### *Identity maintenance*

As per the ‘new me’ theme, peer-support roles, for many, represented a chance to distance themselves from unwanted prior selves. As outlined above, it is important that desisting offenders are able to do this, because remaining consumed by the feelings despair, shame, and guilt associated with a deviant history can keep individuals locked in cycles of destructive behaviour (Maruna, 2001; McCulloch & McNeill, 2008). An important feature of peer-support therefore, is that it allows for the discovery of new skills, the rehearsal of prosocial behaviours, and ultimately the creation of new selves. However, participants in this sample also delineated an identity maintenance feature of peer-support that wasn’t so much about enabling movements away from previous identities, but rather supporting the retention of pre-existing positive traits and behaviours. This theme therefore, points to the importance of stability as well as change in the construal of self-identity.

*It’s something I’ve done in the past, we used to do a lot of charity work and stuff. Because of that it’s kind of engrained in our religion and culture as well, more religion-wide – you should*

*always give, you should always help the needy, help the poor, whether it be financial or emotional. Support in some way or another, you should always give. I think Islam is the only religion in which it's compulsory to give 2% of you incomes to charity, but it's not just about the money it's being there to help people if they need it, and so it's engrained. And its continuing with that, it's important to be able to still do that. And it feels good, it gives you some self-worth, that you can still help others no matter how restrained or incarcerated you are, you still have the ability to help others, and sometimes a smile can make a big difference. Or some kind words. It does help people. Khan (Buddy)*

In contrast to the common trend across other themes that denoted a tendency for participants to seek to move away from their pasts, Khan cites how he's been able to harness some positive aspects from his. He describes how helping people and giving have always been things he's done in the past. He attaches these behaviours to his religion, and illuminates the importance of continuity in terms of upholding his values making a difference. "No matter how restrained or incarcerated", it has been important for Khan to "still have the ability to help others". This highlights the importance of prisoners not only being able to cultivate new skills, but being able to hold on to stable traits that define the positive aspects of who they are.

Many criminological theories relating to offender reform depict in some way that significant changes to the self are required for the achievement of desistance. The notion of turning points (Laub & Sampson, 1993), for example, has frequently given credence to the idea that offenders can overthrow a previous life-course trajectory after gaining employment or entering a marriage (Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998; Uggen, 2000). The subjective changes that supposedly come with such turning points are commonly described with great magnitude. Unchallenged, this trend can give rise to the notion that overhaul transitions are essential for offender rehabilitation (see, for e.g., Maruna & Roy, 2007, for a review of the notion of 'knifing off'). However, there is theoretical support to suggest that stability can be just as important for the well-being and thus progress of offenders. Ross

(1989), for example, argued that how individuals make sense of their personal histories hinges on implicit theories of “stability” and “change”. A person’s self-identity is derived from their perception of temporal consistency in terms of how they construe themselves (Rocque, Posick, & Paternoster, 2016). Moreover, people make sense of their ever-transitioning selves in terms of how ‘the same’ they are as before. This indicator of sameness can be important in enabling individuals to make sense of who they were, who they are now, and who they might be changing into (Blagden, Winder, Gregson, & Thorne, 2014). Khan is able to ground himself by holding close to him the values, beliefs, and traits that he perceives to be part of his stable identity. Peer-support, therefore, enabled many participants to make sense of their selves from both the perspective of stability and change. This was a discernible notion across many extracts and seemed to contribute to constructive self-reflection.

*If I was to say that I receive anything, I would say that I get satisfaction from helping others, erm, because for me, I’ve always been a people person and I’m always quite happy to help anyone I come into contact with or if they’re suffering in a bad way or in whatever sense. And so for me it’s just about the satisfaction of helping somebody. It means that for my presence in the world, I’m here to do good, and I’m here to help others because, it’s just something in my heart and soul that I’ve felt since being a child, I’ve always felt happy to make the world a better place for my being in it, if I can put it that way. So if I wasn’t a Buddy I’d still probably have people come to me and ask for advice and guidance and if I could help them I would, but erm, that’d be just in a voluntary nature I guess. I would always be altruistic because that’s just who I am. Nova (Buddy)*

When many participants described giving back or helping others in their transcripts, they also alluded to energising narratives of change, reform, and redemption. For these participants, the giving back was a new feature of their lives and something that prompted novel yet self-satisfying realisations (i.e. that they were a good or better person). For Nova, this phenomenon is more nuanced. Instead of

articulating that ‘doing good’ is aiding his movement away from an unwanted past, he suggests that his “presence in the world” has always been fundamentally about helping others. He iterates in a variety of ways that this is a stable trait (“I’ve always been a people person”, “it’s something in my heart and soul”, “that’s just who I am”). Nova’s perceived stability of these qualities is emphasised by his assertion that people would still approach him even he wasn’t a Buddy in an official capacity. As such, he clearly values this aspect of his self-identity, and it is something he is keen on continually reaffirming. This points to the importance of understanding how offenders arrive at self-satisfying depictions of themselves; some appear to transition from a discernible unwanted self to a more desirable one, and others appear able to identify positive stable (pre-existing) traits and take action to stimulate them. The outcome may be similar – individuals who are able to give back and ‘do good’ invariably appear to ‘feel’ good and able to distance themselves from doomed identities. However, it may be crucially important to acknowledge the variation in the journey, and provide interventions that respond to this variation (not every offender will arrive at the same desired outcome through the same processes and channels). The flexibility of peer-support in this regard may be one of its key contributions, as it relates to the principles of responsivity and offender-led reform (Bonta & Andrews, 2007). Through enacting peer-support roles, participants are able to engage personal and subjective sense-making processes that mould around their individualised circumstances and life-worlds. This is an achievement that formalised rehabilitation interventions have struggled to attain (Wormith & Olver, 2002), and there may be reason, therefore, to consider the utility of peer-support alongside other structured programs.

### *Receiving appraisals*

What was particularly striking about all the participants’ extracts within this theme was the need for prison staff approval. Participants consistently articulated how the prosocial behaviours they were displaying through their peer-support roles were appreciated by prisoners and staff. The appreciation

from staff seemed to be especially impactful for participants, who spoke with great satisfaction about being viewed as someone of worth by prison officers, psychology staff, or others.

*The officers come to me if they need help, if they've got issues with a particular inmate and they'll say "look, can you come and have a chat to this person, is he OK, is everything alright" and often when I come back on the wing there'll ask me to see what the issue is before they have to give him warnings or nickings, so, you know...you start to believe you have some worth.*

Khan (Buddy)

All participants spoke of experiencing negative labels prior to becoming peer-support volunteers and how this changed as a product of their roles. Khan's extract illuminates how he has been able to shape how people view him by helping others and being an active citizen on his wing. Khan discusses how upholding such roles can allow prisoners to be viewed in more prosocial ways, as opposed to animals. He goes on to explain that enacting such roles and receiving appraisals that acknowledge change is taking place leads to change being actualised, as per the Pygmalion effect (Maruna et al., 2009). Khan ends his extract by discussing self-worth, and how upholding a role such as that of a Buddy can instil a feeling of societal value and belonging. Through enacting peer-support roles, it seems that prisoners have a chance to earn a more positive image. The crucial aspect of this notion is the earning – the process of proving worthy of an appreciated and prosocial identity. Maruna and LeBel (2003) have called for strengths-based approaches with offenders and ex-offenders that focus on building positive skills and constructive self-narratives. It is argued that such approaches are more likely to motivate individuals to achieve 'earned redemption' (Bazemore, 1999), and enable them to 'go straight' after leaving prison. As such, promoting desistance should be centred on providing offenders with chances to build strengths and consequently sustain 'momentums for change' (McNeill, 2006). For the participants in this research, peer-support appeared to be one such chance. This is indicated in how Khan details that in time, officers began to see him as a sensible person and as having "something to

offer society". The external appraisals that peer-supporters seem to incur constitute a form of earned redemption. This appeared to be of unique importance to participants, and has implications in terms of how behaviour change with prisoners can be encouraged.

*It made me feel good...it made me feel, like now...I'm giving back a little bit...and the staff notice that and they start to give you some respect. They realise you're not just wanting to kick off or whatever, but that you're actually doing something to help people, I do like helping people. I'd help an old woman across the road, I'd help someone pick up their shopping...so, and I can't help anyone in prison, you can't do nothing for anybody without..."well what you doing that for"? They question it "what, are you trying to bully him or get something out of it?"...questioning you all the time. But when you do this job no one questions you. Even the staff start to think you're a good person, and that's a nice thing really. Liam (RAPT Mentor)*

Liam describes how staff began to respect him as a consequence of his peer-support work – they realised that he wasn't "just wanting to kick off". There is an allusion here that prison staff have a default distrust and cynicism for prisoners, and that actions denoting the contrary are necessary in reversing these assumptions. Indeed, research generally highlights fractious relationships between prisoners and prison staff, and an inherent relational dissonance between the two groups that is enforced by mutual distrust (Crewe, 2011). However, Liam describes a way in which he was able to reshape how staff viewed him. His helping behaviours represented that of a good person, rather than someone who should be questioned and met with suspicion. Liam describes how it's a nice thing to be able to break down barriers in this way, and he speaks with general positivity about his role and status within the prison. This was the case for many participants who alluded to being able to earn trust, respect, and a better social image.

A notable feature of the extracts within this theme was the surprise participants seemed to have at being able to win over staff and cultivate more constructive relationships. Articulations of this

feat were emitted with a sense of having 'achieved the impossible'. Liam typifies this with "even the staff start to think you're a good person". The apparent challenge in reversing the negative expectations from staff also seemed to be the reason why doing so was so satisfying. Social identity dynamics may be at play here. Prison staff and prisoners represent significantly divergent social groups; the good and the bad (Crewe, 2011; Sparks & Bottoms, 1995). This can to some degree explain the inconceivability that participants seemed to have at the prospect of closing barriers between themselves and staff members (especially prison officers). Doing so, however, represents a social identity shift from 'bad' to 'good'. Some of the phrases used by the participants in this study suggested that appraisals from prison staff were enabling them to move away from prisoners as a social group, and towards the pole construct of that group – prison staff. In social identity theory, to reaffirm belonging to a desirable group, individuals will carry out behaviours that gain the approval of group members (Brown, 2000). When these behaviours are rewarded with appraisals from members of the desirable group, the individual's self-esteem is boosted, and their desired identity is reaffirmed (Haslam & Reicher, 2006). While the participants in this study may not necessarily wish to embed themselves within a prison staff 'outgroup', they appeared desperate in many ways to move away from being socially identified as criminals, untrustworthy cons, or simply bad people. Many participants were achieving this by earning positive affirmations and behavioural appraisals from those who represent the pole of their assumed social group. For these participants, to be considered a good person by staff was to have officially earned redemption to a large degree. This was an important contribution of peer-support.

### Superordinate theme 3: Cultivating wellbeing

The subordinate themes that make up this section relate to the ways in which peer-supporters seemed able to cultivate an improved sense of personal wellbeing, and how they were able to enhance their broader social environment. Participants here were experiencing prison in much more positive ways than might be expected. This was principally a product of being kind to others and generating positivity

as a consequence. By being an 'active citizen' and possessing a purposeful role in the prison, participants were able to feel needed and derive a sense of meaning from their period of incarceration. This contributed to a generalised sense of optimism and positivity.

### *Collecting positivity*

The processes being described in this theme were typified by participants taking control of the present moment, allowing themselves to think and feel, and consequently experiencing a sense of mastery over their own 'journeys' or transformational experiences. For the participants in this research, peer-support roles appeared to prompt deep self-analysis and offer them greater control over their own feelings and challenges. More simply, they fostered participants' accumulation of positivity.

*I think it's...the reward I get, me personally, is...probably to see somebody happy, you know what I mean? To see them climb out that pit. Everybody's in a hole at some point in their life, and to see them climb up that ladder and think "right, today is a new day" I think always...they don't need to say summit, it's what I see with my own eyes that I find rewarding – seeing positivity instead of negativity on people's face. Billy (Helping Hands)*

For Billy, his role enables him to seek out positivity and consequently lift his environment. Positivity is important for Billy and he associates it with a sense of personal reward, especially when he "sees it with his own eyes". Whilst there are no studies exploring the dynamics underlying Billy's positivity-sharing in a peer-support context, some of the research exploring religiosity and coping in prison can help in contextualising his extract. Ellison (1992), for example, produced research that illuminated the mechanisms via which religiosity could be linked with coping in prison. It was argued that religious individuals are more likely to engage in religious role taking that is based on prosocial scriptural behaviours such as treating others with respect, kindness, and empathy. Individuals who routinely behave in these ways are more likely to internalise such behaviours and actualise more positive selves



(Ellison, 1992). Whilst Billy did not verbalise any connections to any religion, he appears to be employing a similar set of behaviours described by Ellison; he is able to lift his own mood by doing what he can to help others and create an environmental sense of positivity. Indeed, research exploring altruism has consistently revealed a strong correlation between the well-being and happiness of those who are emotionally and behaviourally compassionate, fuelling the assertion that “it’s good to be good” (Post, 2005, p66); Billy’s extract transmits this message. However, on a more basic level, Billy describes how, through having a constructive input in his life, he is able to approach each day with a fresh and positive attitude. This appeared to be a common benefit that participants enjoyed from their roles.

*Hope is really important in prison, as I said I think men need purpose and hope is a purpose, it’s a mental purpose, and this role is like giving yourself positivity when you’re in a situation of negativity, and it’s like in science, positives and negatives balance each other out so, you need something to create that equation to give you the ability to get through those dark times, so hope is definitely important, without hope you have nothing. Nova (Buddy)*

Nova connects his ability to generate positivity from his role with hope. Speaking pragmatically, Nova acknowledges that in his present situation, characterised by negativity, he is likely to need as much positive input in his life as possible. In diluting the negativity engrained within his prison life, Nova’s peer-support role restores some balance, which makes life more manageable and allows him to get through the day, especially the darker days. For Nova and many other participants, establishing an inflowing channel of positivity went a long way to making each day easier to get through and to creating a forward momentum which made the future look much less gloomy. As such, peer-support roles appeared to inject a sense of hope and belief in participants, during a time they may have otherwise lost it (Marsh, 2011). Dhami, Ayton and Loewenstein (2007) have proposed that in order for prisoners to adjust to imprisonment and serve out sentences constructively, they need to be able

to have control over their lives and counter feelings of hopelessness. Billy, Nova, and several other participants alluded to the ways in which they were able to do this.

### *Being needed*

In describing self-determination theory, Ryan & Deci (2000) have argued that humans not only need to establish a sense of autonomy and purpose in their lives, but need to feel needed by others and by their surrounding environment. Establishing this basic need is one of many factors that can enhance an individual's human and social capital and thus their connectivity to the prosocial bonds around them (Lochner, 2004; Wolff & Draine, 2004). Researchers have argued that enabling prisoners to secure states and traits that attach them to socially constructive outlets is the key to effective reintegration (Mills & Codd, 2008; Rose & Clear, 2003). The extracts within this theme depict how prisoners were able to satisfy the innate desire to be needed. In doing work that makes a difference and consequently cultivating niche purposes for themselves, the participants in this sample were able to speak about their indispensable roles with some pride and satisfaction.

*When you see the relief on the face of other inmate that suffers you know, we understand each other as we're going through the same thing, similar things, obviously if someone tries to kill himself, I'm never gonna be able to understand because I'm a different kind of person you know, but still, at least, partial understanding. There is a connection between us because we're inmates, on the same side of the walls you know. I think every person needs to feel needed, so, this is...a good thing obviously. Because like, our families are far away, so, you got no relationships as such in the prison so, if there is need...we satisfy our basic instincts. Yeah, it's a good thing. Oliver (Shannon Trust Mentor & Buddy)*

The question initially put to Oliver was "what is it that you get from being a peer-supporter?". In response, he describes the great satisfaction he takes from the help he's able to give others. Simply

seeing the relief on the faces of those he is able to support is reward enough for him. It is not only this that satisfies him, however. His extract illuminates two clear indicators of the way in which he feels needed. Firstly, Oliver is uniquely valuable in the fact he is able to make connections with other prisoners that staff (and perhaps others) cannot. Being on “the same side of the walls” represents a context in which Oliver can carve out a niche role in helping others and making a much-needed contribution. Secondly, Oliver is needed because of the importance of his work – he can often find himself supporting individuals with suicidal thoughts. There is perhaps no greater call for help than this. Being there for those people and being able to provide some relief from such great emotional burden is clearly something that is needed in prison, and Oliver tends to it. However, it appears that Oliver needs the scheme too. He mentions being removed from family and from relationships (what Sykes, 1958, referred to as two core pains of imprisonment) and alludes to how satisfying basic needs through his peer-support role fills this void. This was a notion articulated by many participants.

*It gives you a purpose really, while existing in prison. You know, you could be like...you're like the 5<sup>th</sup> emergency service, and sometimes the officers would come up to me and they'd go “oh, come on, it's kicking off down there, go and have a word with 'em?”. And when you go down there, and you quieten them down, and they stop...and the officers go “ahh thanks for that, we couldn't get him to stop doing what he's doing”, you do go back with a bit of worth, a bit of self-worth, and you think “oh bloody hell I've...I made a difference today”. And the perk I guess is, your door's always open, it opens when the cleaners open, so you're not always locked up. It's a bit of recognition I suppose. Jeremy (Listener)*

As with many participants' extracts, Jeremy's extract is ultimately about having some purpose. More intricately, however, it is about how he is able to envision himself as vital in the prison. He tags his role as the fifth emergency service, and indeed the work of prison Listeners is crucially important. Listeners can be called out by fellow inmates at any time of the day or night to respond not only to suicidal

thoughts but also suicide ideation and sometimes action. Additionally, there are many reported cases of Listeners being relied upon by staff to help calm volatile prisoners (Jaffe, 2011). Jeremy describes how he himself has been in this position, and how the recognition he gets from staff for being able to do something they aren't gives him a sense of worth. The fact that Jeremy and other Listeners are required across these two structural levels (prisoners and staff) emphasises the importance of their roles, and perhaps why they are able to feel needed and that they "made a difference today".

*It has made me aware that you can make a difference in a prison. Although you feel hopelessness, if you put your mind to it there are things you can do that can instigate changes...people come to you for advice, not just prisoners...sometimes the staff will you know, ring you up for advice and say, you know, what was discussed by the director...because sometimes the director and the senior management team can be a bit aloof...but I have direct contact with them on a weekly basis, so we discuss things with them for a couple of hours so you know, it's highly...it's a valued position. And I suppose you feel good. Your voice is being heard and you're like the voice of other prisoners. Sanjay (Prisoner Advice Line Rep)*

A consistent characteristic amongst all extracts within this theme was that they all depicted peer-support roles as crucial, vital, or of high importance. Sanjay's extract relays the same here. He describes how his work brings him closer to staff and even to senior management. Having "direct contact with them on a weekly basis" affirms to Sanjay just how much he is needed – how highly valued his position is. These narratives from participants transcended the dynamics of simply having a purpose or 'something to do'. Rather, peer-supporters appear to be indispensable in prison; they are busy, respected, and heavily depended on. For Sanjay, it feels good to be heard and he is needed for he represents a voice for other prisoners. For others in this sample, they were needed for their ability to calm people's anxieties or help them with whatever stressors they deal with on a daily basis. Whatever the indicator for feeling needed was for participants, they were all able to consider

themselves of high value, high self-worth, and ultimately important. Such self-perceptions are not common amongst prisoners, with research consistently noting that prison populations are typically highly anxious, long-term depressed, depleted of hope and subjective well-being, and low in self-esteem (Castellano & Soderstrom, 1997; Fichtler, Zimmermann, & Moore, 1973). These states and traits are commonly associated with failed reintegration attempts and increased (re)offending (Beech, Friendship, Erikson, & Hanson, 2002; Gendreau, Little, & Goggin, 1996; McLaren, 1992). However, instead of becoming consumed with the shock and despair of having found themselves in prison, succumbing to the pains of imprisonment (Crewe, 2011), and allowing their perceptions of hope, self-worth, and personal value to plummet, peer-supporters appear to fuel a positive forward momentum that keeps them optimistic and from feeling that they are doomed to deviance (McCulloch & McNeill, 2008). While this apparent protective element of being a peer-supporter could in fact be undermined by reverse causality / selection bias mechanics (the prisoners that opt to become peer-supporters might already be 'well'), many participants felt that their role had a direct influence on how they experienced prison and themselves.

*I: How would you feel if your role was taken away from you?*

*P: Unsettled. Unsettled. Erm...worried, unfocused, probably more cynical, I can't be 100% on that but erm...it's hard to think what I'd be like but I could not imagine life without it. It would be as bad as it gets, plus, if you're not doing anything productive it means you're spending more time in your own head, in not a good environment. Erm...and those things become negative. If you're going in the right direction then you can be optimistic, if you're doing something like that, if you're doing a course or something that might benefit you when you get out. If you take that away you take away the only thing that keeps a lot of people going in prison, and that's hope. And that's why many people don't cope because you take away hope from people. Mickey (Shannon Trust Mentor & Buddy)*

Mickey's extract is a testament to the importance that the participants in this sample attached to their roles. He strings together a description of how the mechanics of having a peer-support role operate and how they ultimately represent a protective structure for prisoners. On the most basic level, peer-support roles provide a purpose – a constructive use of time; time which can be spent doing something positive and meaningful. The impact generated from this provides prisoners with a sense of being valued and needed. This enhanced sense of self-worth is continually validated by the tangible difference peer-supporters can see happening around them. All of this makes for a positive energy, a forward momentum (or what Mickey describes as direction), which propels peer-supporters into a space where they are productive, optimistic, positive, and hopeful. Importantly, this space is not something that participants were familiar with or enjoyed prior to becoming peer-supporters, it was something their roles afforded them, and it is of such importance that Mickey, for one, "could not imagine life without it". Unsurprisingly then, having all of this taken away would leave Mickey, and likely others, "unsettled" – in a situation that would be "as bad as it gets". To not have a peer-support role for many would be to not have the strength, hope, and belief to sustain their optimistic perspective – "the only thing that keeps a lot of people going in prison".

### *Development of meaning and purpose*

All participants expressed that roles provided meaning and purpose in prison. The statements that comprised this theme were most commonly elicited from either of the following questions: "what does it mean to you to be a peer-supporter?" or "how would you feel if you were suddenly told you can no longer be a peer-supporter?". The former question directly explored the meaning participants attached to being a peer-supporter, or how they made sense of this aspect of their world. The latter question helped participants visualise what prison life would be like if they were not peer-supporters. When participants did this, they conveyed a genuine fear of not having their role and their predictions of what life might be like without it were bleak.

*If I couldn't do this, if they stopped me and said "look, you need to stop cheering people up". I think I'd be in that situation – what's the point? I think I'd never move out my cell, I think I'd be, I dunno, 25 stone, bored out my mind. Thinking, life's permanently against me, erm...I don't think it would be a good place to be honest, I really don't, I don't think it'd be a good place...you get a lot of respect, you know what I mean? Some of the lads get respect for being arse-hole bullies, but, I get the respect for helping somebody you know, and that means more to me. A load of lads in here will shake my hand, "how you doing Bill", they'll shake my hand, members of staff...they'll shake my hand as well you know. Billy (Helping Hands)*

Many participants described something of a grieving period they envisioned they would go through, in the case that their role would be taken away from them. Losing the meaning and purpose that comes with upholding a peer-support role in prison was a fearful prospect for participants. Billy describes how he would likely be projected into a state of morbid fatalism if he was told to "stop cheering people up". He predicts the graveness of prison life without this purpose, asserting "I don't think it would be a good place, I really don't". Billy's meaning and purpose in prison is derived from the positive relationships he is able to cultivate with others, and the harmonious social environment that this affords him. This was a commonality for participants in this study – peer-support enabled them to construct a personal meaning, which assisted with passing the time in a more self-satisfying way. Others described the more mundane and ritualistic nature of prison, and how peer-support roles offered some relief from the stagnancy of incarceration.

*You can become stagnant if you do the same job and the time drags, whereas changing things keeps your mind fresh...the time would drag stuck behind your door doing some mundane stuff...and your mind will...you'll have negative thoughts and it's a downward spiral really.../...it would be very hard to pass the time and very mentally depressing, and you'd start*

*thinking about the fact that you're in prison. Whereas doing a role, it kind of takes your mind off the fact that you're in prison. You sort of forget, in a sense.* Harry (RAPT Mentor)

*It would be dead. Absolutely dead. I might have worked, but it would just be the same thing every day; work, sleep, work, sleep. Nothing there really. Might as well just take the tele away and just leave you in a room as well because it would just be the same thing every day anyway.* Shay (RAPT Mentor)

Both extracts above illuminate the routine of prison life. This is illustrated as a life of nothingness, which can entrap a person into a “downward spiral” towards insanity (a “mentally depressing” mindset, filled with “negative thoughts” and the feeling of being “absolutely dead”). In Goffman’s (1969) depiction of the total institution, the features of a ‘normal life’ are eroded. Instead, all aspects of life are conducted in the same place, governed by the same authority figure, and comprised of mundane routines. Crewe (2011) has argued that such a context can coerce inhabitants into a state of ‘dull compulsion’, characterised by a fatalistic acceptance that “that’s just the way it is”. In prison, this engenders an environment typified each member's daily activity being universally the same - with “the contents of the various forced activities...brought together as parts of a single over-all rational plan purportedly designed to fulfil the official aims of the institution” (Goffman, 1969, p314). In simpler terms, prison is structured in a way that removes autonomy from inhabitants and forces an intense degree of ‘sameness’. As Shay predicted, “it would be the same thing every day” if he wasn’t a peer-supporter. Peer-supporters, to a certain degree, were able to break from this world of sheer subjugation; they were able to source a personally meaningful level of purpose and “take their minds off the fact they were in prison”. They were able to “sort of forget, in a sense”. This was a crucially important contribution of peer-support roles, and opened space for a generally more constructive experience of prison.



*While you're in prison, there are other things that punish you at the same time, and the first thing is mental pressure. A lot of people can crack under the strain of being separated and locked away in this little box. You've got to keep yourself occupied or do something. There are times when you don't just wanna watch TV, don't wanna play a video game, don't wanna read a book...so what do you do with yourself? And that's why I decided it's important to try and find something to occupy my mind. Men need purpose. My roles as an advisory sort of person in prison is that – I just try and pass things on to others. Nova (Buddy)*

For many participants, peer-support represented a protective mechanism, through which the pains of imprisonment (Dye, 2010) could be, to some degree, alleviated. While the effects of confinement are far ranging (see Smith, 2006), the most severe 'pain' depicted by participants in this study appeared to be boredom. Prison boredom has been increasingly explored in the criminology literature in recent years, and theoretically framed as a manifestation of the meaninglessness of serving time and the purposelessness of 'being' a prisoner (Crewe, 2011; Ferrell, 2004; Scharf, 1983). While Sykes (1958) originally detected five core deprivations of prison (loss of: freedom, autonomy, security, goods and services, and heterosexual relationships), scholars have since expanded the model to include, amongst other factors, boredom (Irwin, 2006; Johnson & McGunigall-Smith, 2008; Maitland & Sluder, 1998). As Nova describes, the challenge of getting through prison seems to hinge on figuring out "what to do with yourself"; "how to keep yourself occupied". The consequences of not overcoming this challenge were spoken about in terms of "losing your mind", "going mad", being consumed with "negative thoughts", and so on. There is now a broad body of research supporting the detrimental impact of boredom in prison, and this highlights how crucial it is for prisoners to be able to secure meaning and a constructive purpose while serving time.

In a study by (Rocheleau, 2013) exploring a number of factors potentially affecting prison misconduct, boredom was amongst those most strongly correlated to increased conflicts with staff and serious misconduct and violence. In fact, a one-unit increase in the difficulty of dealing with

boredom yielded an expected 42% increase in an annual misconduct measure. In contrast, Steiner and Wooldredge (2008) found that prisoners who underwent programs and who upheld prison jobs were less likely to be involved in prison assaults, substance abuse, and other types of prison misconduct. Furthermore, the likelihood of misconduct decreased as employment hours increased. These findings are consistent, and testify to the importance of prisoners being able to source meaning and purpose not just for their own wellbeing, but for the encouragement of prosocial behavioural change. The type of purpose prisoners are able to cultivate also appears to be important, with Duggleby (2016) identifying that roles characterised by caring for others can be especially meaningful. Indeed, the participants in this study relished the chance develop meaning from the purposive objective to help others. Peer-support afforded participants that chance.

### *Building resilience*

In this theme, participants described peer-support as having a general impact on the way in which they viewed the situations and circumstances that unravelled around them. They spoke of the direct and more practical skills they had managed to generate from their roles, but also the experiential learning that had taken place. Regarding the latter, it seemed that peer-support roles introduced individuals to problems (their own and those of others) that they either hadn't experienced before or hadn't been able to resolve before. This made for opportunities for peer-supporters to face social problems and build up strategies to deal with them. In taking advantage of these opportunities, participants reported in some way how they were ultimately able to become more resilient.

*I think I've learned a lot simply by talking to people and understanding their problems, their experiences...and you kind to put yourself in other people's position, I mean Buddies is not about overstepping the mark and advising people but I will try and find solutions for people, and from that you learn maybe, how to deal with those particular problems, which I may never have come across in my life. But you're learning to deal with problems you've never had in that*

*sense, and so you accumulating experiences...building these experiences up if you like, for free, without having to go through the problems yourself. Khan (Buddy)*

Khan refers largely to dealing with other people's problems, but how in doing so he has to empathise and face problems as if they were his own. While he doesn't take individuals' problems away from them and tell them what to do, he tries to formulate solutions. Khan articulates how this effectively represents a simulated environment where he can practice dealing with problems he's never had but might have to face in the future. This dynamic is almost depictable as a role play scenario in which an individual can operate in 'practice mode', and in doing so broaden their skillsets in preparation for the real thing. This phenomenon has been identified as a unique benefit of group therapy sessions in the therapeutic community context (Ware, Frost, & Hoy, 2010). Ware, Frost, and Boer (2014) have argued that group therapy serves as a social microcosm of the external community. In this way, group members are extended the opportunity to practice new ways of being and to test behavioural strategies associated with their future plans in a safe place. Peer-supporters in this study appeared to be able to do the same thing. By helping others, Khan is also preparing himself for potential problems he may encounter in the future. This element of reciprocity manifested itself across all transcripts.

*In fact, there is one issue that a lot of people are unaware of and that's actually that I have a mental illness, err, bipolar disorder. And erm...that's actually affected how I deal with people as well and what advice I give to them, because, I've actually been able to learn techniques of meditation, techniques of self-control, techniques of breathing, that I've used for myself but also suggested to a lot of people when they've had anxiety issues or personal problems and it definitely helps people to deal with it so I'm quite lucky that I have that as a background. It's good because it's like I've got an extra bag of tricks that can assist me. Nova (Buddy)*

Nova's extract illustrates an environment in which he's able to share some of the coping strategies he has used for himself with others. These reciprocal exchanges he is able to engage in enhance his ability to help others, but also seem to assist self-reflection and growth. To understanding how his techniques can assist others, he must make sense of how they work for him. This mirrors some underlying theory associated with peer-support. Keller (1993), for example, described a process in which peer counsellors naturally associate their own attitudes, behaviours, and experiences with those of their clients. In doing this, they are able to reflect on their own situations, behaviours, and motivations and consequently progress through a form of self-rehabilitation. In being able to select from his "bag of tricks" Nova is either consciously or otherwise engaging in cycle of continually honing his skillset. This is a consistent finding, with studies reporting how peer-helpers increase insight into their own lives by helping others and steadily building personal resilience (Keller 1993; Maruna 2001; Parkin & McKeganey 2000; Snow, 2002; Sirdifield, 2006). An important notion within Nova's extract, though, relates to how he is able to utilise his mental health issue as a source of wisdom to help others. He appears to have ascribed value to what some may have considered a significant hindrance, so much so that he construes himself as "lucky to have [issues with mental health] as a background". Peer-support enabled many participants to rework negative histories or challenges into something positive. The process they underwent to do this allowed for the identification of personal weaknesses, the realisation of new skills, and the creation of a resilient 'self' better prepared for future challenges.

*I'm a lot more tolerant and I have a lot more empathy than I used to. Erm...I'm more proactive I think, more inclined to erm...tread where I wouldn't dare before, you know, insofar as, I do presentations for inductions as well. And actually sort of being more assertive, whereas before I'd have just walked away. Yeah, I think, my way of dealing with things was sweeping them under the carpet before, and that has repercussions for when you get angry, you know if you keep putting little pebbles in a boat, it can become heavy and it sinks, things blow up. Mickey (Shannon Trust Mentor & Buddy)*

Mickey also appears to be engaging in deep self-reflection as a product of his peer-support work. He has noticed becoming more tolerant and empathetic since becoming a peer-supporter, but also more proactive and assertive. He describes how aversive situations or challenges (“pebbles in a boat”) can mount pressure on people who try to “sweep them under the carpet”. He personally relates to this, citing how, without an effective coping strategy in place, things can “blow up”. Mickey’s role projected him into a position where he needed to operate in unknown territory, which in turn enabled him to explore his weaknesses and craft new strengths. This is representative of a problem-solving strategy and, in many ways, offers a response to calls for more interventions that enable prisoners to build self-sustaining methods for behaviour management and ultimately desistance from crime (Coates, 2016; Day & Doyle, 2010).

## Concluding comments

This study set out with the aim of generating a phenomenological understanding of how incarcerated peer-supporters feel about their roles and how such roles might contribute to self-change. From analysing participants’ accounts, it was a fundamental objective of this study to be able to offer some insight into the dynamics of peer-support in prison (i.e. how it works and how it impacts prisoners).

First and foremost, participants described their experiences in very positive terms, and appeared to be having deeply reflective realisations via their work. The themes identified within this study exemplified a process that participants were going through. This was characterised by something of a self-change momentum that was being continuously energised by contributing factors emerging out of peer-support work. Through ‘doing good’ (being kind and helpful to others where possible), the participants in this study were able to consider themselves as better, or at least improving, selves. Carrying out prosocial behaviours on a daily basis represented a form of evidence for the participants that they were changing and moving towards a more desirable and hopeful future. However, it also appeared to send a message out to prison staff that they could be trusted, and indeed,

prisoner / staff relationships were described as more trustful and respectful as a consequence. The appraisals that would inflow from staff regarding peer-supporters' positive contributions validated to participants that they truly were changing for the better. This cycle (typified by a Pygmalion effect (Maruna et al., 2009)) of prosocial behaviour and positive reinforcement enabled the participants to continually fuel redemption narratives and also build confidence and skillsets. This, in turn, stimulated 'rebirth plots' (Robinson & Smith, 2009), whereby participants could make sense of and reconstitute problematic pasts. All of this allowed for positive identity shifts and the cultivating of more strong, stable, and prosocial self-identities. Peer-support in this regard was empowering participants to become their own agents of change. These processes were prevailed because participants did not become consumed by the prison regime – they did not become 'institutionalised'. Instead, participants forged more positive environments for themselves, as a product of being able to help people and feel needed. By carving out meaningful and purposeful roles for themselves, participants were beginning to feel more autonomous, independent, and useful. Theoretical standpoints relating to general wellbeing were valuable here, with Ryan and Deci's (2000) work on self-determination asserting the importance of humans establishing autonomy, connectedness, and mastery.

On a wider level, all participants expressed ways in which they managed to cope with the strains of imprisonment and this seemed connected with improving general well-being. The countering of negative emotions brought about by the pains of imprisonment (Dye, 2010) was significantly helped by the meaningful and purposeful lives participants were able to develop via their roles. As peer-supporters, participants were coping as well as accumulating positivity and 'meaningful goods' (Purvis, Ward, & Willis, 2011). The coping strategies participants adopted are heavily discussed in the desistance literature and widely endorsed. Furthermore, current penal policy objectives align with what peer-support roles appeared to offer participants, with a recent Ministry of Justice review emphasising the niche importance of peer-support roles as offender-led, meaningful, and denoting a form of active citizenship (Coates, 2016). In line with these propositions, this study supports earlier claims that peer-support in prison can have benefits that transcend its core function of peer-helping

(Boothby, 2011; Perrin & Blagden, 2014). Accordingly, this research at this point calls for the provision of peer-support across U. K. prisons to be acknowledged on a wider academic and policy level, and to be discussed in the context of offender reform and good forensic practice.

A unique contribution of this study lies within its broader focus – on a sample varying in offence and role type. Previous research that has explored peer-support roles in the context of rehabilitation has done so with a much narrower focus, prioritising one program only (i.e. Boothby, 2011 on Insiders and Perrin & Blagden, 2014 on Listeners). In widening focus, this research has explored the influence of the all-encompassing phenomenon of peer-support on a generalised sample of offenders, not just that of specific role duties on specific offence-related behaviours. The themes presented in this research represented significant benefits for those who adopt peer-support roles, regardless of their offence type or role. As such, this study furthers existing understandings of how change can occur through peer-support schemes. Such schemes appear undoubtedly to have a positive impact in terms of prisoners' views of themselves, their experiences of prison, and their perceptions life beyond prison. Many respondents made an explicit connection between their peer-support role and redemption (Imran stated that his role gives him his "fix of redemption", for example) and all participants expressed a strong desire to become better selves. Ultimately, peer-support roles offer prisoners a chance to 're-story' their lives. This study simply represents some movement towards a greater understanding of where peer-support fits within the ongoing debate surrounding how best to structure offender rehabilitation. The next empirical chapter attempts to progress this understanding further, by focusing on a sample of sexual offenders. Analysing the impact of peer-support across offence types presents the opportunity to explore its wider potential utility. Furthermore, the participants in this study emitted a phenomenological closeness with their peer-support experience, which impacted narrative shifts and life-story reconstructions. Accordingly, the next chapter focuses on a smaller sample of offenders and uses interpretative phenomenological analysis to better explore the sense-making processes that peer-support roles appear to engender.

## Chapter 5: Study 2 – “I’m not a monster, I’m not a terrible person”

### Introductory comments

Study 1 revealed several features of peer-support that may be important in providing meaning and purpose to prisoners and giving them a chance to generate forward momentums comprised of hope and increased self-worth. The notions that participants alluded to were deeply personal and phenomenological in nature; they described in detail what it was to ‘be’ a peer-supporter and how their lived experience of prison was being influenced as a consequence. With the aim of fostering deeper immersion into these processes, the present study utilises interpretative phenomenological analysis on a smaller dataset generated from sexual offenders only (N=15).

The justification for using a smaller sample and focusing on sexual offenders in this study is three-fold: 1) IPA is a labour intensive and deeply focused level of analysis which requires a close connection between the researcher and the dataset. This connection can only be established with smaller sample sizes, with top end quotas of 15 recommended by experts (Smith, 2011); 2) sexual



offenders, who are often required to participate in a variety of intense treatment programmes and group interventions, and are required to demonstrate reduced risk in order to progress through their sentences, represent an important sample with which to explore the potentially redemptive properties of peer-support; 3) sexual offenders represent a unique population in that they are relatively under-researched, but they are also publicly denigrated in the extreme and ostracised from society on a deeply engrained level. A potentially rehabilitative initiative that engenders a community and restorative element may therefore be especially important for this population.

## Participants

Following an extensive National Offender Management Service project approval process, this research project was also approved by the Governor at the research site (HMP Whatton, a U. K. category C sex offender treatment prison). Data collection was facilitated by the Safer Custody department at the prison. Participants (N = 15) were screened by Safer Custody staff and letters were dispatched outlining the research. As with study 1, all participants were required to have relatively substantial experience of their peer-support role (6 months or more) and be active volunteers. They also needed to have served a total of two years in prison. Again, participants were offered no benefits in exchange for their involvement and participation was purely voluntary. All participants were convicted sex offenders and their time spent in prison ranged from 2 years and 4 months to over 27 years. Further demographic information is presented in table 5.

*Table 5: Study 2 participant information*

	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Role*</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Offence details</b>	<b>Sentence (years)</b>	<b>Time served (years, months)</b>

1	Jason	ST	39	Possessing indecent photographs	7	2, 5
2	Charles	ST	60	Sexual assault	Life (99) (extended)	27, 6
3	Jamie	ST	64	Sexual activity with a child	IPP	7, 6
4	Ash	I	32	Sexual assault on a female under age 13	IPP	2, 6
5	Stewart	I	59	Rape	15 (extended)	6, 6
6	Simon	I	28	Rape on a female under age 13	IPP	7, 6
7	Charlie	I	56	Murder	Life (99)	27, 6
8	Drew	I	33	Rape	10	5, 6
9	John	L	59	Rape on a child	Life (99)	8
10	Ryan	L	47	Rape on a child	IPP	6, 6
11	Tom	L	44	Sexual assault	IPP	5, 6
12	Nick	L	64	Sexual assault on a child	12	3
13	Patrick	L	62	Sexual assault on a male under age 13	IPP	7

14	Darren	L	52	Attempted rape on a child under age 13	Life (99)	10
15	Gary	L	42	Murder	Life (99)	23

\*ST = Shannon Trust Mentor; I = Insider; L = Listener

## Peer-support roles

Peer-support programs vary from prison to prison, both in terms of those that actively run and how they operate. Identifying which programs should be in place is usually done on a demand basis. The prison site explored in this study naturally ran a lesser variety of programs, given that it housed only sexual offenders. Peer-support in this prison had an increased focus on the emotional welfare of the inmates, with the Insiders and Listener schemes having the most volunteers and being well-used. This is perhaps not surprising, given the shock and aftermath trauma associated with being convicted of and labelled as a sexual offender (Schwaebe, 2005). These programs, along with the Shannon Trust reading program, were the only three that met the inclusion criteria for exploration in this research. Further details of these programs are provided in table 6.

*Table 6: Study 2 peer-support scheme details*

Role title	Nature of support	Description
Shannon Trust Mentors	Educational	The Shannon Trust is a UK charity that regulates a scheme whereby fluent readers are paired with those less able. Through this set up, Shannon Trust mentors help students through a reading program often over a period of several months (see Shannon Trust, 2005a, for further information).

Insiders	Emotional & practical	The Insiders scheme is primarily in place to address bullying issues in prison. Those who are suffering at the hands of prison bullies can come forward and speak to Insiders, who can then mediate between the victim and prison staff. Though the initial inception of the scheme was premised on anti-bullying, Insiders can also be paired with new prisoners who may require emotional support as they adjust to prison life.
Listeners	Emotional	Volunteer Listeners who are trained by the external charity Samaritans provide face to face emotional support to prisoners who request help (see Samaritans, 2012, for further information).

## Data collection

As with all empirical studies in this thesis, semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. Interviews were recorded using a password protected Dictaphone and later transcribed verbatim. The interview schedule mirrored that used in study 1, again covering the following areas:

- Introductory questions – arrival into prison, initial perceptions of prison life, first encounters with peer-support schemes.
- Views and attitudes regarding peer-support work – initial perceptions of peer-support schemes, first involvement, motivations for volunteering.
- Impact of scheme involvement on the person – thoughts and feelings regarding peer-support role, exploration of how the role impacted on the individual and their experiences of imprisonment.

- Future – views of future in the context of the peer-support role, exploration of how this role has shaped thoughts about future self.

Interviews lasted 1.5 hours on average, and as a rapport building protocol, no notes were taken during interview.

### Analytic technique

This study adopted interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), as described by Smith (1996). The sample size (N = 15), while sitting at the top end, is considered appropriate for IPA studies. Though IPA studies deal only in small numbers, the priority is the generation of rich phenomenological data over generalisability (Smith, 1996). Phenomenological inquiry rests upon the assumption that how things appear to us in consciousness should be the focus of inquiry (Ehrich, 2003). IPA is therefore concerned with the meanings that particular experiences, events and states hold for participants (Smith & Eatough, 2007). As such, in order to generate a phenomenological understanding of a concept, researchers must be able to glean insights from the subject expert (the participants) and seek to illuminate the insider perspective (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). The participants in this sample were all serving time for sexual offences, and as such represent a population of individuals who are publicly denigrated in the extreme (often inside and outside of prison) and fear they will never be accepted by society ever again (Levenson & Cotter, 2005; Schwaebe, 2005). This reality places great importance on the internal identity narratives that sexual offenders construct (Blagden, Winder, Thorne, & Gregson, 2011). Given that the extracts in study 1 featured such emphasis on offending and desisting identity, one of the aims of this study was to explore the mechanics of these narratives further, and how peer-support roles might influence their formation. To this end, IPA, with its emphasis on the sense-making processes of the participants, was considered most appropriate.

The phenomenological approach adopted in this study therefore strives to obtain individuals' thoughts about how peer-support roles influence their experiences of prison and their views of

themselves. These accounts will be rigorously analysed in order to develop an understanding of the participants', and of peer-supporters', "life worlds" (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). Crucially, this understanding necessitates the participants themselves to articulate their personal narratives, which are then systematically analysed by the researcher. In this sense, a form of double interpretation is utilised in IPA, which sees the researcher attempting to make sense of what the participant is making sense of (Aresti, Eatough, & Brooks-Gordon, 2010). This objective is why phenomenology requires such devoted attention to the data, and why phenomenological researchers must cautiously maintain awareness of the distinctions between the participant's account and the researcher's interpretation (Smith, 2011). Here, as a quality assurance measure, it is recommended that a form of inter-rater reliability is performed on the data, which involves the analysis being 'audited' (Armstrong et al., 1997) by the co- author as well as an independent researcher. The data in this study was subjected to such measures in order to ensure that any interpretations held validity.

## Analysis and discussion

Following transcript coding and analysis, three super-ordinate themes comprised of several subordinate themes were identified. These themes are presented in table 7.

*Table 7: Study 2 superordinate and subordinate themes*

<b>Superordinate themes</b>	<b>Subordinate themes</b>
Stepping stones	Headspace Earning trust Eroding negative labels Feeling human Acquiring a stake in conformity
Eclipsing demons	Exorcising trauma

	Addressing deficits
Keeping sane	Meaning and purpose Desire to 'give something back' Channelling

### Superordinate theme 1: Stepping stones

This theme was characterised by participants feeling that by involving themselves in their peer-support roles, they were moving forward. This forward momentum was important for all participants, and provided hope and positivity for the future. Almost all participants offered florid metaphors to describe how their roles were helping them to move forward. Such metaphors were typified by the idea that participants were on a journey of self-discovery. Participants made sense of this journey as taking steps, with each step representing another episode of rediscovery. As such, this entire theme captured the subjective, 'insider perspectives' of participants, who were describing very mindful and deeply self-reflective processes resulting from their roles.

#### *Headspace*

A significant step for participants was to engage in self-reflection. In this subtheme, they enabled themselves to do this through carving out some headspace as a product of being peer-supporters. Through enacting mutually reflective roles, participants were allowing themselves to live in the moment, and to resist setting unrealistic expectations and becoming anxious. Rather, they were reflecting calmly and philosophically upon their self in transition. Blagden, Winder & Hames (2014) have tagged this type of process 'headspace', and have suggested that this is a crucial element in desistance because headspace in prison can allow offenders to self-evaluate and discover that change is possible and desirable. For all participants in this study, peer-support roles appeared to be reducing anxiety and helping volunteers to carve out some headspace.

*I see this as, you know...a stepping stone in my life, of, how I've been in my past, how I am now, and how I want to be in the future...you know, these are three different stepping stones...and I'm making the right choices now to make that first stepping stone even easier, and that's the key thing...taking each day as it comes...and being able to support people and being able to get support has helped with that stepping stone and it's given me more positivity in life, more hope, and more realistic goals to reach, you know, and making that difference inside here, and making a difference when I get outside.. is gonna be a big thing. And that's thanks to the support and the mentoring scheme that we have here. Simon (Insider)*

Simon describes how he views his role as a stepping stone; one that is allowing himself to reflect upon who he used to be, who he is now, and who he wants to be in the future. Simon's Insider role certainly appears to be prompting deep self-reflection, and the concept of headspace and consequential consideration over the self in transition is well illuminated in his extract. "Taking each day as it comes" epitomises what Simon's role seems to be offering him – a chance to live in the moment, not become so consumed with and anxious about what is uncontrollable, and instead to focus on generating positivity where possible, and crucially to keep stepping forward. Ultimately, Simon's extract portrays hope; his role is enabling him to keep 'on track'. Hope is heavily discussed in the desistance literature, and is conceptualised as one of many tools that offenders use to adjust to imprisonment, serve sentences constructively, and work on 'going straight' (Dhami, Ayton, & Loewenstein, 2007). All participants involved in all schemes described the benefits of their roles in very similar ways.

*I can liken it to...ascending, erm a cliff edge, not a cliff edge I suppose but...scrambling up the side of a mountain. When I go hill walking I struggle with heights, but I like hill walking, so there's a problem there. So what I used to have to do was, I used to have to rest at the point before the next scramble up so, if you're going up to Wales or wherever, it's not a climb...there's not ropes and stuff, but you scramble up...and as long as I sit and I look at it, it takes me time*



*to settle and to understand what's going to have to happen next. So I'm not gonna go back down, I am going to ascend, that's gonna happen. But you just get to that point there, and I suppose that's what the Listeners did...that purpose in the sense, to rest me in that place.* Tom (Listener)

Again, Tom's extract appears synonymous with the idea of headspace. Tom describes how his role enables him to reach metaphorical safety holds, from which he can gather power and begin to negotiate the next move upwards. What is evident here is that Tom appears to be bringing his situation under his control, and making sense of it in his own terms. This was a very encouraging benefit for all participants, who all spoke of their roles as enabling them to regain control over their situations and personal challenges. Criminal behaviour has been attributed to low locus of control – to an inability to effectively manage challenges, internal and external stressors, and deprivation. Ineffective coping strategies in these areas can detrimentally effect levels of awareness and impulse control, which can successively bring about fear, frustration, anger, and antisocial behaviour (Samuelson et al., 2007). Simon and Tom describe in their extracts how their roles appear to enable them to bring challenges and potential stressors under their control. This is perhaps due to the natural self-reflection and emotional awareness prompted by Insider and Listener roles. Both schemes involve an intense period of training, which cover modules such as active listening, emotional intelligence, and dealing with difficult feelings (Jaffe, 2011; Boothby, 2011). The literature on mindfulness in correctional settings may go some way to explaining why such roles can bring about enhanced sense of control and increased resilience to stressors for participants. The kinds of benefits being described by participants are analogous with those associated with mindfulness, which has defined as “a sustained nonreactive attention to one's ongoing mental contents and processes (physical sensations, perceptions, affective states, thoughts, and imagery)” (Samuelson et al., 2007, p255). This heightened focus over one's present thoughts and feelings has been attributed to greater conscious awareness and greater control over potential stressors (Grossman et al., 2004). The processes being described by

the participants in this study echo these processes, in that peer-support role holders were taking control of the present moment, allowing themselves to think and feel, and consequently experience a sense of mastery over their own 'journeys' or transformational experiences. Peer-support roles, which were often described as intrinsically emotive and reflective, appear to prompt deep self-analysis and offer participants greater control over their own feelings and challenges.

*I've grown up a lot. I could be quite immature before, I mean I'm thirty eight and sometimes I'd act like fourteen still...erm but with the responsibilities of, sort of having to be...not strict but being in a sort of authoritative figure when you're helping people to read...we work to their scale we don't push them, you have to have certain boundaries, professional boundaries erm with a reader...so, for me I think it's made me definitely grow up...mainly, and look at life differently. In the short time that I've been doing it I've discovered a lot about myself. I'd say I'm on a journey with it, definitely on a journey. Jamie (TBT)*

Jamie's extract exemplifies how peer-support roles can promote self-reflection for volunteers. Jamie is able to verbalise specifically how he thinks he has changed as a product of his role. He talks about growing up and becoming more mature and more responsible. He goes on to say that he now looks at life differently and that he's "on a journey with it". Jamie's extract once again illustrates how peer-support roles appear to inject a sense of present-moment-focus for participants, but also how they can enable role-holders to steadily cultivate forward momentums through which gradual change can happen.

### *Earning trust*

Earning trust was important for the participants in study 1, and was once again a buoyant theme across the transcripts in this study. For sexual offenders especially, cultivating a legitimate and prosocial self-image can be crucial in enabling them to move away from the self-condemning narratives that can

engulf their worlds and reduce their chances of changing (Blagden et al., 2011). Trust, for the participants in this study, appeared to be one of the markers that positive growth was taking place.

*You kind of get a bit of rapport with the staff...because when the staff see that you can do a job and you can do a job well, you kinda get a bit of trust with them – they trust you to deal with things, so the way some wings work...you're not allowed to go to other landings and stuff like that...but if you've got a rapport with them and you're doing your job correctly and efficiently, they'll allow you to go onto the other wings or to the other landings and talk to people who've come on if they've got any issues and need help. So it's about kind of building up that trust with them so they can see you can do a job, you're not messing them around and not swapping things or dealing stuff or whatever. It's about taking it seriously. Stewart (Insider)*

Stewart discusses how his role as an Insider has enabled him to build rapport with staff members in the prison and gain trust and freedom. What is being described here is a cycle of positive behaviour, reinforcement, and continued positive behaviour. It is in Stewart's best interests to behave well within his role and to follow the prison rules, as he is rewarded for doing so by earning trust and being allowed some freedom. As such, peer-support roles in this context appears to create an environment whereby prisoners can actually 'do' trust (not just feel trusted) and enact 'good' and 'moral' selves. Receiving trust and appraisals from others in a prison context is considered very important in terms of galvanising desistance and positive change (Perrin & Blagden, 2014). This was certainly important for all participants in this study.

*You get a bit more trust. And I think...looking at it where you get that trust level that shows that you are improving yourself. And, especially in prison you always get threatened by, sort of the staff "if you don't something wrong you get this, you get that" and it puts the fear into you and you think "oh what if I do one thing wrong, something silly that I don't realise I'm*

*doing it” but when you’re a mentor or you do anything where you’re giving back you would hope that your efforts are looked into and they might balance it up...not that I’m saying that I do it to log favours because you don’t get them, you are still treated as if you’re a prisoner but you get that slight better respect and you get that much better rapport with the officers and the staff...it makes you feel a bit like a human still. Again it’s all about rehabilitation, I’m a strong believer that if you’re treated poorly by officers or staff then you can’t really be rehabilitated. Jamie (TBT)*

Jamie’s extract suggests that earning trust and some recognition for ‘doing good’ equates to a form of validation that he is ‘improving himself’. Jamie inadvertently describes a process of self-assurance, via which he does good things, earns trust and recognition, and consequently lives up to his objective to change. All of this makes Jamie feel more human, and while he is not looking to log favours, this process of doing good and receiving appraisals appears to be giving him hope that he is changing for the better. There is striking resemblance here with the extracts within study 1, and again, the mechanics of a Pygmalion effect appear to be at play (Maruna et al., 2009). For the participants in this sample, however, self-forgiveness seemed to lie at the core of many themes, and indeed this one. Researchers have described the unique and nuanced difficulties that sexual offenders face in coming to terms with their own crimes, admitting them both internally and externally, and forgiving themselves (Blagden et al., 2011; Levenson, 2011). Indeed, vast numbers of sexual offenders deny their offences as they are appalled by what they have done and live with great fear of being forever deemed a ‘sex offender’ (Schwaebe, 2005). For the participants in this study, demonstrating socially legitimate behaviours and receiving some recognition for it went a long way to allowing them to feel like better people. Research widely asserts that such processes are important, given that hopelessness, social isolation, and low self-worth constitute factors that can enforce cycles of offending behaviour (Jeglic, Mercado, & Levenson, 2012). Peer-support therefore represents a rare channel through which trust can be earned, self-forgiveness can be promoted, and desirable selves can be actualised. This is

an important resource for a population of offenders who naturally have limited opportunities to practice socially acceptable behaviours, build useful life skills, and consequently nurture protective states and traits.

### *Eroding negative labels*

Many of the themes identified in this study naturally overlap, and there is definite interplay between all of them. Eroding negatives labels was assigned to repetitive excerpts that highlighted the participants' desire to remove stigma, and to disassociate themselves with labels such as 'prisoner', 'criminal', or what seemed most feared – 'sex offender'. In this theme, the removal of labels appeared to be one of the overarching benefits participants would experience from earning trust, doing good, and 'being' peer-support volunteers.

*I know I keep repeating this but it has made me feel better about myself I know it's sort of reaffirmed to me that I'm not a monster, I'm not a terrible person. I do have anxieties as I said to you about, about the media and about you know, how people might react to me erm, I try and counter that by saying to myself but the people that matter to you the most are the ones that are still there for you they're the ones that are there for you, they've supported you they've given you the time. They've also said to you effectively what you're saying that its great you're doing this listening role doesn't that make you feel better about yourself? Nick (Listener)*

To contextualise Nick's extract, it is important to describe the way in which it was verbalised. Nick spoke with desperation in his voice when articulating how important it was for him not to be regarded a monster, a terrible person. These were labels he had received and had greatly disturbed his sense of self and brought about total despair and hopelessness. Nick spoke about how the media and the general public view sex offenders, and how unforgiving they were likely to be. Before becoming a Listener, this negativity and isolation locked Nick into a state of hopelessness, in which change seemed

impossible. Indeed, widespread research highlights how sex offenders are publicly denigrated in the extreme and consequently find it more difficult than other types of offenders to reintegrate (Levenson & Cotter, 2005; Braden et al., 2012). Research has also found that public shaming and the subsequent social isolation experienced by sex offenders can constitute risk factors in terms of further offending, and this has prompted the emergence of various reintegration initiatives (Braden et al., 2012; Levenson et al., 2007). Despite the harmful and isolative cycle Nick found himself in, he felt able to liberate himself through his work as a Listener. Again, it appears upholding such roles allows for hope to be generated and for 'good selves' to be practiced and systematically reaffirmed. Moreover, though, in reaffirming to himself that he isn't a monster, Nick is not only contributing to a more desirable self-identity, but appears to be energising a narrative of self-forgiveness. The good work he does through his role enables him to feel better about himself and not identify as a "terrible person". While little research has directly explored self-forgiveness in sexual offenders, much of the literature surrounding religiosity and desistance can be useful in framing the extracts in this theme.

When individuals, especially with sexual offence convictions, espouse religious identities or actively use religious narratives in the construction of self, they often mould a "prosocial narrative identity" that can account for why their prior actions are not true reflections of their core selves and why their present and future actions have new meaning and significance (Kerley & Copes 2008). Through religious practices characterised by 'moral reform', individuals who have offended can return to 'being good' through "getting right with God" (Presser & Kurth 2009). Forgiveness is a core Christian value and it is thought that forgiveness enhances one's relationship with God, which can be constructive in aligning the individual to a set of prosocial and protective behaviours that are typical of many religious doctrines (Macaskill, 2007; Rye et al. 2001). Forgiving the self appears important in the self-change process, as forgiveness narratives are future-orientated and important for the process of 'moving on'. In research by Blagden et al. (2011), there was some reluctance from participants to 'fully' forgive themselves, but there was a consistent theme that self-forgiveness was important for a positive future. Being able to forgive the 'self' embodied a form of 'active responsibility-taking' (Ware

& Mann 2012). A belief in God i.e. having God on your side, can support this form of adaptive responsibility-taking. For the participants in this study, it was their belief in the good work they were doing through their peer-support roles that appeared to encourage self-forgiveness, change, and progress. A crucial feature of this change and progress for participants was that they could take steps away from being 'monsters'. In a study conducted by Blagden et al. (2011) that investigated how sexual offenders overcome denial, one theme from participants' narratives depicted a profound fear of being found out and labelled as a 'sex offender'. This fear was not just borne out of the perceived external repercussions, but the internal discomfort in feeling aligned to such a crime as a sexual offence. This notion was illuminated with close similarity in this study.

*You do feel more human and I think you know the trouble is, in an establishment like this, in a sex offenders prison, it's just, it's constantly in the media. Not a day goes by without you hearing something or reading something and I've often thought to myself and voiced it a couple of times, you know you think...if we continued in here to express the kind of...what's the word...if we continued in here to talk about child abuse, sexual offending, grooming all this kind of thing...we would probably never get out. But it seems like the media can constantly barrage the public at large, and we just feel like animals. You know you do feel, I mean it's bad enough being in prison but...forgive me for saying this but you may well have battered some poor old lady around the head and seriously injured her if not killed her to take a few pounds out of her pocket but that's a better crime...than a sexual offence...you do feel like the lowest of the low so to come and just have a normal conversation with the officers, you know...it does help. Nick (Listener)*

Here, Nick embodies the fear response described in sexual offender denial research (Blagden et al., 2011). He describes how he is constantly reminded of where he is (a sexual offender prison) and therefore what he has done. He alludes to how this situation of engrained and recurrent denigration

can give rise to something of a “doom label”, and encourage the systematic internalisation of feeling like “the lowest of the low” or like an “animal”. In response to this kind of internal stressor, sexual offenders may deny their offence (thus denying their association with the ‘sex offender’ label) or employ strategies to ‘unstick’ or moderate harmful labels (Blagden et al., 2011). Such neutralisation techniques (Sykes & Matza, 1957) have been viewed as subversive and associated with offence minimisation and responsibility displacement (see, for e.g. Saradjian & Nobus 2003; Topalli, Brezina, & Bernhardt, 2012), but have also been linked to constructive narratives that can create space for offenders to change (Blagden et al., 2011). The participants in this study appeared to be utilising their peer-support roles for the latter. Nick exhibited the shame he felt for his crime throughout his interview time and time again, and his desperation to be able to forgive himself and move away from the monster label was evident. His role appeared to afford him a level of opportunity to do this, even in the simple form of being able to have a normal conversation with officers. For Nick, and many participants in this study, peer-support opened up a space in which individuals could at least contain some of the harm they recognised they had caused, and this appeared to enable them to avoid fulfilling the detrimental labels that may only serve to increase their risk of reoffending (Braden et al., 2012).

### *Feeling human*

Participants were vocally and visibly relieved at the prospect of being able to resist “doom” labels, and extracts pertaining to this notion depicted the importance of internal and external modes of forgiveness. In its most primitive form, however, the dataset with regard to these dynamics pointed to the fundamental importance of participants feeling more like human beings. ‘Feeling human’, though, interlaced with many under dynamics described by participants; it appeared to be the overarching result of participants earning trust, receiving appraisals from others, developing a sense of achievement, and consequently enhancing their self-esteem. As such, earning trust, doing good



work, and removing labels appeared to represent tools that participants could use in order to more feel human, less 'prisoner'.

*It just brings it back to normality that...you're not a prisoner in a sense, although you are a prisoner, to be able to have that trust...it's something that can only be earned...you don't just get it...but it kinda just makes you feel, "OK, I'm not as much of a prisoner", in a sense, and it just it brings you back to the normality of what it's like outside. Stewart (Insider)*

Here, Stewart neatly describes the interplay between earning trust, using the resources available to him via his Insider role, and in-turn feeling human. It is important to Stewart, as it was for all participants, to move away from the isolative label of 'prisoner'. Indeed, the experience of stigma, stereotyping, and restriction of personal freedoms is well represented in the literature on imprisonment (see for e.g. Dirkzwager & Kruttschnitt, 2012; Gross, 2008). There is also a body of research that reports on problematic relationships between prisoners and staff. Such relationships have often been typified as conflictual, unconstructive, and defined by power imbalances (Hemmens & Marquart, 2000; Morris et al., 2012). Such experiences can result in prisoners feeling unhuman, and can bring about what has been termed the 'golem effect', via which low expectation in individuals produces low outcomes (Maruna et al., 2009). However, for the peer-support role holders in his study, prisoners seemed to be able to avoid these types of dynamics and move into a much more constructive environment. Participants attributed this to their ability to 'do good', earn trust with prison officers, and gradually return to a state of 'normality'.

*It's quite an honour in a sense...it's nice. Erm...I've been here nearly 4.5 years now, so I'm not one of the longest here but I'm kinda getting towards that, and it's nice that although I've been here 4.5 years, I know a lot of the staff...and a lot of the staff know me.. and I get on with most of them...so to be part of the Insiders scheme, especially being a coordinator, means that I can*

*go round and see the other Insiders...and I see staff on other wings and things like that, so it's kind of a nice feeling. Stewart (Insider)*

Both extracts above demonstrate how important it was for participants to 'do good', 'go the extra mile', and build rapport and earn trust with staff. It appeared that these experiences were helping participants distance themselves from simply being a prisoner, and move towards some sense of normality. A broad body of literature highlights the importance of prisoners being able to do this, as it enables them to build hope and strengthens their ability to change (Vaughan, 2007; Maruna et al., 2009; Perrin & Blagden, 2014). What was particularly striking about the extracts within this theme was the need for prison staff approval. This can perhaps be explained by theories sitting in the field of group psychology. Social identity theory, for example, asserts that individual's self-identity can be derived from the groups to which they belong. It also posits that people may enhance their self-esteem by attaching themselves to socially desirable and socially acceptable groups. In order to affirm belonging to a desirable group, individuals will carry out behaviours that will satisfy that group (Brown, 2000). When these behaviours are rewarded with appraisals from members of the desirable group, the individual's self-esteem is boosted, and their desired identity is reaffirmed. Some of the phrases used by the participants in this study suggest that appraisals from prison staff were enabling them to move away from prisoners as a group, and towards the pole construct of that group – prison staff. As such, perhaps peer-support role holders are engaging in a form of self-regulation – a process of self-checking against desirable groups or desirable sets of behaviours. The fact that prisoners are getting on with prison staff might act as a form of validation that they are 'doing good' and therefore 'being good'.

*Most importantly it's making me feel better about myself, making me know that I am a good person deep down even though I've made mistakes. Erm... and that I still have a life, I can still make choices, whereas if you're not doing something you...your choices dictate you all the time*

*where as if you go that extra mile and do that something independent form the prison regime and it's for the good you still get that, you've still got part of your independence there. I do that for Shannon Trust, you do work out how you're gonna approach every single reader at every single lesson and so you are making decisions which normally are taken off you, so for me I think that I benefit mostly from that, that I still feel that I'm still human being. I'm still a citizen even though I'm incarcerated in prison, and I think that's what's most important...I think it's because it's one of those sort of positions where you take away your prison number. Jamie*  
(Shannon Trust Mentor)

All participants spoke of experiencing negative labels prior to becoming peer-support volunteers and how this changed as a product of their roles. Jamie's extract illuminates how he has been able to re-story his identity as a person, and how can still 'have a life', 'make choices', and be autonomous. What Jamie is talking about here is being a human. Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) argues that humans intrinsically set out to achieve autonomy, connectedness, and mastery and are designed to have an impact on the environment around them, rather than simply exist within it. These basic needs need to be fulfilled for psychological wellbeing, and Jamie's needs, along with those of all participants in this study, are being met. When individuals are deprived of these needs, there can be a tendency to resort to illegitimate means and this can result in deviant behaviour. Conversely, when such needs are satisfied, individuals can become motivated to pursue legitimate goals and positive change (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For all participants in this study, peer-support roles represented a source of basic human needs, and this enabled participants to feel more human, engage in self-reflection, and focus on the self in transition. For Jamie, this entire process seemed to start with his ability to exist independently from 'the regime', which resulted in him feeling more like a person rather than a prison number.

### *Acquiring a stake in conformity*

Within this subtheme, participants appeared to perceive their peer-support roles as personally valuable, and as 'something to lose'. The extracts presented herein suggested that prisoners were investing in legitimate and normative behaviours via their roles and indirectly making sure they didn't 'slip up'. As such, peer-support roles seemed to represent connections to prosocial networks of citizenship. Through these "bonds", participants appeared to be conforming to structures more associated with law abiding individuals.

*I wouldn't have met the people I have...the other Insiders. I wouldn't have known them like I do. The safer custody department. I wouldn't have known them...erm, and higher ranking, if you like, governors and that. When I go to the meetings...I know all the governors and they kind of know me, and, whenever I see them in the corridor they'll ask me how I am. To have that kind of rapport in the place is in some ways beneficial...erm...not something to be abused, but to kind of be proud that I'm, in that kind of position. Stewart (Insider)*

Stewart discusses how his role has enabled him to forge positive relationships with staff. He talks with pride about the fact he knows everyone, and they know him, even the higher-ranking staff (Governors). Stewart enjoys his status as an Insider, which appears to give him a feeling of being valued and appreciated. He enjoys his role so much that he would never do anything to compromise his position, one which he respects is 'not to be abused'. Stewart's narrative, in which he describes having secured something good to potentially lose, quintessentially exemplifies this theme. Laub & Sampson (2001) have neatly tagged these process as striving to 'acquire a stake in conformity' – a legitimate social bond via which individuals can satisfy basic human needs. Many participants viewed their roles in the same way – they respected their privileged position as peer-support role holders and this was keeping them in line and on track.

*Just being part of something is really important...and I suppose you don't realise sometimes, I suppose like if you're in a football team or something, although you might never kick the ball in the game, you're still part of the team and being on the field maybe is still enough to get the victory, erm, rather than being totally involved and trying to do too much...so yeah...It's most probably true like if you've got the goal keeper who might never touch the ball but the team's won hasn't it? Drew (Insider)*

Drew's extract highlights the importance of the team element of the Insiders scheme. His football analogy emphasises how important it is for him to feel a part of something, even if it was to be in a minor capacity. The narrative here strikes as being about belonging and about appreciating a privileged position. These notions are reminiscent of a broad theoretical body of research surrounding basic human needs, and thus social and emotional wellbeing. For example, Ward, Mann & Gannon's (2007) work on the Good Lives Model is once again implicated here – participants were continuously gathering meaningful goods via their roles. Fundamental social identity tenets (Brown, 2000) are also evident here, with participants possibly utilising their peer-support involvement to position themselves towards more desirable social groups and thus away from unwanted attachments and labels. Whilst these mechanisms appeared to underline many features of peer-support roles in some way, the research exploring protective factors is especially relevant to the sample in this study. Ullrich & Coid (2011), for example, carried out a study on released offenders and reported that 'belonging to a group, club, or organisation'; 'closeness to others'; 'relationship building'; and 'being in work, training, or education' should be considered as protective bonds. Participants across this study were benefitting from belonging to a group, crafting positive relationships, and consequently procuring something to have pride in, something to lose – a 'stake in conformity'.

## Superordinate theme 2: Eclipsing demons

Participants repeatedly demonstrated how they were engaging the core tenets of peer-support work – they were mutually problem-solving, reflecting on the self while helping others, and learning a great deal about themselves in the process. In this theme, participants alluded to the ways in which they reflected on their own traumatic experiences as a consequence of hearing those of other prisoners. When they did this, they appeared to make sense of problematic pasts or prior experiences, and this seemed to enable them to reconcile troubled histories. Participants in this theme also spoke about the skills and traits they developed as product of upholding peer-support roles. Crucially though, they contrasted these with the deficits they felt they had in the past. In this way, participants were acknowledging problematic experiences and traits and detailing how they had come to resolve them.

### *Exorcising trauma*

One consistent narrative showcased across all participants' transcripts depicted a notion that helping others (listening, teaching, supporting emotionally) can prompt reflection and elicit realisations about personal challenges and past difficulties. Through supporting others, many participants seemed to be double sense-making; they were assisting people with their specific issues whilst also reflecting on the difficulties and personal traumas they too had experienced in the past. This process is described in the peer-support literature as a mechanism of formal social support, which is characterised by peer-supporters increasing their insight into their own lives as a product of mutual reflective work with others (Sirdifield, 2006; Snow, 2002). This was a process welcomed by all participants and seemed to provide many powerful realisations.

*I was on constant watch every 4 minutes, I was that low...I'd hit rock bottom, I didn't know where to turn to or who to talk to. I was on one wing or another, and then they moved me on here and I just didn't know what was happening. I felt like I'd been punished, guilt...everything...and I just didn't know where to turn to, who to speak to at the time, and, I*

*think you know, with the Listeners...and the staff, I don't think I'd be here today if I didn't get the help and support and so, that's why I decided I wanted to become a Listener, once I knew I was ready. Gary (Listener)*

Gary describes his despair after first arriving in the prison, and how the Listeners helped him to such a degree that he attributes their support to why he is still here today. He goes on to state that this pivotal help he received is what motivated him to volunteer to become a Listener, but importantly, only when he knew he “was ready”. There appears to be a deep self-reflective element in Gary’s extract here, in which he contrasts his prior instability, anguish, and despair with his current Listener self who is more stable and resilient. There is a suggestion in his extract that Gary has seen a qualitative shift in how he was when he first came to prison, and how he is now, and he appears to attribute much of this shift to his Listener role. As such, the Listener role seems to be something to achieve, or live up to, and for Gary it represents a point in time when he became stabilised and ready for something to change. For many participants, this process seemed to emerge from helping others, consequently reflecting on their own histories or personal traumas, and in-turn drawing comparisons between old-self and new-self. In this theme, the new-self was often verbalised as stable, experienced, stronger, and wiser. Holding a peer-support role appeared, therefore, to have wider implications for participants, and these seemed to engender personal resilience and personal growth.

*I thought “well I’ve been through that experience”, and I know it wasn’t very nice and I managed to come through it and I managed to keep stable...so I’m using my experiences and the way I’ve dealt with it to try and pass it on and to help somebody else who might be blind to it, it might be something very simple and they’re just making it so hard or they’re thinking about it too much where it might be just a quick dissection of what’s going through their minds or what’s happening to them might be enough to help them get through, so yeah, I think it...erm I think it makes you a stronger person too. Erm you know coz obviously, I had to deal*

*with my own personal problems and if I've helped somebody who's had a similar problem it's worked for them then I can take what I've used on them for myself and learn from that as well. You sort of realise what sort of person you actually was and where you are today and where you wanna be tomorrow. Drew (Insider)*

Here, Drew echoes similar views of his Insider role as Gary did with his Listener role. For Drew, his role represents an opportunity to reflect upon and utilise his own life experience to help others. Once again, here in lies an engrained self-reflective element to the peer-support roles being discussed. There is evidence of a continual interplay between helping others, self-reflection, and consequently feeling more stable as an individual. This interplay seems to keep alive a narrative that participants can use to make sense of what has happened to them in the past, and how they can now move forward. Some of the research exploring posttraumatic growth may be helpful in framing this theme. Experts have argued that it is common for positive changes to result from struggles with adversity, and have termed the collection of such changes 'adversarial growth' (Joseph, Yule & Williams, 1993). It has been argued that the process of struggling with adversity may bring about changes in people, who might then develop higher levels of functioning than that which existed prior to the event. These positive changes, that "don't kill us but make us stronger" (Joseph, 2011), have been labelled "posttraumatic growth, stress-related growth, perceived benefits, thriving, blessings, positive by-products, positive adjustment, and positive adaptation" (Linley & Joseph, 2004, p11). Drew's extract is typified by this notion of adversarial growth, and he makes sense of the problems he has experienced as something he can now advise on. Drew states that the strategies he uses to help others allows him to "use them for myself and learn from that as well". He then goes on to say how this reciprocal exchange is helping him reflect on who he was, where he is today, and where he wants to be in the future. Whilst the participants in this sample were not verified sufferers of PTSD, they all made reference to overcoming extreme adversity throughout their lives. Researchers have argued this is key in the growth process; for individuals to reflect upon and understand the self in the context of adversity, and to question



what particular experiences have taught them and how they have impacted on relationships with others (Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1998). Furthermore, LeBel, Richie, and Maruna (2015) have applied these notions to the field of desistance. The authors note a common trend in ex-offenders wishing to become “wounded healers” – someone who utilises their deviant history as a means of providing support to others. It is argued that by recycling a deviant history in such a way that PTSD sufferers might make sense of and re-story trauma, offenders may be better able to make sense of unwanted pasts and take steps towards more desirable future selves (Maruna, 2001; Perrin & Blagden, 2014). The peer-supporters in this research appeared to be harnessing the right experiences, and asking the right questions in terms of enabling them to move forward.

### *Addressing deficits*

There was an indication across all participants’ transcripts that peer-support roles provide opportunities to develop social and emotional skills. When participants spoke about such skills, they contrasted who they are now with who they felt they used to be, and spoke about development and growth. It seemed that participants were cementing new ways of dealing with their social surroundings via their peer-support roles, and these adjustments seemed to be filling deficits or addressing prior problem behaviours. As such, this theme refers here to the experiential learning and growth that participants seemed to enjoy from their peer-support roles, and how they were applying this to situations that they may previously have found difficult to manage.

*In terms of patience, in terms of respecting other people...it has changed my life..., because it could be any time in the future you know...and I’m actually given the opportunity to work towards getting out, erm...It’s kinda hard to sorta pin point, but...in my past relationships, I’ve always been very demanding, always needing things done my way and never allowing my partner to have their say, their opinion. I was never interested. The Shannon Trust...they’ve given me...allowed me to see the amount of patience I have. It’s affected everything. And I*

*believe that, should I have, erm, another relationship, I'll be completely different, you know, I will, instead of telling my partner that I need that and that this needs to be done, and expecting it to be done...sit down with them, speak to them about it, listen to what they've got to say. My word is not law, I'm not the be all and end all of things. Charles (Shannon Trust Mentor)*

Charles speaks of his development of patience and how this has allowed him to reflect on past relationships and where problems have arisen. He describes his self, prior to being a Shannon Trust mentor, as egocentric, demanding, and lacking in ability to compromise and empathise. Charles describes the way in which he feels he'll be completely different in relationships now that his mentoring role has instilled some patience in him. He recognises the importance of negotiation and compromise in relationships and that it is unreasonable to consider his own needs as paramount. Egocentrism, selfishness, low empathy, and consequential relationship difficulties were commonly spoken about where participants' extracts illuminated past selves. These character traits were often contrasted against those that were developed following peer-support experience, and analysis of these extracts revealed the emergence of a qualitative shift in the self for participants. Peer-support roles were instilling a variety of positive and desired traits in those who upheld them. This process appeared to be mechanically similar to that described in the prior subtheme. However, where 'exorcizing trauma' was about reflecting on and coming to terms with distressing past events, the present subtheme displayed how participants were creating and honing new behavioural traits and relative functional skills.

*It's made me become a better person, it's made me look at how it'll affect other people, because before when I was on the outside...I was a selfish person...I was all about myself, I want what I want, forget about what you want, forget about how you want, this is me, listen to me, this is what I want...so being this listener has actually made me become a better person and understand what I've done and what it's caused on other people. You know, the victims,*

*the victims' family, my family, my friends everybody who's associated or knew me it's affected them.* Gary (Listener)

Again, with much resemblance to several other participant extracts, Gary connects his Listener experience to a strand of self-development that is incongruent with his 'old ways'. While he was once a "selfish person, all about myself", he now feels he's become a better person who is perhaps more able to appreciate the gravity and consequences of his own actions and behaviours. The outputs Gary describes here are reminiscent of those a prototypical sexual offender treatment program would encourage (Hanson et al., 2002). Being able to view the 'self' in positive terms and building a sense of personal value are important factors in the treatment of sexual offenders (Mann, Hanson, & Thornton, 2010). Through peer-support programs, individuals seemed empowered to be able to do this.

*I didn't value myself too much. I was thinking you know, "am I worth it?" Because all that I was was very much tainted by my offending and my really poor decision making. So you think about...am I just feeding that ego by doing this work or is there genuine compassion for fellow human beings? Could I do the same work without wearing the t shirt?...And I suppose I kept looking at the motives, why is it that I want to do that? And certainly, my friend was sort of talking to me about it like "why is it that you want to do that?" you know, are you still trying to be this man, are you still trying to be this important guy? Is it still your ego you're feeding or do you genuinely want to help? And once I had come to the conclusion that no actually, this is, really about...compassion for people in the situation that I'm in and to be fair I don't gain anything from it. You know it doesn't buy me a ticket to an easier sentence...in fact it could be said it's the opposite, so yeah. And I think that's a conversation I needed to have with myself. Because I'd be concerned if I was just doing it because it made me feel important or worthy or needed and that's, that's a, quite a delicate balance. So when we did the training...erm that*

*was on my mind, but also then the good thing about the Listeners scheme is...that it's almost an antidote to egoism, because the whole point of it is open questions.* Tom (Listener)

Tom begins by discussing his perception of personal value, and how he has struggled to pry himself away from only depicting himself within the confines of his offence and the psycho-social deficits attached to it. He highlights issues with poor decision making, but also alludes to other problematic traits, especially egotism. When initially assimilating into his role as a Listener, Tom appeared to go through the same self-reflective process that many other participants described, and came to some conclusions about himself as a consequence. These seemed to be largely related to compassion – he was very cautious about the intentions underlying his wish to become a Listener, and vigilant in making sure his intentions were not about self-glorifying or fuelling his ego, but rather about true compassion (“genuinely wanting to help”). Tom was able to assure himself, through self-analysis and contemplation with a friend, that his motivations were indeed pro-social and underpinned by wanting to act compassionately. He arrives at this assurance by untangling the Listener role itself. In doing so, he reasons that having the role isn’t self-serving from the neither the perspective of acquiring a “ticket to an easier sentence” (peer-supporters are busy people who can compromise their position in prison if they are seen to betray the ‘inmate code’ (Trammell, 2009)), nor the perspective of ego-boosting (the Listener role requires true immersion into the ‘caller’s story’ and is thus concerned with the other, over the self). While Tom likely does derive an enhanced sense of self-worth from his position, he articulates that this is not about “feeling important”. The significance of Tom’s narrative here not only lies in the outcomes he feels his peer-support role offers (i.e. a chance to be compassionate), but rather in the sense-making process that his role encourages. Through deep reflection, Tom is able to acknowledge offence-supportive attitudes such as poor decision-making and egotism (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996; Beauregard & Leclerc, 2007), engage and explore them, and generate

important personal insights as a consequence. The process Tom is able to mechanise here has important implications for sexual offender treatment. Research surrounding SOTP shows that individuals who are able to control lifestyle impulsiveness and gain personal insight into problematic behaviours (characterised by low self-control, generalised instability, lack of meaningful daily routines, irresponsible decisions, and limited or unrealistic long-term goals) are more likely to go on to desist from offending (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Parry & Lindsay, 2003). The protective factors juxtaposed to high impulsivity include the ability to be able to self-reflect, assimilate protective strategies into every day behaviours, demonstrate impulse control, and problem solve effectively (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2004). Through his role, Tom appears to be maintaining a constructive level of self-analysis that ensures he is always mindful of offence-related attitudes and behaviours, and how to defuse them. This allusion to a process of self-regulation featured across all participants' extracts.

*Part of my problem is anger...which is always directed inward, the only outward sign that I'm angry is that I'll pick up a cup and bang it down and...banging and slamming things down. I don't lash out at people...never have done, but also, entitlement, that's a big one. If I go to the staff...and I ask for something I believe I'm entitled to and I don't get it then...fireworks...you know, but that's what it was like. Now...erm, like with the papers. I order a paper Monday though to Saturday. Therefore, I expect that my paper is there on the unit waiting for me. If it's not there. Why isn't it there? Oh...I can get very demanding...nowadays, it's more...“have the papers arrived yet”, “no they haven't”, “oh, okay thanks very much”. Now, I can sit back and go “well, it's not their fault, it's nobody's fault really. It just happens”. And me shouting and balling at the wing staff...the only thing that's gonna happen is me getting into trouble for losing my rag. So it's actually taking a step back and going “what you losing your rag for? Is it going to achieve anything? No”. With my work with the Shannon Trust, this is what it's actually*

*helped me to learn. It's helped me to learn to be a lot more patient than what I ever was...you know, it's great...as I said, it's affected my whole life.* Charles (TBT)

Charles' narrative of self-reflection is extraordinarily congruent with those of other participants in this study. He relates 'entitlement' to anger, and cognises that his aggression, though occasionally externalised through "slamming things down", is mostly directed inwards. While he doesn't express having entirely dealt with this, he appears to be on a self-reflective journey that is incrementally enlightening him and affording him some insight into his attitudes and behaviours. His role as a Shannon Trust mentor has impacted this; it has energised an increased level of patience in him and slowed the processing speed between being "very demanding" and getting angry. As a result, Charles has crafted the space and time he needs to bring trigger points under his control and buffer the factors that can lead to problem behaviours. This strategy he describes is echoed in cognitive behavioural therapy-based interventions, that look to prevent harmful attitudes and emotions from spiralling into destructive behaviours and actions (Butler, Chapman, Forman, & Beck, 2006).

Charles' extract evinces two levels of importance that interact. The first concerns the deficits (or risk factors) that he seems to directly pinpoint, and the second relates to the process through which he is able to mitigate the subversive impact of those factors. Entitlement has indeed been heavily discussed within the sexual offending literature, most commonly under the umbrella notion of cognitive distortion (see seminal works by Hanson, Gizzarelli, & Scott, 1994; Ward, Hudson, Johnston, & Marshall, 1997). Relatedly, researchers have argued that sexual offenders, child molesters especially, often possess attitudes and beliefs that legitimise sexual involvement with children and serve to justify persistent offending. For example, child molesters, may see children in sexual terms, and envisage them as wanting sex, as not being harmed by the sexual contact, and therefore not really being responsible for any harm (Hayashino, Wurtele, & Klebe, 1995; Ward, 2000; Ó Ciardha & Ward, 2013). This can in turn promote 'entitlement schemas', through which offenders can feel their persistent offending is justified (or rather, does not constitute offending at all) (Ó Ciardha & Ward,

2013). Entitlement, therefore, has been framed as one of many “maladaptive beliefs and attitudes, and problematic thinking styles [that can be] distorted in ways that enable sexual offenders to describe and justify their offending behaviour” (Ward, 2000, p491). While Charles is not referring to sexual entitlement in his extract, it is curious that he should use a term which is often of central focus in sexual offender treatment (Charles was a program completer). Whether or not Charles is directly addressing a risk factor through his role is perhaps not as implicative as the fact he is participating in a self-reflective process which is characterised by assessing and damage-limiting what he believes to be a problematic behaviour – for him, a “big one”. At the very least, Charles is demonstrating increased self-awareness over some of his problematic attitudes and traits, and crucially, he attributes much of this insight to his peer-support role. While caution must be exercised in postulating the treatment utility of peer-support, there were indications across this theme, typified in Tom’s and Charles’ extracts, that adopting a peer-support role affords participants opportunities to implement and practice protective strands of behaviour. Peer-support as an accompaniment to formalised treatment interventions, therefore, is perhaps worthy of discussion and further investigation.

### Superordinate theme 3: Keeping sane

Prison is synonymous with deprivation and has been well-known to impart significant psychological damage onto those who serve time. This superordinate theme enveloped notions that related to how participants were, to a degree, protected from capitulating under the stresses and strains of incarceration. The challenge of ‘keeping sane’ in such an environment appeared to be heavily influenced by having a meaningful role that occupied an otherwise purposeless existence. Peer-support roles constituted a legitimate space in which prisoners could nurture helpful, purposeful, and prosocial lives. This contributed to general well-being and seemed to keep participants on the ‘straight and narrow’.

### *Meaning and purpose*

As with participants in study 1, all peer-supporters in this study expressed that their peer-support roles provided a wellspring of meaning and purpose in prison. Depictions of how crucial cultivating meaning and purpose was for participants stemmed from their reflections on what prison life might be without having a peer-support role. With the aim of generating an understanding of this, questions put to participants attempted to enable them to envisage suddenly losing their roles. When they did this, participants conveyed great upset at the prospect of losing their roles and went on to describe what meaning they derived from them.

*I would be extremely gutted if I lost it [the Insider role]...I'm very proud to be an Insider and to help other people. I feel it's a role which I should be doing...with the experiences I've got of prison life, this is definitely something which I can give back to...and I see it as putting something back into the prison. Stewart (Insider)*

Stewart begins with a clear emphasis on the personal importance he attaches to his role. Without it, he would be gutted, because he would then be unable to impact the environment around him in the way he is currently able to do. As it stands, Stewart is securing a basic human need through his role, which is to autonomously and skilfully impact the social world around him (Ryan & Deci, 2000). He articulates a proudness in the work he does and emits a sense of self-satisfaction at the knowledge he is giving back to others and also to the prison itself. Stewart is able to channel “the experiences I’ve got” into his role. This unearths a nuance to Stewart’s narrative that illuminates how he assimilates personal experiences and learning into his job role and his cultivation of meaning. Implicit theories of stability denote that this can be important in crafting a stable sense of self (Ross, 1989). Individuals who are able to centralise their routine activities, interactions, and experiences around a constant source of meaning are said to be able to create a temporal consistency that can keep them focused and self-motivated (Sturman, Cheramie, & Cashen, 2005). In cultivating meaning from their roles, this



was something that all participants appeared to be able to do. Without this significant benefit of peer-support, participants seemed to suggest prison would be almost unbearable.

*I'd be shot...I'd be sad, but I would still help somebody, because...when you become a Listener, you're a Listener 24/7, no matter if you haven't got the green shirt on or if they've took it away from you...someone will always come and talk to you and I would still act as a listener and not say anything to anybody...because it's the people out there, if you went and told somebody the system doesn't work, the Samaritans doesn't work, they wouldn't come to you anymore. But I'm still gonna have that instinct, if they're gonna say sorry you can't do it anymore, I will still help people and I will always say whatever you say is with me, it stays with me...I would still do it even if this got took off me...it's in my nature now. It's in my blood as they say, I've got so trained and used to it, I feel proud when I wear that green shirt and even if they took it away from me, I'd be sad but ok they must have their reasons...erm I'd ask why if I was taken off.*

Gary (Listener)

Participants consistently iterated a great fear of having their roles taken away, and this implied an important qualitative difference in how participants experienced prison before and after adopting their roles. Gary was visibly struck when he replied “shot and sad” to the question “how would you feel if the role was taken away?”, almost as if the possibility alone was unthinkable. As such, he displayed an attachment to his role that suggested it had become an engrained part of him. He gives credence to this supposition in the way he immediately moves to emphasise how he would continue his work in some way, even if it was in an unofficial capacity. Particularly salient is how he does this by insisting, in at least five variations (“I would still act as a Listener”, “I’m still gonna have that instinct”, “I will still help people”, “It’s in my nature”, “it’s in my blood”), how he *is* a Listener (as opposed to just someone with a Listener role). This is an important feature of Gary’s extract, and underscores the way in which he has internalised the meaning his role has offered and allowed it to transform aspects

of his 'self'. These transformations appear to be directly related to his Listener role, and this is manifested in the way he announces "it's in my nature now" (now that he has been a Listener). The level of meaning Gary has extracted from his role transcends the notion of simply 'having something to do' while serving time, and points to the importance of him being able to reshape deeply subjective and intramural variations of meaning (i.e. the meaning of the self). For Gary, the meaning he derives from his role is cross-wired with his self-concept, so much so that he would "not say anything to anybody" if he continued to listen covertly – because he doesn't need permission to *be* who he believes to be his genuine self. Though Gary elucidated this deeply introspective level of meaning from his role, others stressed the importance of having an enhanced level of purpose while serving their time, and how this interacted with meaning making.

*I've got a lot more confidence...erm...and it's perhaps not a good thing to be a confident prisoner, but at the same time, I'm not in my shell and I'm not just sat in my cell doing nothing. I'm out and about doing things which then helps the time to go quicker. The busier I am the quicker the day goes...so before you know it you've been to work, you've done whatever, you've gone for dinner, you're back in the afternoon...it's tea time, and then it's lock up. And the next day it's here we go again, and so, having that confidence and purpose from doing this role has kinda helped my sentence...and to, erm, to keep sane...for the amount of time I've been in, I've not been institutionalised. I still kinda consider that when I go to work, I'm actually going to a proper job, and I take it seriously the work that I do. I have deadlines and things like that. I take that all very seriously, as if I'm actually in a job outside somewhere. Stewart (Insider)*

It is important for Stewart not to succumb to "doing nothing" and remain "in his shell". Rather, he wants to be something of an active citizen in prison, and nurture an environment in which he can be purposeful and busy. His success in achieving this helps him approach his sentence and ensures he remains sane rather than "institutionalised". He outlines the responsibilities associated with his

purposeful prison life, which he then likens to life on the outside – one which would feature a “proper job”. While the latter part of Stewart’s narrative emits a sense of hope and perhaps a desired post-prison future, the most buoyant notion on display in the extract is that prison has become a place of purpose for Stewart. This is important, as widespread research attests to the inherent purposelessness of prison and the threat to wellbeing this can place on prisoners. Denborough (1996; 2002), for example, have described the pervasive silence, monolithic lifestyle, and totalised identities that are closely associated with the imprisonment’s twin dimensions of control and fear. In a semi-ethnographic study of a medium-security men’s prison in the UK and based on inmate testimony, Crewe (2007) seeks to both “document the nature and experience of power in the late-modern prison, and to detail the various ways that prisoners adapt to these mechanisms of control and compliance” (p.256). Using this data, he illustrates how various aspects of social order in prison are expressed through a range of adaptations, but also how “prisoners experience, manage and counteract power in various ways” (p.273). In the face of prison hegemony, one class of response noted by Crewe is what he refers to as “‘dull compulsion’...in which the rules and rituals of prison life generate a pragmatic or fatalistic acceptance of its inalterability” (Crewe, 2007, p.258). Some inmates, however, perceive themselves as active and resistant, in a way that provides opportunities for autonomy, meaning, and purpose (Ibid, 2007). While Stewart does not appear ‘resistant’, and in fact details the monotonous ritual of prison life, he is active, and able to inject a sense of purpose into his daily routine. Having something akin to a “proper job” seems to grant him a sense of meaning. This was the case for all participants in this study, who were resisting the hegemony of the prison institution and the ‘compulsion’ to accept its inalterable mundanity (Crewe, 2007). In this study, peer-supporters were remodelling prison into a place of active citizenship, from which meaning and purpose could be extracted.

### *Desire to ‘give something back’*

This theme categorised extracts that portrayed participants’ yearning to ‘give something back’ – to engage in something altruistic and for the greater good of others. Giving back has been widely

discussed in the desistance literature, and has been described as a behaviour that enables offenders to move away from their offending pasts and to look forward towards a 'new me' (Maruna, 2001; Perrin & Blagden, 2014). This is important for the desisting individual, as it has been found that offenders who are unable to reconcile an unwanted past can become locked in cycles of hopelessness and offending behaviour (Maruna & Roy, 2007). The participants in this study were routinely giving back through their peer-support roles and this gifted them a sense of self-satisfaction.

*They're going from being unable to read and write, the simplest things - you know most jobs want some level of reading level, even if they go out of here learning basic reading, they're gonna progress if they keep up the reading in their own time. They're gonna get better and they're gonna have a better chance of getting a job and again that gives me satisfaction knowing that I'm helping other people...again the knock on effect of that is that if they've got a job that they can rely on and be in especially say a shoplifter or a burglar...they're gonna get a job where they can earn money rather than have to go nick...and do things like that and if that keep that one person out of jail in the hundreds that I see that's one more proud moment. And I may never see any of those people again but I'll still be in the knowledge that, at least one person's been helped...that I know that I've used my time here effectively and I've achieved things that I wouldn't have achieved if I hadn't been put in this position...and I'm giving something back. Jamie (TBT)*

Jamie elates at the fact he is able to potentially contribute to another person's fortunes by simply helping them to read and write. He links the level of support he provides to a specific set of impactful outcomes, i.e. his mentees "getting better and having a better chance at getting a job". While he may be overstating his influence, or rather simplifying the complexities that are likely to be faced by those he helps, Jamie delights in giving back. Even helping just "that one person" would constitute "one proud moment", and would be a testament to purposeful and impactful prison sentence. Jamie's

narrative constitutes a quintessential redemption script. Redemption scripts are the subjective self-narratives that desisting offenders use to make sense of why they have gone or are going 'legit' (Maruna, 2001). Crucially, the viability of these scripts, or 'reform tales', hinges on the behaviours individuals demonstrate. Giving back behaviours lie at the core of the construction of redemption scripts, and can signify to the individual that they are qualitatively different from an unwanted past 'self' (Perrin & Blagden, 2014). In helping other people, and especially in ways that might influence reoffending in some way, Jamie is able to craft a viable redemption script and distance himself from any notion of an 'offending self'. Just to know he's helped, in some however small way, affords him a great sense of self-satisfaction.

Notably, Jamie also emits a sense of relief in the fact he has "achieved things he wouldn't have achieved if he wasn't put in this position". In the offending context, Maruna and Ramsden (2004) have argued that offenders can build their unwanted pasts and subsequent experiences of prison into a constructive purpose and consequently reconcile the anguish of having otherwise wasted time. Along similar lines, Holman & Silver (1998) have described how people who experience life-threatening illnesses attempt to make sense of their adversity by searching for some form "silver lining" from what would otherwise be meaningless trauma. In the quest to action this silver lining, individuals who have offended commonly seek to become a "professional-ex" – an individual who reworks their deviant history into a source of wisdom to help others (LeBel, Richie, & Maruna, 2015; Marsh, 2011). To the recovering ex-offender, the helping of others appears to enable them to make sense of why they wound up in prison, just as Jamie does in recounting his giving back and the achievements it has brought. Wounded healer roles can also signify something of a marker that proves genuine change has happened (Perrin & Blagden, 2014). This is further reinforced when the giving back yields especially impactful outcomes, and when external praise is awarded to the professional-ex's good work.

*Someone, took...I was speaking to somebody and, somebody took their own life...well they tried to, and I got it stopped...and yesterday it was my birthday and he put the words "scoring a goal is great, saving a life is incredible, thank you" [they had played football earlier]. Just that thank you, means you've done something for that person, and he actually put the date when it happened...it choked a bit and I thought "wow". And I'm seeing that person around and you know...just that thank you. Never asked for it, never. Don't want anything for it, didn't say "oh can you put this, make it look good" it was just that thank you, and that meant a lot...I was on top of the world! I just went "oh thank you" and I didn't want to show him up or cry, I had a little tear but it was so nice. And I thought I've saved somebody and just one person can make that difference...just I feel like I can take on the world, I feel I can do everything and just seeing that person there and knowing that he's alright, it's just brilliant, it's absolutely fantastic to see it and just him to say you know "cheers mate"...and you know you're a good'un, you're a star, you're brilliant and that just means something to me and I'll take that with me for a long time...I'm proud of him I really am... I'm proud of myself! Gary (Listener)*

Gary recounts a powerful moment from his Listener experience in which he was able to prevent a suicide. He is filled with deep satisfaction at the thought of having at least helped "just one person". This was a prevalent narrative amongst the transcripts – it didn't matter how many people participants felt they'd helped, but it was crucially important for the 'self', to have helped just one person or to be 'trying'. Participants emitted a need to be able to keep telling themselves that they were "making a difference", "helping", or "at least trying". This is again emblematic of a redemption script, but also gives rise to Maruna's (2001) principal assertion that, in terms of desistance, "the going is the thing" (p17). The peer-supporters in this study were not determining their influence by assessing the amount of people they'd helped or the outcomes they'd achieved, they were simply taking satisfaction from enacting a higher moral purpose. Loftland (1969, cited in Maruna, 2001) observed that "transformed deviants tend to become not merely moral but hypermoral...they take on a relatively fervent moral

purpose” (p283). As depicted in Gary’s extract, ‘hypermoral purpose’ featured strongly in this study; participants iterated something of a desperation to help others as much as possible. They often made connections between this moral objective and ‘feeling like a better person’. It has been argued that this common trend in offenders taking on roles of higher morality enables them to offset some of the harm they recognise they have caused in the past (McNeill & Maruna, 2007). For the participants in this study, peer-support roles seemed to offer a trajectory away from the stereotypical characterisation of an offender as ‘bad’, ‘selfish’, and ‘immoral’ (Haegerich & Bottoms, 2004; Sanghara Wilson, 2006). This, in turn, enabled participants to believe that they were truly changing.

*With the Insiders I’m not always trying to take...it’s about being human in a sense, and about being a normal person, not the criminal aspect of oh it’s always take take take, but actually to be a real human on the outside. It’s something which this scheme does, it allows me to give something back into the prison system. Even if that’s just mentoring somebody who’s come on to the wing and going and having a chat with them, in some instances that can mean all the difference to that person. So this role allows me to be able to do that on a sort of legitimate basis. Obviously if you try and do it out of that, then all questions can be asked as to what you doing in there and things like that...so it’s just more, a legitimate way of being able to help somebody. Stewart (Insider)*

Stewart’s extract affirms the notion that peer-support roles enable a narrative shift away ‘being’ a criminal (i.e. on the take take take) and becoming more like a human – a normal person. Stewart also describes his role as an avenue through which he can give back legitimately. He alludes to the notion that his official role is necessary for him to give back, because if he were to carry out altruistic behaviours outside of his role, “questions would be asked”. This suggests that there is (unsurprisingly) a default level of suspicion and distrust for offenders in prison, and that they must forge visibly legitimate roles in order to have their positive behaviours taken seriously and appreciated for being

just that – positive behaviours. There is no shortage of research citing the distrust for prisoners from prison staff (see for e.g. Crewe, 2011; Liebling, 2004), and this highlights another unique source of value in peer-support programs. That is, they allow for the construction and demonstration of legitimate selves that stand a chance of being taken seriously and without cynical interpretation. It appears that without such an opportunity, Stewart, as with many other participants in this sample, would not have been able to satisfy his desire to “give back into to the prison system”. This is crucial as giving back for Stewart is clearly important and something which enables him to feel more like a human and a “normal person”. However, while Stewart might well be galvanising a narrative that enables him to move away from crime, he is also simply making himself feel better. A number of studies have linked selfless behaviours with universal happiness. For example, Meier and Stutzer (2008) found that several indicators of subjective wellbeing, including happiness, were enhanced not only when people volunteered, but when volunteering was less associated with materialistic motivations and driven more by wanting to truly make a difference. This is supported by Dunn, Aknin and Norton (2008), who found that participants were more satisfied when spending money on others rather than themselves. These findings offer some support for why Stewart might well genuinely crave to give back and subsequently feel better about himself. It is important that prisons offer opportunities like this, whereby offenders can contribute not only to their own rehabilitation, but to their sense of self that transcends the boundaries of simply being an offender or an ex-offender. Stewart is a difference maker.

Regarding Stewart’s “giving back”, it is also noteworthy that he explicitly mentions that it is not only people, but the prison he is giving back to. Research generally depicts prisoners as being distrustful of prisons as institutions, and even when they form trusting relationships with staff, they still commonly refer to not trusting ‘the system’ (Crewe, 2011). Here, however, Stewart speaks as someone who is grateful for what the prison has done for him and for the support he has received, so much so that he almost feels a sense of guilt for always being on the “take, take, take”. This indicates a synergy between Stewart and the prison structure and its aims – there is a sense of alliance here



between prisoner and prison. This is very much a divergent concept relative to the extant literature, and also sits in contrast to many of the participants' accounts in the previous study in this thesis. The trend in the previous study and in research is one associated with animosity between prisoner and prison. One of the characteristics of participants' experiences of peer-support in the preceding study was that peer-support roles protected prisoners from 'the institution' – they represented a space in which prisoners could shield themselves from the pains of confinement and from the risk of becoming institutionalised or governed by "dull compulsion" (a fatalistic acceptance of the unalterable prison institution (Crewe, 2007)). Here, Stewart, as several other prisoners did in this study, articulates a sense of commitment and attachment to the prison. This may have important implications, as research consistently shows that prisoners who align with prison aims are more likely to see better outcomes from programs and interventions (and ultimately reintegration) (see for e.g. Polaschek & Ross, 2010). This is especially true for sexual offenders, given the focus on risk, therapy, and reduced risk in sexual offender establishments (Laws & Ward, 2011).

*The main reason why I do it is because I want to give something back...all these years, all the different prison education departments I've had contact with...all have helped me gain the qualifications and the knowledge that I have got. Erm...so, to be able to help someone open up a new world for them...it's amazing. I've been asked by others "do you get paid for doing it?". I say "no", so "why do you do it?", and I say "well, for the simple reason of helping someone else to be able to read". You know...it's hard to explain, when somebody is unable to read, they are very closed. Erm...very insular, and to see somebody complete the red book, and go on to further education, it's like they change from one person to another. They're different people altogether. Charles (TBT)*

Charles also begins his extract by describing his satisfaction in giving back to the prison – specifically to the education department within it. He is happy to be able to balance out the conventional direction

of help (from prison to him) and forge an affiliation with the prison that is not so unidirectional. Again, there may lie several important implications here that relate to enhancing prisoner/staff relationships, but also calibrating the needs of offenders with the services of prisons. Although limited criminological research has explored how this might be done, a growing body of healthcare literature discusses how institutional care settings can deprive patients of self-worth and autonomy (Agich, 1993; Andersson, Svanström, Ek, Rosén, & Berglund, 2015) in very much the way ‘total institutions’ typically do (Goffman, 1961). It appears that empowering patients to contribute not only to their own care but generally to the running of the services around them can enhance treatment experiences and outcomes. Theories underpinning this proclaim the importance of people overcoming feelings of relationship inequality (being constantly taken care of) and being burdensome (Svanström, Andersson, Rosén, & Berglund, 2016). In the earlier extract, Stewart emitted a sense of frustration at himself for always being on the “take, take, take”, and here, Charles too reflects on all the prison has done for him and how it’s amazing to now give back. As such, it appears giving back assists participants in nurturing a sense of agency and control over their personal value. Peer-supports feel actively involved in their surroundings and treatment, as opposed to passive recipients of intervention. This variation of personal agency has been found to be an important factor in prisoners’ participation in the constructive aspects of prison (i.e. programs) (Coyle, 1992; Perrin & Blagden, 2014; Ware, Frost, & Hoy, 2010).

### *Channelling*

This theme emerged from data consistently revealing the notion that peer-support roles were keeping prisoners occupied and focussed on something constructive and legitimate. Most of the participants described how the nature of imprisonment (characterised by loss of liberty, deprivation, and a range of antagonistic conditions (Dye, 2010)) can not only cause despair but can also result in destructive behaviours. Indeed, a vast body of research cites the volatility of the prison environment and the heightened presence of social issues such as gang violence, drug use, violent and sexual abuse, bullying,

and discrimination (Carpentier et al., 2012; Fleisher & Decker, 2001). Prisons overwhelmed by such conditions have been found to increase reoffending (Cullen, Jonson, & Nagin, 2011). In the present theme, participants spoke of a protective element associated with their peer-support roles; their work prevented them from succumbing to the destructive magnetism of imprisonment.

*I suppose there's the possibility that I would've been in a lot of trouble...because the Shannon Trust has given me the opportunity to seize the amount of patience I have...and for me to recognise that that actually affects everything I do...without that...I'd be an impatience bugger...you know, if I asked a member of staff for something and I didn't get it straight away then, I would tend to lose my rag...you know. Charles (Shannon Trust Mentor)*

Charles recognises in his extract that he may well have found himself getting 'into a lot of trouble' had he not been able to seize positive traits via his mentoring role. He goes on to identify that it is his natural impatience that would have led him astray, and that his Shannon Trust role occupies the space in which his destructive traits might have prevailed. Through this role, Charles is actively addressing a behaviour that he has recognised as harmful. Through this channelling, Charles is able to let trivial annoyances pass by and avoid getting into trouble. For many participants, this type of investment in peer-support roles kept them focussed and enabled them to harness positive traits and skills. This apparent feature of peer-support roles is once again reminiscent of the good lives model (Ward, Mann, & Gannon, 2007).

*To be able to sort them out, get them through that it's just enjoyment really, for me, at least I've done something good for that day...which is what we need to do...it makes you feel good, it just raises you up, your sense of responsibility and your sense of awareness around you which is what we need to do. Erm so I find it gets you through the day, otherwise you're just gonna be bored out your head all day...and obviously that can lead onto something else so being able*

*to do something, be involved you know, no matter how small it is, it's a good feeling.* Drew (Insider)

Drew reiterates Charles' experience of peer-support roles as protective, but also introduces the idea of peer-support roles raising awareness and increasing an individual's sense of responsibility. Again, it appears having such a meaningful role places individuals in the present moment and enables them to stake stock of their situation and surroundings. This type of focus not only gets prisoners 'through the day', it also prevents boredom and 'something else' from happening (Drew's insinuation here was that boredom can lead to despair and self-destructive behaviours). The emergence of this notion across all transcripts is what framed this entire thread of analysis – 'keeping sane'. As well as maintaining mental wellbeing via channelling, some participants alluded to redirecting illegitimate skills and transforming them into socially acceptable ones.

*Before, I was an absolute pest, you know my life was all about drugs...about the street life. About me and my boys...fast life...fast money, that was me, for a long long time...so...I went from one extreme to the other. But I found from that from that life before, from the destructive lifestyle that I used to lead...into this positive academic driven sort of life, I found that there was skills from all that craziness that I brought into...like a new sense of maturity I guess...But I'd say that...I actually got those skills from the darker time of my life really...but...*

I) *You've managed to redirect them?*

*Yeah...use them in a positive way.* Ash (Insider)

Here, Ash contrasts his past and present selves. He describes how his old self was characterised by 'street life' – obtaining money via illegitimate means and having little interest in anything typically socially acceptable. Ash concedes that this was a destructive and 'darker' world. However, he has been able to re-story this old world and make sense of it through his role as an Insider, via which he has

been able select some of the skills he developed during ‘all that craziness’ and use them in a positive way.

## Concluding comments

This study represented a move away from exploring the general dynamics underpinning peer-support with a mixed sample of offenders, to a more phenomenologically focused investigation of how sexual offenders experience their peer-helping roles. Encouragingly, participants spoke about their peer-support work very constructively, and alluded to cultivating similar benefits that participants described in study 1. As such, the findings between this study and study 1 converged in many areas, but for the participants in this study, certain notions were emphasised or nuanced in ways that were specific to their offence.

The first of these discernibly more nuanced themes was ‘feeling human’. Although participants in study 1 described becoming new selves and moving away from unwanted identities, the participants in this study portrayed a deep fear of forever being labelled ‘sex offenders’. Nick’s extract, in which he despaired at being depicted as a ‘monster’, exemplified this. While there was a collective fear of being branded in this way, peer-support appeared to be helping participants resist harmful labels. This was a crucially important contribution of peer-support in this study, given that sexual offenders find it especially hard to reintegrate as a consequence of extreme public denigration (Levenson & Cotter, 2005; Braden, Göbbels et al., 2012). Upholding peer-support roles provided some level of solace to the participants in this study that they could one day be regarded as good people again. This has implications for the reintegration of sexual offenders, given that hopelessness, social isolation, and low self-worth have been shown to enforce cycles of offending behaviour (Jeglic, Mercado, & Levenson, 2012). ‘Feeling human’ in this study was energised by notions convergent with study 1, with participants reporting how they were able to earn trust and prosocial recognition through enacting environmentally constructive behaviours.

Another important finding specific to the participants in this study was that they appeared to be building coping strategies and addressing deficits that were related to offence-supportive attitudes and behaviours. Here, Charles, Gary, and many other participants spoke of being impatient, selfish, demanding, and apathetic to other people's needs. This apparent contribution of peer-support has some implications in terms of sexual offender treatment, with Mann et al. (2010, pp. 199-203) citing poor problem solving, resistance to rules and supervision, grievance/hostile thinking, and attitudes of entitlement as "psychologically meaningful" risk factors. It seemed possible from participants accounts that peer-support roles could provide offenders with opportunities to 'practice' new skills in this regard, and consequently build protective traits and behaviours. This sits in line with calls to provide opportunities for sex offenders especially to "do desistance" (Thornton, 2013) and demonstrate effective risk management methods (Davey, Day, & Balfour, 2015; Olver & Wong, 2013). The peer-support volunteers within this sample appeared to be addressing risk through the enactment of prosocial selves characterised by better coping, effective emotional regulation, empathy, mutual helping, and active citizenship. There appeared to be a closer connection between the participants and their roles in this study, and this was typified by deeper levels of personal reflection. This could be a product of the more intense therapeutic environment that characterises sex offender treatment prisons; it may be possible that the participants were engaging more therapeutically with their roles. On these grounds, future research might explore the clinical utility of peer-support roles in the context of sexual offender treatment.

Another point of divergence in this chapter compared to the last was that participants described how they were giving back to the prison, and in doing so, emitted a sense of gratefulness and appreciation to the 'system' they were serving time in. In contrast, participants in the study prior appeared to be using most aspects of their roles as a distraction from the system, or as a method of hiding from it. While this may seem like a something and nothing distinction, it symbolises an important dissimilarity in the experiences of the mains prisoners in the first study and the sexual offender prisoners herein. That is, the participants within this study appeared to have a closer

relationship with the prison generally – they were more invested in it and what it offered. This might be explained by the divergence in the rehabilitative activities and experiences between mains and sexual offender prisons. In the latter, sexual offenders are required, through intensive and personally intrusive programs, to emotionally engage in their journey through imprisonment: they are expected to, and do, open their innermost selves to officers, facilitators, and peers in contexts such as therapy groups and CBT-oriented interventions. In doing so, sexual offenders commonly refer to having ‘life-changing’ revelations during treatment (Blagden, Perrin, Smith, Gleeson, & Gillies, 2017; Blagden, Winder, & Hames, 2016; Laws & Ward, 2011). In contrast, many participants in study 1 regarded programs as a ‘waste of time’ and as ‘tick box exercises’. As such, sexual offenders are perhaps more likely to experience prison as a place of change, growth, and thus something to embrace. However, by encouraging alliance between prison and prisoner, peer-support roles may represent a resource for enhancing rehabilitative work and deconstructing barriers between inmates and ‘the system’.

## Chapter 6: Study 3 – “There’s no promised land”

### Introductory comments

This study was conceived and designed following the findings from studies 1 and 2. It became evident across the first two studies that while peer-support appeared to provide many benefits for participants, there were wider structural properties that required explicit exploration. Being a peer-supporter in prison seems to provide a chance for prisoners to create more positive and constructive environments for themselves. They are able to continually enact prosocial attitudes and behaviours through their roles and energise narrative shifts underpinned by redemption scripts (ultimately ‘feeling cleaner’). These personal agency-centric inputs were invaluable for peer-supporters, but there were some allusions to broader environmental and institutional factors influencing peer-support in prisons. These related to how other prisoners and staff view peer-support, and how the type and regime of a prison

can affect how peer-support programs run. To be able to comment fully on the potential utility of peer-support in prison, there was a need to understand these factors further.

As such, this chapter explores the attitudes that prisoners have regarding the status of peer-support in prisons, its shortcomings, and the wider problems with rehabilitation ideals and how these interact with peer-support are unpacked. It also explores participants' views of rehabilitation generally, and where peer-support fits with their understandings of what it is to be rehabilitated. This analysis is interweaved with literature related to the wider organisational, institutional, social, and political issues facing the rehabilitation of offenders. As such, the analysis in this chapter discusses issues relating to the importance of prisoners owning their own rehabilitation (Blagden, Perrin, Smith, Gleeson, & Gillies, 2017), the importance of prisoners not feeling disenfranchised from the creation and maintenance of their environment (Dhami, 2005; Juliani, 1981), and the implications more generally of prisoners being included in the academic and policy discourse surrounding imprisonment and rehabilitation (Dhami, 2005; Erez, 1987).

It is hoped that by the end of this chapter, which presents the final research study in this thesis, peer-support programs in prisons will have been evaluated both from a personal agency point of view (i.e. what it means to prisoners), and a structural point of view. This chapter is primarily concerned with the latter; how the structural properties and implications associated with peer-support interact with those who experience it, and what this can mean for the utility of peer-support in the broad context of offender rehabilitation. Utility in this regard ultimately hinges on prison governors, practitioners, and policy makers considering the recommendations of the experts – those serving time and undergoing the interventions and programs that others think are best for them. This final study seeks to offer such insights.

## Participants

In this study, a subset of participants from both HMP Lowdham Grange in study 1 and HMP Whatton in study 2 took part in follow-up interviews approximately 8 weeks after initial interview. This subset



was selected through a convenience sampling strategy which aimed to capture the range and diversity of the participants in terms of demographic characteristics, peer-support role, and offence type. The reason for not including participants from HMP Brixton and HMP The Mount in this subset was due to feasibility and access issues which meant that participants from these sites could not be re-contacted. Therefore, the final sample size for this study was 15, which is considered more than satisfactory in terms of the method of analysis used on the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As with studies 1 and 2, data collection was facilitated by the Safer Custody departments within both sites. Naturally, all participants fell under the same inclusion criteria (possess 6 months or more experience, be active in their peer-support roles, and have served a total of two years in prison). The peer-support roles had not changed between the interview time points, and all participants held the same roles and statuses as they did at initial interview. Again, no benefits were offered in exchange for participation, which was purely voluntary. Demographic information is presented in table 8.

*Table 8: Study 3 participant information*

	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Role*</b>	<b>Prison**</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Offence details</b>	<b>Sentence (years)</b>	<b>Time served (years, months)</b>
1	Jeremy	L	LG	58	Drugs	28	5, 9
2	Oliver	ST/B	LG	37	Customs & excise	11	4, 10
3	Mickey	ST/B	LG	45	Attempted Murder	13	5, 6
4	Imran	ST	LG	35	Drugs	15	4
5	Nikita	ER	LG	40	Kidnap	11	3
6	Jackson	B	LG	34	Murder	17	8, 9
7	Sanjay	PAL	LG	50	Drugs	25	7
8	Joaquim	ER	LG	35	Attempted murder	8	5

9	Nova	B	LG	47	Murder	18	3, 6
10	Jamie	ST	W	64	Sexual activity with a child	IPP	7, 6
11	Ash	I	W	32	Sexual assault on a female under age 13	IPP	2, 6
12	Stewart	I	W	59	Rape	15 (extended)	6, 6
13	Charlie	I	W	56	Murder	Life (99)	27, 6
14	Drew	I	W	33	Rape	10	5, 6
15	Gary	L	W	42	Murder	Life (99)	23

\*L = Listener; ST = Shannon Trust Mentor; B = Buddy; ER = Equality Representative; PAL = Prison Advice

Line Operator; I = Insider

\*\*LG = HMP Lowdham Grange; W = HMP Whatton

## Data collection

Semi-structured interviews, recorded using a password protected Dictaphone and later transcribed, were once again used for data collection. The interview schedule took the following format:

- Redefinition process and introductory questions – an explanation by the researcher by way of recapping and closing on the purpose of the previous interview was provided, and an introduction to the purpose of the follow-up was given. Introductory questions then focused on participants' thoughts about key terms such as 'peer-support', 'rehabilitation', and 'imprisonment'.

- Views and attitudes regarding the broader notion of peer-support – participants were asked what they think peer-support is, how it works, and why it might be useful in the context of prison.
- The potential utility of peer-support in prison – thoughts regarding how peer-support can shape experiences of prison were explored. Additionally, participants were asked generally about what peer-support could contribute to the prison environment and to offending behaviour in general.
- The problems with peer-support – participants were asked to describe any problems they felt peer-support brought to the prison, or problems that prohibited peer-support from working as well as it could. Probing questions were used here to explore specific roles, and the attitudes that prisoners and prison staff had towards them.
- Implications and suggestions for policy and practice – views regarding things that could be changed were sought from participants here, and suggestions for how peer-support could be better integrated into the structure of prison were explored.

Interviews lasted 60 minutes on average, and as a rapport building protocol, no notes were taken during interview.

## Analysis and discussion

As with study 1, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was adopted for analysis of the transcripts in this study. Following transcript coding and analysis, three super-ordinate themes comprised of several subordinate themes were identified. These themes are presented in table 9.

*Table 9: Study 3 superordinate and subordinate themes*

Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes

Through the gate implications	Vocational and transferable skill outputs Personal and social development Hope for the future
Stumbling blocks	Questionable motivations Balancing a complex role Overcoming negative attitudes Being an 'Insider' Incentivising peer-support
Implications for policy and practice	Assessing the value of 'courses' Standardisation Laying fertile ground Construing rehabilitation

### Superordinate theme 1: Through the gate implications

This superordinate theme encompasses three subordinate themes that relate to the most important implications regarding participants' lives beyond prison. Peer-support appeared to equip participants with a variety of skills that helped them to navigate the experience of imprisonment and also become better versions of themselves. However, there were also suggestions that peer-support could enable participants to feel better about their futures. While the testing ground for any constructive work in prison is based on the results it brings 'on the outside', there were reasons to be optimistic about the contributions of peer-support in terms preparing individuals for reintegration.

#### *Vocational and transferable skill outputs*

This subtheme is the first in this cluster to demonstrate some of the ways in which the participants in this study utilised their peer-support roles as such opportunities – in an educational capacity. This

section of analysis will demonstrate how peer-support roles may in fact be viewed as educational programs in their own right, or rather, self-elected opportunities via which prisoners can create and benefit from their own goals and targets.

*At the minute it's more of an experience thing for me for when I get out on my release, because I wanna do charity work and things like that. I'm doing a GCSE in Art, and I wanna use art and music in some kind of charity to...for younger adults, that haven't got no direction, try and keep them off the streets and give them something to aim for and that. So that's why I'm doing my degree as well in Criminology and Social Science, so I can put all these things together and hopefully be able to do something with it when I get released.../...I think prison, buddy, the whole scenario of it has pointed me in that direction, because without it, I wouldn't have...well I wouldn't, because without it, I wouldn't have picked up a guitar, I'd have never done art, I've have never done the buddy course or done a degree. All of these things have helped me to envision what I want to do. Jackson (Buddy)*

Jackson describes how his peer-support role intertwines many of the other aims he has developed during his time in prison, and in fact goes on to suggest that taking up the role was the catalyst that triggered the other positive influences in his prison life. There is a valuable experiential aspect to Jackson's peer-support role as a Buddy, which enables him to practice a mentoring role alongside working towards a range of qualifications. Together, these targets form a desired future for Jackson, who can verbalise a clear vocational pathway that he intends to pursue upon leaving prison. This narrative emits a sense of ambition, focus, and hope for the future. Notably, these ambitions have a redemptive element to them, with Jackson discussing how he found direction and purpose in prison and now wishes to help others do the same. The Buddy role, for Jackson, appears to afford him the freedom to take stock of his position in prison, to set himself targets, and to reflect on what achieving those targets will mean for his future on the outside. More specifically though, Jackson's role appears

to represent a focal point, which keeps him engaged in his own development and from which he attaches other activities, interests, and aims. In a recent review of education in U.K. prisons, Coates (2016) asserts that every prison should strive to offer individualised training programs that address basic skills but that also encourage personal responsibility and emotional and social development. It is concluded in the review that a range of methods should be provided in terms of education in prison, and should include embedded learning, blended learning, and peer-led programs. Jackson's extract is exemplary of this approach in practice; he is clearly taking personal responsibility for his own learning and development, and this appears to stem from his role as a Buddy. He is benefitting from his role as it is very personal to him and he has been able to develop further interests and targets from this. In contrast to this situation is what Coates (2016) has labelled a 'one-size-fits-all' approach and argued that such approaches will not achieve desired outcomes. It is argued that instead, a personalised approach can help individuals to understand who they are in a more rounded sense and help them to make sense of what and why they need to learn.

*I think if somebody shows they wanna change by helping other people, that's gotta be better than sitting on a chair and listening to someone talk about something. I mean, don't get me wrong, that course could work as well, if you wanna hear it, but some people are doing it for the progression they'll get from doing it, but they're not gonna get anything from it. Jackson (Buddy)*

Jackson emphasises the importance of showing change, not simply talking about it. He questions the motives of some people who do undertake such courses and that consequently, simply completing a program whilst in prison does not necessarily constitute change or development. Mann, Hanson, and Thornton (2010) have emphasised that individuals' behaviours and interactions with others and the environments that they create for themselves could be as meaningful as the risk factors they may be associated with. Prison inmates who demonstrate consistency in positive behaviours, beliefs, and

attitudes can contribute to a protective environment in ways that might sit outside of a designated intervention but that are still meaningful in terms of reducing the likelihood of reoffending (Mann, Hanson, & Thornton, 2010). As such, *doing* change and seeing skills develop from many varieties of activity can be significant markers of positive change. In this regard, upholding a peer-support role was important for participants.

It may also be uniquely important because of the fear and anxiety that often surrounds prison education or treatment programs. A body of research reports that the expectation, the imminence, and pressure surrounding “learning outcomes” and “targets” can elicit fear of failure and feelings of inadequacy in people who attend educational programs (Caraway et al., 2003; Sprinkle et al., 2006; Martin, 2010). This is especially true for those who possess low levels of prior education attainment, which is typical of those residing in prisons (Guerrero, 2010) (as of November 2015, 46% of people entering the prison system possessed literacy and numeracy skills expected of children aged 11) (Braggins & Talbot, 2003). While participants did not directly allude to a fear of formal interventions in prisons, there was a general preference displayed for “doing” rather than “sitting on a chair and listening”. This doesn’t appear to be a new finding. A Prison Reform Trust guide on active citizenship in prison (Edgar, Jacobson, & Biggar, 2011) makes the point that many of the benefits derived from peer-support roles cannot be gained in other ways, especially the ‘hands-on’ and interactive nature of the work. By becoming ‘active citizens’ via peer-support volunteer roles, people in prison carry out meaningful roles that have a clear purpose. It is argued that in doing so, they become purposeful and develop practice skills that could project them into a better position ready for life after release. Having opted for this form of challenging and rewarding work themselves, peer-supporters in prison change their environment; they move away from being passive recipients of what the prison offers and become active participants in a more positive environment characterised by self-improvement.

*I think being in prison and doing this job give you more confidence, in your communications.*

*Because in this job you talk a lot, you need to communicate...listen as well. This, you get to*

*learn. And there's nothing wrong about learning. Certain things, you know you will not need them, certain things, you'll try to use. And I think the job can be quite positive for this.* Joaquim  
(Equality Rep)

For Joaquim, the focus of imprisonment has been to learn and he has developed confidence and practiced communication skills through his peer-support role. His mindset seems to be characterised by the belief that even the smallest amount of learning is likely to be useful, and he discusses how his role can be positive in equipping him with 'certain things' that he can then use. There was convergence across all participants' transcripts regarding this mindset: all participants spoke at some point about the skills they had acquired from their work and how they were able to utilise these 'for good'. Many of these skills could be categorised as vocational in that they could feasibly compliment career ambitions and objectives. Such skills consisted of communication skills, becoming organised, or learning how to be more creative or reflective. Other skills could be defined as transferable: skills such as being a good listener, feeling confident around others, and developing patience. Peer-support roles enabled participants to develop and continually practice these broad skillsets, and this kept them focused on geared towards a more positive desired future.

### *Personal & social development*

Whilst limited research has explored the impact peer-support roles on the experience of prison, there is a body of literature that associates program engagement and education in prison with enhanced prisoner well-being (see for e.g. Costelloe & Warner, 2008). It is claimed that such engagement not only helps prisoners to achieve the direct aims of specific learning outcomes, but also enables them to restore fundamental needs such as autonomy, meaning and purpose, hope, and personal agency (Blagden & Perrin, 2016; Blagden, Winder, & Hames, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000). It has been argued that this can provide a safer and more progressive environment in which prisoners can become more



self-reflective and take control over their own personal development. Participants within this theme outlined ways in which they had 'grown' over the course of their peer-support involvement.

*Caring, confident to talk to people more, people I don't know, and understanding and that. Understanding people's situations and that, whereas before I didn't care. And it's literally sitting and listening, and not saying "I know how you feel" but it's more, I can understand how you feel, and like I say it's just listening to people, you don't really think about listening but on a Buddy course you do. And you listen to stories and stuff and you realise, well I might have had it bad but he's had it rough you know...you look at people in a different way. They might act a bit of a plonker but you start to think, well why is he like that you know, it's not genetic, he's not been like that since birth. Jackson (Buddy)*

Jackson alludes to becoming more empathetic as a product of being a Buddy. He states the impact of truly listening and how developing such a skill has enabled him to uncover the deeper meanings behind people's interactions and behaviours. He has become much more reflective about the way people are, even to the extent where he considers how a particular person might have come to behave in the way they do and how their personally traits have been constricted. As such, being a Buddy and learning how to actively listen to others has altered Jackson's perspective and enabled him to take stock of the behaviours and interactions going on around him in a much more mindful way. He briefly draws upon how all of this has led to him questioning his own circumstances, and comments that while he may have "had it bad", others have "had it rough" too. In this sense, the Buddy role for Jackson has been one characterised by skill acquisition, increased self and generalised reflection, and perspective making. Other participants experienced their roles in similar ways.

*If I can spend time passing on a few skills that I do have to people, you know, through toe-by-toe, then I would hate to have gone through prison and not done that. I think that's kind of*

*what I worry about, leaving with the same that I went in with. Or leaving with less than I came in with, or you know, thinking of myself as less than when I came in. So I think if you can better yourself by trying to better other people, then I think it does a world of good for your sense of wellbeing, for your own self esteem even. Mickey (Shannon Trust Mentor & Buddy)*

For Mickey, coping with prison meant re-storying it as a place for opportunity and self-improvement. The notion of leaving prison without having passed on skills to others and made a difference is unbearable for Mickey, for that would mean he'd have wasted his time entirely and potentially left with "less than he came in with". Importantly, while Mickey's desire to make such an impact and better himself might have preceded his decision to become a peer-supporter, it was his role that afforded him the opportunity and space to do so. Consequently, his sense of wellbeing and self-esteem has been boosted, and he can rest in the knowledge that he has not idly watched himself become "less than when he came in". For Mickey, achieving at least some aspect of personal development from his spell in prison has been crucial, and not only in terms of serving out his sentence, but for how he sees his future self too.

*It goes like, a long way for your own self-esteem and that is about knowing your limits, and why I did that was that I wanted to see how far I could stretch myself, but if I failed at that, it didn't matter, as long as I gave it 100%, I wanted to know my limits. And I don't put anything off until tomorrow now, you know, I've got the ability to it. So I kinda make the most of what I've got. It kinda makes you wanna improve on what you've got already. Also, I think that helps with how you kind of view life, how you view people. I think if you go round with an attitude where you're kind of looking down on people, and I've done that admittedly, erm...then you're very...you are limiting yourself in a certain way. And you certainly don't have a lot of peace with yourself if you like. I don't think you can really like yourself if you submit to these things. Mickey (Shannon Trust Mentor & Buddy)*

Mickey's peer-support role challenged him in ways he may not have expected, and revealed things about himself that he might otherwise not have identified with. He describes how he has pushed his limits within his role and how this has changed his outlook in terms of how he approaches tasks and priorities. He depicts himself as having a more 'go-getter' attitude now, and someone who looks to build on positive attributes rather than focus on deficits. Mickey's extract is made up of several testimonials to the ways in which he has developed as a product of his role, and this seems to be contributing to his over-all sense of enhanced well-being and personal satisfaction. This positivity is not self-centric, but seeps into Mickey's view of others and his general perception of life. He reflects on how he would once have looked down on some people, but how such an attitude only holds people back. Having a more positive outlook and being able to invest in his own self-development has empowered Mickey not to 'submit' to 'these things' (the temptations to be more negative and judgemental about people and about life's obstacles and challenges). Consequently, Mickey is able to be at peace with himself and like himself.

### *Hope for the Future*

For many participants, peer-support roles provided opportunities where new skills, traits, and perspectives could be identified and harnessed. The implications of this were significant but also appeared to go beyond skill acquisition and personal development, and project participants into a forward momentum. This was characterised by participants looking forward and enjoying making thoughtful plans for a positive future. This in turn seemed to provide feelings of personal satisfaction, and some assurance that the future would be brighter.

*I can't wait to get out of here and go to another jail and resume my listener role again. In the next jail, carry it on. And when I get out, I would like to be a Samaritan, definitely, I would definitely go down that road. Of erm...trying to become a Samaritan in the community, I'm not*

*sure I'd get the same...if it would be the same because I know out there it's on the phone, and I'm better, when I'm looking at someone, than talking on the phone. Because when you're talking to someone, you can have a laugh and a joke as well and you can talk problems and, I'm better at that and, when I'm doing that I forget about my own problems, and it's harder to do that on the phone. Jeremy (Listener)*

Jeremy's forward momentum is characterised by his Listener role. He emits a passion for his Samaritans work, so much so that he "can't wait" to move on to a prison where he can resume full service (at time of interview Jeremy was an active Listener but was receiving very few calls due to the conditions of his wing). Not only is he looking forward to re-enacting his Listener role at the next prison he is moved to, but he is envisioning taking up a community-based role upon release. Jeremy's extract sits in contrast to much of the extant data surrounding prison and coping, in which participants have described the anxiety attached to being relocated from prison to prison and the despair of 'passing time' and being unable to envision or plan for any kind of future. As such, the implications of having peer-support roles in prisons, and perhaps other voluntary positions from which prisoners can derive such meaning, are of great significance. As with many participants, Jeremy's role is not just providing him with something to do, but is fuelling an optimistic and prosocial narrative that is geared towards completing his sentence and reintegrating. Whilst he expresses mild doubt about his ability to carry out the role post-prison (where Listening is primarily carried out through telephone), and alludes to his "own problems" potentially intervening, he is reflective and open-minded about how his Samaritans role might feature in his future.

*You can't rehabilitate me any more than I wanna be rehabilitated. If I wanna go out and commit crime I'm gonna do it anyway, no matter what you do. You can't just walk out and be a peer-support volunteer out there...it can't give you hope because there's no promised land for you now. It's not like it's because you had a peer-support role in jail you're gonna be able*

*to walk into a peer-support job or that sort of lifestyle or that type of society. You have to go and work for that. Nothing's easy. It's not free. I don't think it gives you hope like that...but it does give you hope for progression and, you're doing something good and, course there's gonna be hope in that. But you have to work for it. There's no promised land, just hope in that there's something that it might change.* Imran (Shannon Trust Mentor)

Imran is realistic in his view of how peer-support might slot into his future. He acknowledges that having a satisfying and constructive role in prison doesn't necessarily reserve prisoners any "promised land" on the outside. He accepts that positive reintegration outcomes are a product of the individual's hard work. Nevertheless, and despite the fact that perhaps few prisoners will carry their role out with them through the gate, peer-support, or "doing something good", can represent a source of hope at the very least. This can, in turn, provide prisoners with the space needed for reflection and to work on "going straight" (Dhami, Ayton, & Loewenstein, 2007; Maruna, 2001). Researchers have argued that desistance can be provoked by someone believing in the offender, but crucially the offender beginning to believe in themselves (Farrall et al., 2011). As Imran articulates, peer-support affords individuals the chance to do something good, and this can energise that narrative that while "nothing's easy", there can be "hope for progression" and hope that "there's something that it might change". Maintaining this narrative can be crucial in propping up offenders' beliefs in change when aversive situations make them question if they are capable of fulfilling their goals (Marsh, 2011). Peer-support was a source of hope for many participants, and this may have important implications in enabling them to continually fuel momentums for change (McNeill, 2006).

*The best of you comes out because you are trying to help someone, and maybe people will then not associate that kind of behaviour with someone that is in prison.../...I think some people have the wrong idea of what is prison – they think everyone is bad. And I think, these jobs show you that people try to make...err...and sometimes someone that never did, for*

*example, charity outside or, help anyone, and when they come to do these jobs...they kind of, realise things about themselves as well you know...so maybe people outside are maybe gang related, and I saw here inside, with the job and the responsibility; they're trying to...defuse a fight.* Joaquim (Equality Rep)

Joaquim speaks more objectively about how peer-support might change the larger landscape of what prison is and how it can be experienced. Ultimately, this is about helping, and moving away from everything and everyone being bad. Joaquim reflects on his observations of contradictory behaviours in terms of what could be expected from a criminal and those that peer-support volunteers have demonstrated. He gives the example of a gang member on the outside coming into prison and trying to stop a fight. He denotes how this kind of situation can be unexpected for the individual, who consequently might realise things about themselves – skills or attributes they never elsewhere had a chance to utilise. The opportunities peer-support volunteers get to demonstrate prosocial behaviours may go some way to helping prisons re-shape their image, from being places where ‘everyone is bad’ to places where growth and change is possible. Given that such opportunities are largely voluntary and offender-led, there is hope that social perceptions of prisons and prisoners can be shaped. Joaquim alludes to this when he states that people have the ‘wrong idea of what is prison’. Indeed, there have been many attempts largely from Western governments, especially in recent years, to alter perceptions of what prison is for. The recently published Prisons and Courts Bill (2017) repeatedly calls for safer prisons where prisoners can focus on educational and vocational development, and engage in activity characterised by interpersonal growth and general well-being. Whilst this has primarily been a Western trend, it is not exclusively so. Recent case study research which is still being expanded emphasises the importance of well-being in prisons. Helliwell (2011), carried out research exploring the Singapore Prison Service’s (SPS) successful transition from its traditionally punitive system to one that focuses on improving the everyday lives of inmates, prisoner staff relationships, and adjusting community’s perception of prison. In describing the underlying tenets behind the achievement of a

33% reduction in recidivism and more stable prison environments, the SPS cites 5 key features of a constructive prison. They are: the importance of social context, benevolence, trust, building positive outcomes, and top-to-bottom engagement in a shared purpose. These factors transparently underpin the accounts of the participants in this study, and appear ingrained in peer-support contexts. In fact, the SPS has introduced many peer-led interventions alongside its redevelopment which have shown great success in both helping prisoners to reintegrate and gradually altering what was once a very punitive public attitude. Two of the main interventions include the Yellow Ribbon Project and 18 Chefs, which both utilise the skills of prisoners and ex-prisoners to provide a through-the-gate level of support for those who are reintegrating. While these interventions are primarily after-care oriented, their success gives hope to programs that look to bridge the gap in support for those transitioning from prison to community.

## Superordinate theme 2: Stumbling blocks

While all the participants spoke positively about their involvement with peer-support schemes, some also articulated some frustrations and barriers that they continually had to overcome. These frustrations largely emanated from the need to balance a socially sensitive role (in terms of prison dynamics) and the need to address negative attitudes from both prisoners and staff. Despite participants voicing some concerns in these areas, a sense of optimism and positivity also emerged from the data in that these concerns were minor and could be easily dealt with. As such, the label 'stumbling blocks' is used here to illuminate the solution-focussed viewpoint that the participant expressed.

### *Questionable motivations*

There was concern from some participants that peer-support programs could be open to misuse from certain prisoners. Most peer-led interventions operate on a voluntary basis, or pay a very small amount often for long hours. Nevertheless, there are commonly a set of privileges associated with

upholding such roles, and these can be inappropriately taken advantage of by those who volunteer “for the wrong reasons”.

*I know some people do it for the wrong reasons, erm, you know the, IEP levels and things, they're kinda badly thought out. And if you can only get your enhanced doing this, then people will do it to get their enhanced. There has to be, for peer-mentoring, there has to be an environment where you feel you can make a difference in doing it. And I don't think that's done by rewarding somebody for performing an action for actually being in the mentoring position. I think perks should be there anyway, and then they're there, they don't have to get them. And then the right people can get the right jobs in mentoring.* Mickey (Shannon Trust Mentor & Buddy)

A recommendation from Mickey is to offer IEPs (incentives and earned privileges) on a blanket basis. This way, prisoners are less likely to simply do things for materialistic gain and more likely to take advantage of opportunities that are personally meaningful to them. For Mickey, this is crucial in peer-support work, because those not doing it to make a difference are doing it for the wrong reasons. In maximising the utility of peer-support work in prisons, Mickey's recommendation makes sense. Whilst it may not be feasible to provide IEPs for everyone, the policies surrounding their use for incentivising peer-support roles should perhaps be reviewed. A common trend in studies one and two of this thesis was that peer-supporters feel a great sense of reward from their work. This element of personal satisfaction was also often an indicator of increased self-worth, a heightened sense of hope, and a feeling of prosocial investment and having something to lose. As such, the personal satisfaction element of peer-support is something to be harnessed and protected. It is easy to see that incentivising peer-support using IEPs might compromise this: it threatens to deplete the altruistic nature of peer-to-peer helping and the fundamental tenets on which it is built (shared problem solving,



mutual reciprocity, and empathy). There was agreement across the sample that such roles should be adopted by those who really care, not those seeking privileges or other self-centric centric gain.

*I think a lot of mentors they use the roles to gain like paroles and stuff, especially the longer...lifers or whatever, because when you're in prison it's hard to prove that you're a rehabilitated character. You have to show that, you know, do something to show that you're rehabilitated. And a lot of mentors use their role as a demonstration that they've changes, they're helping other prisoners, and they're helping the community. A lot of them do it in a cynical way really if you see what I mean. They do it to, you know, tick the box but deep in their hearts I don't think they really give a damn. Sanjay (Prisoner Advice Line Rep)*

Sanjay expresses some concern that peer-support role holders may simply use their work to convince prison staff that they have changed, or are moving towards rehabilitation. This “tick box” approach may be damaging to the peer-support structure because it could lead to the employment of many disingenuous or unempathetic individuals, rather than those who truly want to make a difference in the prison. Indeed, identifying the genuine from the exploitative in this regard represents a difficult challenge for the prison service and for administrators of peer-support programs. It is perhaps not feasible to think that peer-support provision will ever not be open to abuse, and that some individuals will be able to personally gain from work that they may not be totally invested in. However, there are (at least) two ways of construing Sanjay’s concerns more positively: 1) it is not necessary harmful for prisoners to want to engage in peer-support work to prove that they are a ‘rehabilitated character’ – this at least shows that there is some investment in change and an understanding of the negative behaviours to be addressed and the positive ones to be achieved; 2) there is also the possibility that prisoners may initially be drawn towards peer-support roles ‘for the wrong reasons’ and subsequently enjoy the same personally rewarding experiences that others do. Spinelli (2007) has observed this phenomenon in the context of therapy, arguing that whether or not the client is observably engaged

and motivated by genuine drivers isn't necessarily important. Rather, "the very entry into a therapeutic relationship...permits the client to entertain and 'try out' possibilities of being that provide a temporary means by which the worldview is reconfigured" (Spinelli, 2007, p87). Thus, it may be that simply entering into the peer-support context can about change in offenders that are not overtly observable. This could in turn bring about the genuine motivations that were initially 'questionable'.

Participants in studies one and two alluded to this, in describing their initial ambiguity and reservations about becoming a peer-supporter and how these concerns were soon eclipsed by the rewarding experiences they went on to have. While Mickey, Sanjay, and other participants in the sample are astute in highlighting some of the concerns in relation to prisoners' motivations to become involved in peer-support, these need not represent irremovable challenges in the evolution of its value. Nevertheless, in the interest of ensuring the legitimacy of peer-support roles, prison staff should be vigilant in monitoring the 'who?' and 'why?' when it comes to making selections.

### *Balancing a complex role*

Participants expressed concerns about how they balanced their role from two perspectives: organisationally and emotionally. From an organisational viewpoint, there are many peer-led schemes that operate in prisons and as such, confusion can result in terms of signposting prisoners with a range of problems to the right scheme. Participants expressed that this signposting issue often resulted in organisational confusion and procedural complications.

*Knowing where the boundaries are...so whether that's a boundary for emotional support, where we pass onto the Listeners, or where the boundary comes into equality. So...although somebody can be getting bullied or in a sense abused by calling names...it could be a racial thing, which again is us in a sense because it's anti-social behaviour. But it's also a racial aspect...so it's about knowing where the borders are and knowing when to pass it on so we can deal with something and put the paperwork in...but it can be a week down the line and the*

*it's no longer an issue. So it's kind of knowing where the boundaries are and...how to deal with issues...and that's where the training comes into it. Stewart (Insider)*

Stewart describes how there can be difficulties in establishing the true nature of a prisoner's issue, which in-turn makes it difficult to point them in the right direction or help them in the most effective way. Many of the support schemes available to prisoners naturally overlap in terms of the services they provide and as such, there are complications in terms of boundary setting. Participants expressed how this could often result in organisation complications, such as time-consuming paperwork being sent around the prison for the wrong reasons. This ultimately points to the need for peer-support to be formally recognised and structured, and perhaps for more stringent and continual support/training to be provided. Although this issue of organisational boundary setting represented a stumbling block for many participants, there was also a lot of positivity in terms of identifying solutions. In the above extract, for example, Stewart refers to training and the need to maintain up-to-date knowledge about 'where the boundaries are'. At no point, did any of the participants express any grave concerns or a sense of hopelessness over the frustrations they had experienced. Nevertheless, recurring 'stumbling blocks' were identified and these should be addressed in order to maximise the clear value of peer-support.

*Some of them, they have proper problems, you know, losing jobs or problems with officers...basically, I told these to my boss and, nothing happened, you know. Nothing happened. I sent maybe 20 problems and nothing happened, and people are coming to us, I look like an idiot. I try to be a man of my word you know and then people come and say "I tried to sort it out"...and nothing happened. Maybe it takes time but, if I have a problem, I say "just give me any answer" so I have something to say back. And if I have to ask again, I become angry, I don't want to be like a small child asking every time. Nikita (Equality Rep)*

Here, Nikita describes how his role can sometimes see him in locked in a 'no win' position. This is borne out of his attempts to meet the needs of prisoners while also working under the constraints and realities of prison procedures. It takes time for Nikita's efforts to be actioned, which ultimately leads to the peers he's trying to help questioning his level of support. This threatens a core aspect of Nikita's self in a sense – his promise to always keep his word. It is of course unfeasible to think that prison staff can always prioritise the work of peer-supporters, and there are procedures to be followed for the sake of safety and security. Nevertheless, Nikita articulates simply wanting a more upfront and honest approach from staff, which would involve simply being kept informed of processes and the reasons behind delays in processing any requests he sends off. This would at least enable him to ease the pressure he experiences as a product of being in the middle of staff and prisoner priorities. Again, this is an issue underpinned by the need to balance a multi-faceted role, and it should be taken seriously by staff tasked with implementing and/or regulating peer-led programs. It is important that the positive influence Nikita wishes to have is encouraged, and that he is not dissuaded from making such contributions and consequently left feeling deflated and 'angry'. This would only serve to tarnish the otherwise constructive experiences that he and others have through their roles.

*The buddy role is needed in prison, but we need a little bit more support from the prison itself, because at the moment we're supposed to have meetings as buddies every month, and the last meeting was, I dunno, 6/8 months ago? I don't even remember...because the person who was supposed to be dealing with us, the officer, he has to do some job elsewhere. So he's got 2 jobs, and when you have to do 2 different things you're not very good at any of them. You need to dedicate your time to one job and do it properly.* Oliver (Shannon Trust Mentor & Buddy)

As with the first two extracts presented under this theme, Oliver's comments highlight the need for peer-support to be more formally recognised in prisons, and structured in a way that ensures a level

of quality in the service provided by both staff to peer-supporters, and peer-supporters to recipient peers. The Buddy role does indeed have a place in prisons. In addressing bullying, the Buddy role attempts to support the vast numbers of prisoners who will experience anxiety and distress as a product of being verbally or physically abused, routinely exploited, and consequently left feeling hopeless. Despite its importance and unique ability to reach prisoners in need (who often choose not to turn to staff through fear of breaking the ('inmate code') (Cordilia, 1983)), the Buddy program does not have a dedicated overseer who is able to dedicate some time to its regulation. This is likely to result in reduced service quality for those in need of Buddy support, and resentment in the peer-supporters who want to make a difference and do something constructive and helpful with their time. Again, it may be a stretch to recommend increased resources for peer-support programs, given the already-depleted levels of staffing across UK prisons, but it is feasible for them to be reviewed and better-structured. Simple measures that could bring about some formality to such programs could go a long way to ensuring that peers fully benefit from the services available to them, and peer-supporters do not become jaded as a result of not being appreciated and taken seriously. While most participants outlined associated frustrations (those largely a product of poor prison-wide organisation and a lack of regulations or procedures surrounding peer-support), there was also some concern expressed for the way in which staff construed the confidential nature of much peer-support work. This threatened to be a more nuanced and challenging stumbling block.

*Sometimes they'd walk away with me and say "how was he, was he alright?", and I'd say "yeah he's OK", and they'd say "well what was his problem then?". So I'd say "well, you know when you had your briefing today, what did you all say?". And they'd say "well we can't tell you that!", I'd say "exactly, you should know better to ask me those questions". I mean I'd not got into trouble because they can't be seen to be doing that but, certain officers changed...like when I wanted to go somewhere or something, they'd make life hard for me, thinking, you're not gonna help us, what we're gonna help you for?.../...Samaritans wanted to hold some*

*training to teach the officers how it all operates but, that was blocked, and it was all “no, no, we’ve gotta do our training unfortunately”.* Jeremy (Listener)

Jeremy describes a troublesome power dynamic between himself as a prison Listener (with a degree of enhanced status and the obligation to treat his Listener interactions confidentially) and the prison staff. This stems from staff wanting to know more about his interactions with his callers (fellow prisoners who request a Listener) and him being unable to share such information. Listeners were conceived and are regulated by Samaritans, a U. K charity with an overarching objective to provide a support avenue for those living with suicidal thoughts and feelings. As such, prison Listeners are bound by the same policies and regulations as Listeners ‘on the outside’. Of these policies, the confidentiality of the caller’s interaction is most crucial. In fact, Listeners who break this code of conduct are highly likely to have their role terminated by Samaritans with full support of the prison’s Safer Custody Department. Not only is confidentiality crucial from a regulatory perspective, but it is important to the Listeners on a personal level – all Listeners in the studies prior articulated how privileged they were to have their roles and how they fully respected the boundaries set within them. This relates also to the recipients of the support, and the mutual respect between them and their Listeners. In essence, without confidentiality, the entire Listener scheme would collapse. Despite this, Jeremy describes how some staff appear to let curiosity get the better of them – they ask about his interactions with callers. When Jeremy responds as he should, telling staff that he cannot disclose any such information, he feels that staff begin to treat him differently (“make life hard”). This dynamic wasn’t just articulated by Jeremy.

*You’ve got a lot on your shoulders because you have to be confidential and you do get some staff, not all staff, who wanna know what’s been said...and you can’t, you can’t tell anybody and some of it can be very deep.* Gary (Listener)

Gary affirms the problem of peer-supporters (especially Listeners) managing their confidentiality protocols. This issue is alarming for three clear reasons. Firstly, Listeners need to be able to do their deeply sensitive job within the boundaries set by Samaritans, as this ensures service quality, the safety of both Listeners and callers, and the maintenance of the scheme. Secondly, if Listeners feel pressured by staff to essentially violate aspects of their roles, they are not only likely to feel distressed and lose focus on their work, but are at risk dually: of either breaking Samaritans protocol, or damaging relations with prison staff. Thirdly, if prisoners do indeed share sensitive information with staff, as a means to avoid a hard life, then they risk opening themselves up to attack from other prisoners, whose trust they betrayed. From playing out Jeremy's and Gary's dilemma, any one of these risks could actualise, and in doing so would threaten the constructive outputs described in studies 1 and 2 (i.e. the development of trust between staff/prisoners and prisoners/prisoners; the attachment to legitimate and pro-social roles; the development of confidence and high self-esteem; the reduction in stress and anxiety as a result of having a constructive use of time). As such, it is vital that this issue be raised with prison staff. Furthermore, as Jeremy recommends, perhaps training detailing the nature of Listener work should be completed by staff.

### *Overcoming negative attitudes*

When asked if there were any problems with being a peer-supporter, some participants highlighted the occasional negative attitude they could be on the receiving end of. These attitudes came from other prisoners and also some staff. Attitudes from the former were characterised by a cynical view that prisoners who become peer-supporters must have an ulterior motive, and should not be trusted, whereas attitudes from staff were more dependent on the power dynamics between them and the prisoners. While these perceptions of peer-support threatened to tarnish the good work it encourages and the reputations of those who provide the support, participants were fairly unmoved by the judgements placed upon them, and seemed to be able to shrug off what could otherwise make for a destructive environment.

*I suppose you're gonna have the people that doubt because obviously they're not sure what you're here for, they don't quite understand, obviously heard bad rumours. Sometimes you just get called grasses and all that because obviously we can't keep our information confidential which is quite...it's a very grey area because obviously some guys wanna come talk to you and they wanna try and keep it private but it's just impossible because obviously something just has to be done...and erm especially on the bullying side...and I think it always will be because obviously people are gonna perceive us as...you know, there's gonna be the doubters and the ones that are gonna say "oh yeah well he did me really good deed the other day, I really felt good, it stopped me from doing this or helped me sort something out" so there's always gonna be that battle I think. Drew (Insider)*

Drew discusses how his particular role places him in a quandary, which is a product of him not being able to guarantee the confidentiality of the interactions he has with those he supports. Unlike Listeners, who are bound by Samaritans policy to keep all interactions confidential, Insiders occupy the middle ground between prisoners and prison staff – they are responsible for supporting victims of bullying and making sure something is done about it. This is problematic for two reasons: 1) users of Insider support may simply want to offload their anxieties about a bullying situation but may not wish to take the issue through any prison procedures through fear of things getting worse or being identified as a 'snitch' (Marquart & Roebuck, 1985; Akerstrom; 1989; Garland & Wilson, 2013); 2) Insiders who are seen to be interacting between prisoners and prison staff are likely to be targeted themselves as snitches (or as 'grasses', as Drew describes). These problems are not necessarily unique to Insiders, but appeared much more difficult to overcome. Listeners in this study also reported being labelled as grasses every so often (though far less), but in contrast to Insiders, they are able to quickly quell prisoner scepticism by assuring them that their interactions are confidential - they can even highlight official Samaritan policy to emphasise this (Jaffe, 2012). The fact that Drew cannot fall back



on this same strategy leaves him (and several other Insiders) with the defeatist supposition that there's always "gonna be the doubters". Drew finished on a positive note however, trading off the negative attitudes for the positive ones stemming from those he supports and who get a lot from it. This optimism in a situation of potentially great anxiety and negativity was common across the transcripts, but especially amongst Insiders.

*Well...the prisoners, a lot of them take us as grasses...I've had it a lot of the time where people have said "oh, you're just a grass" and I've had to, not put them in their place but, tell them why they're wrong and...so kind of explain, like I said earlier about.. I use it as a scenario quite a lot of the time that...you know what, if there's someone being bullied and I don't help them and they take their life that night...how am I gonna feel the next day knowing that I could have done something?...so once I kind of explain that to them, they then sit down and go.. yeah I see where you're coming from, unless you get the real hard-nuts who say well I don't really care...so a lot of it is about education.../...educating them into exactly what we do. Stewart (Insider)*

Stewart describes how he finds himself in the same dilemma as Drew – a Catch22 of sorts, enforced by the requirement to balance the perceptions that prisoners may have of him with the duty of care he has to the people being bullied. This dilemma that Drew, Stewart, and many participants alluded to in their accounts is likely borne out of the inmate code. Paterline and Petersen (1999) have summarised the inmate code as a collection of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours that serve as a survival mechanism for prisoners. Sykes and Messinger (1960, p5-11) offered a number of discernible codes of conduct that are observable in the prison setting. Of these, "don't interfere with inmate interests"; "don't exploit inmates"; and "don't weaken" are particularly useful in explaining the difficult scenario in which peer-supporters can find themselves. In upholding Insider roles, prisoners may be perceived as deviating from the inmate code, as they actively seek to interfere with inmates'

interests (whether the goal is to provide help and support, or to report individuals who are bullying others). Insiders may also be seen to be exploiting inmates. They may be viewed as mere intelligence gatherers who will use the information they gather for their own gain (i.e. developing favourable relationships with prison staff or receiving IEPs). Finally, Insiders, and perhaps all peer-supporters, may be viewed as 'weak' as a product of taking on a role that ultimately defies the following inmate code: to always sit in opposition to the directives and the authority of the institution (Sykes & Messinger, 1960; Crewe, 2005).

As well as governing the everyday attitudes and behaviours of prisoners, the inmate code is said to be especially important in defining relationships between prisoners and prison officers. The two groups are expected, via the inmate code, not to mix beyond the level of the basic and necessary interaction (Paterline & Petersen, 1999). When they do, suspicion, distrust, and eventually abuse and violence can be the response from fellow prisoners. These dynamics are also theoretically aligned to social identity principles, and the mechanisms an ingroup may use to define the boundaries between their own members, outgroup members, and those operating in the middle ground (black sheep) (Reicher, Haslam, & Hopkins, 2005). It is possible that in upholding a peer-support role, especially that of an Insider, places individuals in a tense situation that could see them victimised. While some participants had their own strategies of dealing with this, i.e. "putting them in their place" or "sitting them down" and explaining, this is another situation which highlights the need for more formal controls and regulations for peer-support programs in prisons. As Stewart suggests, openly educating people as to the purpose of peer-support roles may go some way to containing the negative attitudes that prisoners can develop. Interestingly, this applies not only to prisoners but also to prison staff, who were too mentioned as occasionally having negative views of peer-supporters.

*Staff differ...staff do differ...I suppose some think you're meddling...you're getting involved in things you shouldn't.../...I suppose staff differ in two different ways...some think you're helpful, because you take pressure off them...and others think you're meddling. Charlie (Insider)*

Several participants representing all peer-support roles expressed that some prison staff struggled to fully respect their work. Historically, prison has been characterised by numerous layers of social divide and clusters of individuals who form in- and out-groups (i.e. gangs) who either do not associate or actively seek to undermine the one another (Fleisher & Decker, 2001). Probably the largest and most notable of these groups are prisoners and prison staff. The dynamic between these two groups and the research exploring it is perhaps best summarised by McDermott and King's (1988, p361) description of mutually contemptuous environment in which prisoners view staff as "callous zoo-keepers, indifferent to, or enjoying, the indignities suffered by their charges" and staff view prisoners as "no better than animals who don't deserve proper sanitation". While these observations are outwardly hyperbolic, there is a plethora of evidence attesting to the power imbalance between staff and prisoners and how this permeates into the everyday treatment of prisoners (see, for example, Edgar, O'Donnell, & Martin, 2014; Haney & Zimbardo, 2009; Ross, 1981). It is unsurprising therefore, that "staff do differ" in their responses to prisoners who ultimately possess elevated status within the prison – some staff may embrace any resource that takes away the pressure of a heavy workload, and some may feel their own roles are being trespassed upon by those they are tasked with incapacitating. This divide in staff attitudes was reaffirmed many times over in participants' transcripts.

*Some staff don't take it as seriously as they should...on our wings...there are certain staff that look at the Insiders as if to say, "you know what, you're glorified a little bit too much". I think certain officers come from different prisons and they've worked in different prisons all their life and they come here and it's almost like a complete job change for them really in terms of the dynamics of the place. A lot of the time they bring that sort of...old head with them. So some of them look at Insiders like "you know what, you can't talk to me about any of this stuff, this isn't your job"...and I have had that, but the majority aren't like that...the scheme works really well here. Ash (Insider)*

Ash also describes differential attitudes from staff, and alludes to a problematic power dynamic which leads to some staff being uncomfortable with prisoners being “glorified” (or perhaps given too much liberty or power). While historically, the literature concerning prison officer power recurrently points to a troublesome and abusive power dynamic between prisoners and staff, some researchers have argued that changes in staff recruitment (see McHugh et al., 2008) and the introduction of so many policies governing staff power and discretion have largely addressed the problem. Backing this, Crewe (2005) has argued that the dissonance between prisoners and staff, enforced by the prisoner mentality of staff being ‘the enemy’, has somewhat narrowed. Indeed, more recent research highlights examples of excellent working relationships between prisoners and staff, and how these are galvanising effective rehabilitative initiatives (see, for e.g., Blagden, Winder, & Hames, 2016).

Ash validates this historical and contemporary split in the research surrounding prisoner / staff relationships, in observing that it appears to be those with an “old head with them” who feel that prisoners should not possess roles that potentially transcend the traditional order of power (depicted by Ash as a “this isn’t your job” kind of attitude). However, Ash goes on to say that the majority of staff do not hold such an attitude and that generally, the scheme works well. As such, while peer-support roles can potentially elicit resentment in some staff towards prisoners, and can in turn represent a potential threat toward their welfare and progress, such roles are also appreciated by many staff. A more optimistic outlook therefore is that peer-support may deconstructing the abrasive culture between prisoners and staff more than it is stoking it. This is in line with the myriad of extracts presented in studies 1 and 2 which point to the trustful, constructive, and collaborative relationships that prisoners are able to form with staff through their roles. Nevertheless, it is important to be mindful that staff attitudes “do differ”, and the implications this might have on the running of peer-support programs and the welfare of those who uphold roles.

### *Being an 'Insider'*

There is clear crossover between this theme and the two that preceded it. However, this theme is specific to the Insider role. In relation to it, many of the participants verbalised the awkward position in which they could often find themselves. This position was one of conflict because their role places them in the middle of two groups, prisoners and prison staff, but also requires them to mediate between the two. This is somewhat different to other roles which are more about supporting prisoners through a relatively independent system. The lack of this independent system appeared to leave participants open to some risk in terms of being viewed as informants. To this end, some participants even talked about changing the title of the scheme, as it lends itself to negative stereotypes and is synonymous with 'informant', 'spy', 'grass' (an issue raised in previous themes). Some participants described how they could often find themselves in very compromising positions in terms of appearing to be on a particular 'side'.

*I mean the difficulties come if...the guy who's coming to see you is actually complaining about a member of staff...and that does happen, and then you've got an issue because your first port of call when someone comes to see you is staff. But if it's about a member of staff, you've got another issue there. Charlie (Insider)*

In terms of the inmate code described earlier, Charlie is potentially placing himself in great risk by accumulating information from prisoners regarding staff, and then possibly having to go and report this to those same staff members. Depending on how staff members deal with such a situation (ideally, with careful strategy and great sensitivity), Charlie could feasibly be deemed some kind of informant by prisoners, given that he is directly exchanging information between the two groups. Given the strong social identity dynamics already ingrained within the 'prison walls' (Fleisher & Decker, 2001), Charlie, as with other Insiders, runs the risk of being socially ostracised, or worse, abused by fellow prisoners.

*How do the prisoners see you as an Insider? Some think you're a grass...they think of 'Insider' as 'informer'. See the thing is, with the Listeners, it's stated that everything is confidential...with the Insiders it's stated that it isn't confidential...it is stated that you'll only talk to people who need to know, but people don't hear that bit...they just think you're gonna go and run into whoever, and so it's a little bit difficult. Charlie (Insider)*

Charlie's extract offers some explanation as to the aetiology of the Insider/informer concern. As alluded to in the previous subthemes, reassuring recipients of support that their 'stories' are kept confidential appears to be key in suppressing any suspicions that peer-supporters are informants who are not to be trusted. The objective of the Insiders scheme fills a void in that it seeks to stop prisoners being bullied by identifying such cases and reporting them to staff who have the authority to enact some form of control. As such, it is difficult to imagine Insiders operating effectively without the flexibility in terms of confidentiality. It may be, therefore, that the only clear solution is to ensure the objectives of the Insiders scheme and the channels through which Insiders operate are clearly and consistently expressed by the prison. It may also be worth considering renaming the scheme, as per the stigma attachable to the term 'Insider'.

### *Incentivising peer-support*

There is some variation in terms of how peer-supporters are compensated for their work, but all are arguably incentivised in some way. Listeners, Insiders, Helping Hands volunteers, and Shannon Trust mentors are not paid directly, but usually (depending on prison regime) operate within the 'red band' zone of privileges, meaning they are eligible to be placed on enhanced wings and are more trusted to move around the prison (NOMS & MoJ, 2011). Conversely, Buddies, Equality Reps, and Prisoner Advice Line operatives are paid a variable but very small rate (access to specific figures was not granted). As Prison Service Order 4460 indicates, pay rates for work in prisons generally average £9.60 per week,

but can be as low as £4 (HM Prison Service, 2000). This has not changed in at least two decades. This is for conventional 32-hour week jobs such as cleaning, canteen duties, or packaging services. Peer-support roles (if they are paid at all) are often compensated at an even lower rate. Depending on the prison regime and security level, some of these peer-supporters may also be permitted a level of movement-freedom in the prison, which enables them to carry out their daily tasks (i.e. Buddies may need to attend to the personal care needs of those they help at certain times). The participants in the theme 'questionable motivations' articulated some concern about individuals opting to be peer-supporters for the 'wrong reasons'. This theme presents extracts suggesting that the incentives peer-supporters stand to receive could represent one of those 'wrong reasons'.

*Another thing as well, the Listeners don't get paid. The Buddies – they pay you. So why do you wanna be a Buddy? "Well I'm gonna get £20 quid a week". Why do you wanna be a listener? Well because I wanna help somebody. There's a big difference. I just liked being able to help people. My wife suffers from mental illness, so I know a lot about mental illness and I can, you know, I've got empathy with mental illness because I've been there, I've dealt with it, I've lived with it, know it. If I can help someone, it's down on my record that...if it weren't for my intervention with a certain prisoner, he would've taken his own life cos he was very bag and he was segregated...and just to interact with him as a human being. Jeremy (Listener)*

While Jeremy exaggerates the pay rate for a Buddy (and in fact any peer-support role), he raises the important point that in paying peer-supporters, it becomes more difficult to clearly assess their motivations for joining. Jeremy goes on to describe his own motivations, which relate to his personal experience with mental illness. In doing so, he emphasises the importance of the human nature of peer-support work and alludes to how paying someone to do such a job might take away from the notion of people simply wanting to help others. Jeremy does, however, discuss how his good work will go down on his record, indicating that there is some self-serving element to his work (as perhaps there

should be). This illuminates how complex the issue of incentivising peer-support roles is: what constitutes an incentive? How can true altruism be assessed? Does it even matter if there is a self-serving or directly materialistic motivation underpinning a peer-supporter's work, so long as it is constructive and mutually beneficial? Despite these unanswered questions, perhaps the use of privileges could indeed encourage more superficial motivations for becoming a peer-supporter, and this could in-turn affect the kinds of people that make up peer-support programs and thus the level of support given. While this might be a risk and should be monitored, many participants in study 1 spoke about how they didn't care about privileges and hadn't actually used any of them when they were offered. Others also spoke about how the level of commitment required in a peer-support role is intense, and that this would naturally filter out those who were not truly in it to make a positive impact. Nevertheless, any system in prison that offers inmates a level of privileges is unfortunately open to being taken advantage of, and while this is not a justification to become cynical about prisoner behaviour, it is a dynamic that should not be ignored.

*If you treat people like humans...I go back to dog training, you don't train a dog by saying if you don't do you this you get a whack. No, you train people by rewarding them...using the carrot, it's a time-tested approach. But my point is, when you have people here, who are on a good regime and are fairly settled, and the prison is fairly settled, people will be more mindful of doing things, they'd put themselves forward a bit more. Where this prison went wrong last time is they paid people to do it, they paid people to be mentors, and if you're on a cleaning job, that's what you're gonna go for. And so you get people saying they wanna do that, but they don't, they're just splitting their money two ways. So don't pay people, but still have a steady ship. It's safer...people are more inclined to do more responsible things, more mentorships. Mickey (Shannon Trust Mentor & Buddy)*



Mickey describes how paying people to do peer-support roles would almost inevitably mean that prisoners would select such roles over more menial jobs like cleaning. Therefore, people might come forward for peer-support roles simply because it's better than the alternative, rather than because they truly want to. Mickey suggests that removing pay incentives would "steady the ship" in this regard. It would settle the prison in terms of equality because everyone would know that money is earned through certain prison jobs and that positions like mentoring roles are about doing something different (perhaps something more "responsible"). It is feasible that Mickey's suggestion might well ensure that the people who truly want to make a difference to "do good" with their time might put themselves forward more. In paying people, there is a risk of peer-support roles morphing into every other prison role and losing their niche value which appears to be about a certain degree of altruism, caring for others, making a difference, and consequently feeling more human.

### Superordinate theme 3: Implications for policy and practice

The subthemes identified within this final superordinate theme report on four areas that participants felt were important for the future of peer-support. Here, participants described some institutional hindrances that need to be resolved for the benefits of peer-support to be fully actualised. They also spoke about what rehabilitation means to them, and how peer-support roles can complement constructive offender change and progress. As such, this final superordinate theme is important in understanding how the participants themselves feel their peer-support roles can aid offender reform. There are several implications for policy and practice embedded throughout this section, and these will be drawn out explicitly in the final chapter which is concerned with future directions and envisioned impact.

#### *Assessing the value of 'courses'*

The final two subthemes that conclude this superordinate theme and chapter relate to prison a broader institution and a place that should rehabilitate its inhabitants. The aim here was to

accumulate a collective and general perception from participants as to how they feel they should be rehabilitated. This collective perception is contrasted with what has already been discovered regarding peer-support (in studies 1 and 2 especially), and with the mentions of peer-support that naturally occurred in participants' responses. Generating participants' accounts in this way has afforded the opportunity to identify where peer-support might naturally slot in to how the prisoners themselves see rehabilitation.

*I think, to be honest, when they do those courses. When I did all those courses you know. I think it's just people ticking the box. And officers making money from that, from Government. But what is the benefit for prisoners? Because to be honest half of the people in prison are not criminals, they make stupid mistakes, or just, fraud, something stupid. They're full time legal workers and they make some stupid mistake and end up in prison. So the course, like enhanced thinking, you can still do criminal activities; maybe just stop and think this time before you do them! You can use those courses in a criminal life as well you know. Yes, OK, I'm a criminal you know, but those courses. They don't work for me. Nikita (Equality Rep)*

Nikita expresses great cynicism and dubiousness for prison courses (i.e. standardised CBT-based interventions). He questions the validity of the courses firstly, specifically targeting 'enhanced thinking skills' and proposing that programs designed to deal with criminals overlook the basic human aspect of crime – that people simply make mistakes. Of course, prisoners, having committed crimes are, by definition, criminals (or at least once were). However, the point Nikita is trying to make is that programs in prison may over-state the criminogenic needs of prisoners. In doing so, prisons may be coercing prisoners into programs that are not relevant and that they do not need. This might also be the reason for Nikita's (and several others' in the sample) frustration towards people "ticking the box". This is not a new criticism of prison programs. Wakeling, Mann, and Carter (2012), for example, identified and explored the problem of "over-treatment". They cite a study by Friendship, Mann, and

Beech (2003) which evaluated prison treatment for sexual offenders in England and Wales. The study found that medium-low- and medium-high-risk offenders benefitted from treatment but that low-risk offenders did not. This finding is also not specific to sexual offending. A large body of research indicates that programs are far less effective with low- rather than high-risk offenders (see Gendreau 1996; Gendreau & Goggin 1996; Howells, Watt, Hall, & Baldwin, 1997; Maguire & Priestly 1995). Regarding this recurrent finding, it has been argued that “low risk offenders have often been the subjects for intervention because they represent a “safe bet” in as much as they are not likely to reoffend” (Hall, 1998, p5). While determining risk in prisoners presents its own complications, on balance, the extant research boldly points to the reality that significant numbers of prisoners are likely to be mandated onto programs that they stand to gain little from (Hall, 1998). Indeed, two decades’ worth of findings from Gendreau’s research suggests that many prison-based programs may be counter-productive (see, for e.g. Gendreau 1996; Gendreau, Listwan, Kuhns, & Exum, 2014). The participants in this study also felt the same way.

*Erm...there are a lot of courses available that unfortunately, and prisoners are aware, do not help prisoners. It's almost like you're going through the motions instead of achieving something positive at the end, and I think those courses need to be relooked at and either changed entirely or rejigged to actually create a better outcome for the prisoners who do it. I mean I've actually heard prisoners telling lies so they can just get through the course and make it look like they've got something from it, now prisoners shouldn't have to lie to actually get through a course, so they have to change the course. Nova (Buddy)*

Nova confirms that many prisoners, as well as himself, are not so optimistic about the degree to which courses can help them. According to many participants, prisoners are able to manipulate their way through courses and pretend that they may have helped them. It appears from most participants’ accounts that courses are experienced simply as tick box exercises that are to be completed and then

forgotten about. While there is a robust evidence-base for many prison-based programs (Clark, 2011), this theme suggested that they should not be considered the sole form of intervention for the purposes of offender change. Rather, participants here emphasised the importance of prisoners owning their own rehabilitation. Researchers and policy makers have echoed this call in recent years (Gendreau, Listwan, Kuhns, & Exum, 2014). Indeed, widespread research in the areas of program engagement, rehabilitation, and desistance asserts that the programs most likely to encourage pathways away from crime are individualised and focus on the desired 'goods' and future selves that are personally meaningful to the program completers (Maruna, 2001; Oyserman & Markus, 1990; Purvis, Ward, & Willis, 2011). Peer-support roles represent an avenue via which this can be achieved.

*Rehabilitation is a personal thing, you can't really rehabilitate unless you want to. And no one in the world can tell you to do that. You can do the courses, but you know...a lot of people do the courses and then they go, "well what a load of shit that was" you know...rehabilitation comes from the direction you wanna go in. People don't ask people "well what do you wanna do, where do you wanna go?" it more, this is the way you should be going, this is what you should be doing. So it's no wonder that people fly off, and then they turf you out with £40 quid in your pocket and nowhere to go. If you have a lot of peer-support, maybe on a one-to-one basis...to me that's rehabilitation. It's not what courses do for you, but how you approach this yourself...if you can form a trust between another inmate and yourself, where there is real empathy there, then I think you've got more of a chance then. Mickey (Shannon Trust Mentor & Buddy)*

Again, for Mickey, rehabilitation is a personal thing which requires some autonomous agency and accountability. This is increasingly recognised in research and practice, with scholars and practitioners highlighting the personal nature of desistance and the need for interventions that recognise this (Purvis, Ward, & Willis, 2011; Weaver & McNeill, 2010). Mickey conceives rehabilitation not as

something that can be externally managed or achieved through a course. In fact, this might even cause prisoners to “fly off” in frustration at having their liberty confiscated. Mickey asserts that “no one in the world can tell” someone to be rehabilitated, but that it has to come from within – it is for prisoners to identify their own “direction”. Peer-support is a pathway that allows prisoners to do this and Mickey describes the tangible behaviours and outputs that peer-led roles can encourage. Indeed, if prisoners can outwardly practice, demonstrate, and reflect on prosocial behaviours such as building trust and empathising with others, there is clear value here that is not always captured in programs and courses. The literature surrounding therapeutic community prisons has driven this argument, and has encouraged the introduction of more and more peer-led interventions that enable prisoners to help each other in a reciprocal and empathetic environment which also affords individuals the chance to “do” rehabilitation (Ware, Frost, & hoy, 2010). While programs and treatment interventions clearly have value and while prisons should not stop using and improving them, the participants in this theme make a compelling argument that it is time for a change in strategy.

### *Standardisation*

There has been recurrent emphasis throughout the analysis in this chapter on the need for peer-support to be more formally recognised across prisons. This would allow for quality assurance guidance to be constructed around peer-support and for its contributions to be fully recognised. It would also ensure that any factors holding back the usefulness of peer-support could be abated. One such factor, indicated by participants, was the issue of standardisation. Many different peer-support programs run in a variety of ways across the prison estate in England and Wales. Meanwhile, prisoners are likely to transfer between prisons at least once during their sentence (Prison Reform Trust, 2016). Participants expressed how this can make for chaotic adjustments to new peer-support schemes, and that there was a need to standardise the procedures surrounding peer-supporters ‘carrying’ their roles from prison to prison.

*Any prison really, any prison it would work. But they need to have the same schemes. Like I said, some prisons do Listeners and some do Buddies. They're all different. They need to be on the same page first...every time you go to a new jail you have to restart all over again...do the course or reapply, and out of a thousand people, you're lucky to get it. If you take your roles with you, if you're a Listener and you go to a prison where they don't have a Listener scheme, you need to still be recognised as a Listener. Because that's still a skill. The problem is that by the time I go to another prison, my Listener training will be out of date, so it's got no bearing on anything. Come here, spend 3 years here, and I ain't been a Listener for 3 years. By the time I go to a new prison I can't say I'm a Listener, your certificate is invalid. And in a new jail I'd have to reapply and do it all again, so that certificate I've got in my cell, all that training...it's useless, it's no good, it doesn't help. It's got no value. Imran (Shannon Trust Mentor)*

It is crucially important that prisoners who show investment in positive self-change and who take steps to be constructive and helpful in the prison are recognised for doing so. Such behaviour should be encouraged, never dissuaded. Imran articulates the complexity of prisoners transferring prisons and still wishing to continue their peer-support work. If Imran were to transfer to a prison where his scheme doesn't operate, all the good work he provided in his previous prison would largely be thrown on the waste pile. He emits a sense of frustration at that prospect, and indeed it is concerning that years of constructive work might end up having "no value". It is important therefore that peer-support is not only formally recognised in the prison system, but also standardised in a way that ensures peer-supporters are not suddenly deprived of their status and desire to continue their constructive work.

*It would be nice to have one scheme, or two or three schemes that were the same title across the board in all prisons. If that happened it would keep people more aware of what they were dealing with and who they would go to, rather than having different job titles at different prisons. Prisoners like uniformity. Because it shows them where they are, what boundaries they*

*have, who to go to, how to deal with a situation, and it gives them some form of confidence...even when I came to this prison, I was confused with all the titles they throw at you.* Nova (Buddy)

Nova reiterates the need to synergise peer-support across prisons. Doing so would reduce confusion regarding the purpose of different schemes and make the running of them more manageable and transparent. Unfortunately, there is very limited information publicly available regarding the functions and running of peer-support schemes in prisons. There is also a lack of prison service guidance on what purposes certain schemes fulfil and what is expected of peer-supporters. This represents an important implication in itself – there is a great need for comprehensive and accurate information relating to the peer-support programs that operate in prisons. The information collected for this thesis was largely generated from meetings with Safer Custody staff in the prisons and from meetings with representatives of the external organisations that support the schemes (such as Samaritans). A review of this information did however reveal that there is some crossover between the functions of different peer-support roles. Buddies, Listeners, and Insiders (Boothby, 2012; Jaffe, 2011; Le Mesurier, 2011), for example, provide levels of emotional support to prisoners, and there can be confusion regarding the uniqueness of each role (i.e. which kinds of support they offer). The distinctions between these roles hinge on issues pertaining to confidentiality and the nature of emotional support (Listeners are in place to support prisoners suffering from suicidal ideation whereas Insiders support prisoners who are anxious as a product of being bullied). As Nova suggests, some level of uniformity may be important in ensuring peer-support is more readily accessible by those who need help, and less confusing for those who provide and supervise it.

### *Laying fertile ground*

This subtheme illustrates what participants envisioned would make the perfect environment for peer-support to thrive. Participants consistently expressed that there needed to be some commitment to

forging a prison climate that welcomes peer-support and enables it to flourish. While it was articulated that this was a task for everyone, participants pointed to the importance of staff encouraging peer-support, and the prison taking such roles more seriously in general. Words such as “community” and “climate” featured strongly across this theme, and seemed to lie at the foundation of overcoming some of the stumbling blocks identified earlier.

*I think it goes back to having, erm...the backing of staff, and management. You know, with each new government comes new policies, erm, new ill-thought innovations. Erm, so, it becomes the point that the boy cries wolf, where the really good innovations fall flat on their face because staff and management will have the attitude of “well, we’ve seen it fail”. So, if you steady a prison environment, where it’s not the worst place in the world to be...then the tensions will lift off the staff as well. They will be more inclined to support peer-mentoring, and invest in that climate...and it will all be a lot safer. Mickey (Shannon Trust Mentor & Buddy)*

There was acknowledgement from participants across this study that prisons are constantly in a state of change and volatility. While there was often a level of fatalistic acceptance expressed alongside this (i.e. a general feeling that prisons were powerless to change), there were also some optimistic and constructive ideas emitted. In his extract, Mickey describes how everchanging government landscapes can create a cynicism within the prison estate that ‘nothing works’. This can manifest itself in what Mickey tags a “we’ve seen it fail” mentality from staff. While his recommendation of steadying the prison environment may be vague and ambitious, he identifies that prison atmosphere and climate are key to improving the outlook of peer-mentoring. In the literature surrounding therapeutic community prisons (TCs), ‘rehabilitative climate’ is framed as an environment in which both staff and prisoners are aligned to the goals of the prison (ultimately to reform its inhabitants) (Blagden & Perrin, 2016). Prisons that cultivate staff buy-in and a sense that interventions can work have been found to have a positive effect on prisoners’ self-identity and enable them to construct positive identities



(Miller, Sees, & Brown, 2006). They have also been found to improve quality of life for prisoners (Shefer, 2010), which in turn places them at lower risk of receiving an adjudication (Newton, 1998). While Mickey is not explicitly alluding to therapeutic communities in his extract, he recognises a need for a more positive atmosphere that is safer and less tense. He also believes that in this kind of environment, staff would be “more inclined to support peer-mentoring”.

*It would work better if the prison...if each wing had their own community, and the community decided what does and doesn't go on...we are adults, and we have got sensible people in here, some more sensible than the officers!...it can run...and that's what happens in therapeutic community prisons. The prisoners decide, if you wanna put in for a family visit, have you behaved yourself that month to have that family visit? And they have a vote, and if they decide, well I don't think he should have that visit because last week he was talking to someone disrespectfully, and this is the prisoners deciding it. That can work! Jeremy (Listener)*

*You have to recreate a society, like Norway have, within a prison. You have a community anyway; you can't change that. But it's about how you change that community, and how you can make that community be responsible for itself. Mickey (Shannon Trust Mentor & Buddy)*

When asked about the kind of environment peer-support would work best in, Jeremy makes the explicit connection to therapeutic community prisons. Indeed, there appears to be a degree of conceptual alliance between the tenets of peer-support and the theoretical underpinnings of the therapeutic community. While the typical secure setting presents considerable drawbacks for encouraging personal growth and undertaking constructive therapeutic work (Dhami, Ayton, & Loewenstein, 2007), some have argued it may also represent opportunities and potential benefits, particularly if it is characterised by therapeutic and rehabilitative goals. In TC environments, these goals are driven by emphasising prisoners' personal agency and responsibility for themselves and their

social environment (Frost & Connolly, 2004). Both Jeremy and Mickey express the importance of this, asserting that “the prisoners deciding...can work!” and that the key is to identify “how you can make that community be responsible for itself” (in TC establishments, prisoners organised into peer-groups often have the autonomy to make decisions about other prisoners’ conduct and relative allowances). Jeremy places peer-support alongside the tenets of the therapeutic community, and indeed, there is a growing body of literature that suggests TC prisons are successful because they typically revolve around peer-to-peer and group psychotherapy interventions that hinge on shared problem solving (De Leon, 2000; Ware, Frost, & Hoy, 2009). Theoretically then, peer-support may be well-placed in TC prisons. Inversely, integrating features of TC environments into main prisons might be useful both generally and for the purpose of enhancing the utility of peer-support.

### *Construing rehabilitation*

It has been argued that prisoners are too often passive recipients of rehabilitative initiatives that are mandated upon them by those who know better (Deville, et al., 2005). Despite this claim, which alludes to the importance of prisoner-led rehabilitation and the value of the “insider perspective”, research on prisoners’ views of rehabilitation is scarce. Little is known about how prisoners experience rehabilitation, and what their ideas regarding its reform might be. In presenting some such perspectives, this subtheme bridges this gap to some extent; it is an analytical commentary exploring the viewpoints of the experts (the participants) on what rehabilitation means and how it can be experienced. In exploring these accounts, it is hoped that peer-support can be explored in the broader context of offender rehabilitation, and that issues associated with its current operational structure will be illuminated. To this end, questions put to participants during this stage of data collection aimed to generate an understanding of what rehabilitation means to them, how it should be done, and what this means for the utility of peer-support.

*Now, with rehabilitation, it's like drug addiction, you can only be rehabilitated if you want to be. If you don't want to be, nothing's gonna stop you or make you change, whatever you do it's not gonna happen. So you've got to want to change, you've got to work at it. That's why this peer-support stuff is a good thing...you're actually doing something. But go and look around on the wings, people sitting about, doing nothing. Is that rehabilitation? Warehousing people, and giving them stupid mundane jobs, giving them 10 pounds a week...How is that gonna rehabilitate you? Someone tells you on that day, you're forced to do a course, SCP, resolve. You haven't got a choice to do it, you're forced to do it. And I know many people who actually want to do it, and can't get on it! But...the people who don't wanna do it, they're in there doing it. It's a selection process surely? Jeremy (Listener)*

*Me personally, I think rehabilitation has gotta start at home, that person has gotta want to do it and do it the way they want. If he doesn't want to, it's a waste of time. These courses they put inmates on, biggest waste of money ever. You're not gonna change someone who doesn't wanna change. All they're gonna do is bullshit you to get outta the door. Change has gotta start at home. They can try and try and try as much as they want, but it's not going to happen if that person doesn't wanna change. Jamie (Shannon Trust Mentor)*

When discussing rehabilitation, participants' transcripts were saturated with the assertion that rehabilitation is a personal thing and that the motivation to achieve it has to come from within. There is indeed much theoretical support for this claim, with the literature surrounding program and treatment readiness consistently emphasising the importance of prisoner characteristics (states or dispositions) which are likely to promote engagement in therapy and thus behavioural change (Howells & Day, 2002). A key protocol in determining whether an offender is ready for an intervention is assessing their motivation – i.e. do they genuinely want to change (Ward, Day, Howells, & Birgden, 2004). However, Jeremy alludes to the idea that people may be motivated to 'do' change through

their peer-support roles, but not necessarily wish to enter a course or program. The implication here is that prison-led programs and courses may not be for everyone, and that prisoner-led change through peer-helping could be a viable alternative. “Being forced” to do a program or course was considered pointless in that prisoners will only change when they want to. Crucially, as shown across studies 1 and 2 peer-support roles can represent structures that encourage natural change in offenders. This may be important as a response to participants’ assertions that change has to come from within. Peer-support seems to encourage organic change that stems from prisoners’ own decisions to begin helping others. Such change, for participants in this research, was typified by realising new skills, finding hope and optimism, and garnering self-esteem and self-efficacy from legitimate sources of activity. Some participants alluded to how this in itself was a form of rehabilitation.

*I think the prison system should focus on what people are good at...if people can improve even more on those things then that would give them some hope and self-belief, and that will probably take them away from the bad things they were doing, that they probably didn't even want to do but they were just doing because they had to fit in or whatever. But once they have the worth and they have an identity, they don't need to be part of that anymore, they can be an individual. So I think prison should really look at focusing on peoples skills and abilities, whether they be innate or learned or whatever. I think the prison needs to spend more time and resources, identifying people skills and abilities, and harvesting them. That can happen through peer-support...and it would make people feel a lot better and that would be true rehabilitation. Nova (Buddy)*

Nova describes a strengths-based approach to rehabilitation that echoes the theoretical tenets of the Good Lives Model (Ward, 2002). He urges the prison system to be more responsive to offenders’ individual needs, skills, and goals. Focusing resources on identifying people’s natural abilities and

providing opportunities for them to be practiced and honed would be “true rehabilitation”. In this research, participants were discovering new skills and capabilities through their peer-support roles, and they were continually crafting them as a product of the routine reciprocal reflecting they were undertaking with fellow prisoners. Being able to harvest these benefits from the prosocial activities underpinning peer-support work meant that, for many, there was no need to engage in other methods of esteem-boosting. Nova mentions that people who are able to cultivate hope and self-belief from legitimate channels and “thing’s they’re good at” may position themselves on routes away from “the bad things they were doing”. He attributes this to self-worth and identity, and indeed, the participants in this study were constructing positive individual and social identities as a product of ‘being’ peer-supporters.

## Concluding comments

Relying on the accounts of the prisoners themselves, this chapter aimed to portray the prisoner perspective on the potential utility of peer-support in the context of the present corrective landscape. In doing so, it identified some encouraging prospects in terms of how peer-support roles can assist offenders in, and potentially beyond, prison. It also identified an array of challenges and hindrances that need to be overcome for the betterment of peer-support’s contribution to offender reform contexts. Furthermore, in responding to questions such as “what does rehabilitation mean to you?”, “what do you think an important change to prisons could be?”, and “how could peer-support impact on rehabilitation?”, the participants in this study highlighted some important implications in terms of where peer-support roles can be interlaced with rehabilitation initiatives.

The peer-supporters in this study described many ways in which they were boosting their future prospects. They were discovering new skills and simultaneously reflecting on how these could be employed to good effect in the future; they were thus projecting future desirable selves (Meek, 2007; Oyserman & Markus, 1990). Participants were identifying possible vocations, crafting transferable skillsets, and cultivating an array of personal and social skills. All of this provided

participants with a boosted sense of self-esteem, some purposeful direction, and a glimpse of hope that future desirable selves and lives could be reached. Trajectories of hope driven by becoming a possible self can be crucial for keeping ex-offenders 'on the straight and narrow' (Poulton, 2012). Despite the social and structural problems that the participants in this study will likely face on release (Harris, 2011), the cultivation of possible selves was an important feature of peer-support. Cognitive research with ex-prisoners (Maruna, 2001) has revealed that persistent offenders possess a mindset characterised by depleted personal agency and a fatalistic acceptance of being 'doomed to deviance'. Conversely, LeBel et al., (2008) showed that an offender's belief in their ability to 'go straight' and degree of hope were important factors in enabling desistance from crime. In their study, hope was delineated as a tool ex-offenders could use to shape their social environment following release (i.e. take advantage of opportunities and better cope with disappointments) (LeBel et al., 2008). Participants in this research consistently made sense of themselves as more hopeful and as better people. As per findings from LeBel et al. (2008), this can have important implications in terms of better motivating prisoners for reintegration.

Participants alluded to an abundance of benefits associated with peer-support roles, but also issued several cautions in the form of 'stumbling blocks'. Here, five subthemes were identified across participants' transcripts and they point to action areas for the prison service and for decision makers to overcome. The motivations underlying prisoners' decisions to become peer-supporters should be explored in order to ensure the credibility of their intentions to genuinely help. The analysis in this chapter noted that while having the 'wrong motivations' initially needn't necessarily be a concern (as per Spinelli's (2007) unconscious therapeutic alliance notion), there should be some protocol in place to filter out prisoners who may seek to abuse and damage peer-support schemes. Motivation was also connected to the issue of whether (or how) to incentivise peer-support. Many participants felt that peer-supporters should not be paid for their work, and that it should be as close to altruism as possible. No great concern was expressed from participants regarding the current approach for incentivising peer-led roles, which is mostly to offer movement to an enhanced wing (an offer that many

participants didn't accept). Nevertheless, incentivising peer-support remains an issue that the prison service should take a stance on. Accordingly, this research urges decision makers to appreciate the importance of the intrinsic human and altruistic benefits of being peer-supporter.

The other stumbling blocks that participants referred to related largely to how their roles were perceived in the prison. There were some concerns that fellow prisoners could view peer-supporters as 'grasses' or 'snitches', due to the fact they often need to play an intermediary role between prisoners and staff. This potential risk was connected to the notion of the inmate code (Cordilia, 1983; Paterline & Petersen, 1999) and points to the need for prison staff to be trained on the roles of peer-supporters and how they should be managed in the prison environment. Staff themselves also need to be aware of their impact on the functioning of peer-supporters. Many participants described ways in which staff could (consciously or otherwise) undermine their work. The most concerning finding in this regard was that prison officers may be reactive to a perceived power reversal (peer-supporters being given too much autonomy or credit). This threatens to limit the constrictive utility of peer-support, and staff should therefore be made aware of the beneficial impact of peer-helping in terms of offender change. As it stands, with the limited research available, many staff are possibly unaware of the influence peer-support appears to inject into the prison environment. This research offers a level of understanding in this regard.

The final superordinate theme in the chapter was derived from participants' views about the future of peer-support, and what else might need to change for it to be fully utilised. Here, prison courses and programs were spoken about in negative terms. It was debated that while programs are integral to the development and reformation of offenders, they should not be employed as the sole source of intervention. Participants repeatedly lauded peer-support for offering prisoners a chance to do something that is led by them and personally meaningful. They juxtaposed this by reiterating that "you can only be rehabilitated if you want to". The notion of offender-led reform was alluded to throughout studies 1 and 2 also. It was argued that through enacting peer-support roles, participants were engaging in personal and subjective sense-making processes that were responsive to their own

individualised circumstances and life-worlds (Bonta & Andrews, 2007). This appeared to be a unique and important contribution of peer-support, given that many formalised rehabilitation interventions have struggled to account for diversity and differentiation (McNeill, 2006; Wormith & Olver, 2002). The participants in this research called for a prison climate that encourages peer-support and consequently encourages prisoners to carve out their own rehabilitation pathways.

The findings from this chapter will hopefully aid further research and help to construct policy and practice around peer-support in prisons. Including prisoners directly in the formulation of these implications is an important contribution of this study. It is hoped that this feature of the research has ultimately represented chance for prisoners to inform some of their own directives. This thesis passionately advocates such practice. After all, “continued bypassing of the prisoner's perspective can serve only to harden the apparent resentment and contempt for a criminal justice system predicated on brass-bound policy ideals” (Juliani, 1981, p122). Indeed, prisoners should not feel like they are mere spectators of the CJS but rather active participants in its development (Casper, 1972, cited in Erez, 1987). In such an environment, prisoners are plausibly more likely to respect and adhere to the initiatives and interventions that they themselves helped formulate (Juliani, 1981). Conversely, disenfranchisement undermines rehabilitative goals and efforts to socially reintegrate ex-offenders (Dhami, 2005). As well as illuminating the important implications surrounding the utility of peer-support in prison, it is hoped that this chapter, more generally, has demonstrated the value of listening to the prisoner voice.



## Chapter 7: Conclusion

### Introductory comments

The empirical chapters in this thesis have highlighted many ways in which peer-support roles can be experienced by those who uphold them, and what this could mean for experiences of prison and potentially for offender change. Firstly, in this chapter, these findings are summarised and contrasted in accordance with the central research aims that guided this project. Following on from this, several uses for peer-support are proposed. This suggested utility is offered along with a discussion of how this thesis can contribute to theory, future research, policy, and practice. It must be noted that there are many ways in which the findings from this research can be interpreted, and thus many directions it could take in terms of implications and impact. The implications selected for discussion here are considered to be those that linked most closely to the participants' accounts and thus regarded the most important. It is hoped that this research will encourage further investigation into this topic of inquiry, and eventually result in positive and impactful changes to the way in which prison is

experienced by those it should endeavour to help. Therefore, this thesis represents a foundation that future researchers can use to guide their studies. In the interests of offering a level of quality assurance to these future investigations, this chapter offers a review of some of the limitations of this research. The chapter closes with some final observations on issues associated with the reintegration of offenders, highlighting the complexity of the association between what goes on in prison, and what this can mean for those who eventually re-join the community.

### The lived experiences and perspectives of incarcerated peer-supporters

Studies 1 and 2 in this research were especially focused on generating a phenomenological understanding of how participants made sense of their lived experience of 'being' peer-supporters. Going from relatively broad to specific, study 1 explored the influence of peer-support on a mixed sample of offenders residing in three UK prisons. Study 2 narrowed focus on a smaller sexual offender sample, with the aim of unearthing the personal and subjective sense-making processes that peer-supporters appear to engage. These two studies have revealed insights with regard to the impact of peer-support with 'mains' prisoners and with sexual offenders. These two groups significantly diverge in their experiences of prison, offender treatment, and reintegration (Blagden et al., 2017; Laws & Ward, 2011). Unlike mains prisoners, incarcerated sexual offenders face intensive treatment-oriented prison terms and a number of psychosocial problems specific to the social isolation they face for 'being' sex offenders (Schwaebe, 2005). This experiential divergence seemed to place more importance on certain contributions of peer-support for both groups, with sexual offenders being more profoundly affected by the labels they receive and how these can be countered by 'becoming a better person' as a product of doing peer-support work.

While there existed these nuanced differences in terms of how mains and sexual offender peer-supporters narrativised themselves, there were themes and notions across all transcripts that were recounted with striking similarity. All participants spoke of cultivating constructive relationships with prison staff and other prisoners, enjoying personal growth from 'doing good', honing positive

skills and keeping busy, all participants were also able to have a more generally positive experience of prison because of their roles. This experiential enhancement was attributable to peer-support involvement in that participants repeatedly contrasted prison life before and after becoming peer-supporters. Here, the consensus was that prison life before the injection of meaning afforded by peer-support was much less bearable. This isn't a surprising finding when considering the wide variety of research that explores how sources of meaning can impact prisoners' lives. Much of this research has focused on religion 'behind bars' (see, for e.g. Clear et al., 2000). It has been robustly argued that prisoners can, and do, employ their religiosity as a coping mechanism (Stringer 2009). The structured nature of religious subscription can help individuals take stock of their lives and come to terms with internal and external stressors (Heilman & Witzkum, 2010). Other findings have suggested that religious people generally experience enhanced life satisfaction as a consequence of regularly attending religious services and building positive and meaningful social networks (Rambo, 1993; Lim & Putnam 2010). The peer-supporters in this research described the same constructive inputs. Incarcerated religious converts also routinely construct a "prosocial narrative identity" that can account for why their prior actions are not true reflections of their core selves and why their present and future actions have new meaning and significance (Kerley & Copes 2008). Indeed, religious narratives allow for a new lens through which people can view their lives, and an opportunity to reinterpret their current situation into something more positive and manageable (Kerley & Copes 2008, Maruna et al., 2006). These processes were repeatedly echoed in this research also; participants were experiencing their peer-support roles as meaningful structures which offered many opportunities for enhanced wellbeing, personal growth, and holistic improvements to prison life. These gains appeared largely to be a product of purpose building, positivity gathering, relationship cultivating, and cushioning from negative labels and destructive stigma. All of these benefits, to an extent, appeared to protect participants against the aversive nature of imprisonment, and enable them to serve their sentences constructively. Peer-support also provided participants with an increased sense of hope for a better future.

## An insight into the sense-making processes of imprisoned peer-supporters

Peer-support roles contributed a great deal to how participants were able to 'story' their lives. They were able to narrativise their pasts, presents, and futures according to the differences in their attitudes and behaviours since becoming peer-supporters. Employing processes described in conceptualisations of redemption scripts (Maruna, 2001; Vaughan, 2007) and 'rebirth plots' (Robinson & Smith, 2009), participants were able to reconcile unwanted and wasteful pasts and take some constructive insights from them. This alleviated the burden of being consumed by regret (Holman & Silver, 1998) and enabled participants to focus on their present and future. The energised something of a forward momentum for change (as depicted by McNeill, 2006) and afforded participants the headspace to envision possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Meek, 2007) rather than the prospect of being 'doomed to deviance' (locked in cycles of criminal behaviours) (McCulloch & McNeill, 2008).

Ultimately, peer-support in this research seemed to invigorate participants' desire to change. The process of desistance that Shapland and Bottoms (2011) delineated can frame a summary of how participants made sense of the impact that peer-support had on them. This process begins with offenders wishing to change. In this research, the peer-supporters repeatedly expressed a desire to 'be better'. This seemed to be rooted in a yearning for redemption – participants specifically alluded to wanting to 'feel cleaner', 'feel more human', and get a 'fix of redemption'. Realising this was possible through their peer-support roles, participants progressed along the distance process by envisioning the kind of 'self' they wanted to become. Shapland and Bottoms (2011) refer to this stage as a moment of narrative shift, through which the individual begins to feel qualitatively different from a previous offending self. Participants alluded to this shift when speaking about how they 'didn't realise they could do it' (be peer-supporters), how they 'didn't think they had it in them', and how they described 'becoming a new me'. This shift in self-narrative can lead to the offender engaging in the recurrent prosocial behaviours associated with 'doing desistance'. In this research, participants emitted a sense of desperation to continually 'give back' and help others. This seemed to represent

to participants that they truly were changing, and the hope that came with this appeared to trigger cycles of prosocial behaviours and improved self-efficacy. In essence, peer-support provided a viable reform story (Maruna, 2001) which participants absorbed and used to spark and fuel momentums of change (McNeill, 2006).

## Reviewing and contextualising the definition of prison-based peer-support

In this subsection, the ‘contextualising’ relates to both the environment in which the participants made sense of their peer-support roles, and also the theoretical underpinnings of these phenomenological processes. Regarding the former, it is an important objective of this thesis to offer a reworked definition of peer-support that is rooted in the perspectives of the experts (participants) and therefore specific to the context of prison. Peer-support in the community is likely to differ on many levels from that which exists in prison. This is not only due to the environmental and institutional confines of prison when contrasted with the ‘outside world’, but also the characteristics of human interaction that prisons engender. The reworking of accepted definitions of peer-support in this chapter is responsive to these contextual divergences.

An important factor to consider in defining peer-support for prison contexts is the differentiation in the peer-led programs explored in this research. Some of the roles explored in this thesis would not easily slot into accepted definitions of peer-support in the community. Such definitions emphasise both parties having matched experience over the problem being addressed (Borkman, 1990), and particular levels of social and emotional support being expressed (Solomon, 2004). Within these confines, Prisoner Advice Line (PAL) representatives, for example, may not fit. PAL reps carry out their roles via phone, do not commonly emotionally engage with those they supports, and do not necessarily share the same experiences that ‘callers’ are requiring advice about. Similarly, Helping Hands volunteers are not necessarily themselves disabled in any way. However, the “mutual experiential learning” aspect of traditional depictions of peer-support (Solomon, 2004) can still be observed in the fact that both parties involved in the reciprocal dynamic are prisoners. As prisoners,

individuals share many psychological and social ‘deprivations’ (Dye, 2010) that place them experientially close to one another. As such, determining whether or not someone can be classed as a prison-based peer-supporter based on matched experience of a given history of trauma may be problematic, in that all prisoners on some level will share some experience in this regard. It may be more helpful, therefore, to construct a prison-specific definition of peer-support based on the benefits that the participants in this research reported cultivating, rather than the ‘job specification’ types of details that underpin community-oriented conceptualisations. Defining prison-based peer-support according to the benefits it likely offers individuals can ensure that 1) peer-support underpinnings are truly at play, and 2) individuals who become peer-supporters are likely to cultivate the same ‘gains’ as community-based helpers report.

For the purpose of defining prison-based peer-support in this way, Skovholt’s (1974) description of ‘helper benefits’ is adopted here. Accordingly, a peer-supporter in prison should be considered as someone who: *engages in mutually agreed problem-solving with fellow prisoners, and from doing so, may be likely to 1) feel an enhanced sense of accomplishment and self-efficacy for having positively impacted someone else’s life; 2) recognise that helping others can also be helpful for the self; 3) receive individualised learning as a product of helping another prisoner; 4) cultivate an enhanced sense of self-confidence from appraisals of the help they have provided.* Whether or not these benefits are fully garnered by prisoners upholding peer-support roles may be variable (some may become Listeners and feel no such benefits). However, assessing a role based on an individual’s *opportunity* to cultivate these outcomes from it will help practitioners distinguish peer-support work from prison jobs that sit outside of its theoretical underpinning.

## The utility of peer-support in prison: Implications for theory, policy, and practice

In the most pragmatic and broad terms, this research reiterates prior research postulations that the implications of peer-support in prisons go beyond basic peer-to-peer helping (Davies, 1994; Boothby, 2011; Perrin & Blagden, 2014). While there are many ways that impact could be interpreted here, the

following features of peer-support are considered to hold the most potential in terms of influence the prison environment.

### *Prisoner / staff relationships*

Participants across all studies indicated that their relationships with people in the prison improved as a consequence of having 'active citizenship' roles (Edgar, Jacobson, & Biggar, 2011). An especially important finding in this regard was that peer-supporters' relationships with prison staff had improved as a consequence of the trust they were able to build from 'doing good'. Widespread research has described the entrenched challenge of overcoming prisoner and staff dissension (Crewe, 2012; Liebling, Price, & Shefer, 2010) and peer-support in this research appeared to play a mediating role between the two inherently divided groups. While this was potentially threatened by the suggestion in chapter 3 that some staff may not appreciate peer-support roles, there was a buoyant collective assertion that peer-supporters are better-able to cultivate collegiate relationships with prison staff. This should be regarded as a crucial potential contribution of peer-support, and explored further.

### *Peer-supporters as wounded healers*

One way in which this research linked peer-support to the reformation of offenders was through the notion of the wounded healer (Maruna, 2001; White, 2000). LeBel, Richie, and Maruna (2015) have noted the prevalence of desisting offenders wishing to become a "professional ex-" (Brown, 1991) or rather a wounded healer (someone who utilises their deviant history as a means of providing support to others). In studies 1 and 2 especially, participants continually referred to generating great satisfaction from helping others. They spoke not only of 'giving back' while enacting peer-support roles in prison, but also expressed a great desire to continue helping others 'on the outside'. The satisfaction participants displayed at the thought of being able to do this is rooted in theory, and relates to ex-offenders being able to move on and away from an unwanted past. By recycling a criminal past in such a way, offenders are said to be able to make sense of past offending identities and take steps towards

more desirable future selves (Maruna, 2001; Perrin & Blagden, 2014). Research has revealed a recurrent trend in ex-offenders looking to energise this identity shift process, especially by forging wounded healer roles (Arrigo & Takahashi, 2006; Jackson, 2001; LeBel, 2007, 2009). Describing this trend, Maruna (2001) neatly surmised that “the desisting self-narrative frequently involves reworking a delinquent history into a source of wisdom to be drawn from while acting as a drug counsellor, youth worker, community volunteer, or mutual-help group member” (p117). Indeed, LeBel (2007) found that ‘activist orientation’ (where individuals seek to help other reintegrating offenders using their own experiences) contributed to well-being and increased likelihood of ‘staying straight’.

Fundamentally, for the desisting offender, becoming a wounded healer appears to allow for the construction of “reform tales” or “redemption scripts” (Maruna, 2001, p84). These “recovery narratives” need to be believable and logical if they are to be accepted by both the desisting offender themselves and by society. Crucially, they also need to be actioned and therefore validated; desisting offenders need to “do desistance” (Serin & Lloyd, 2009). As the participants in this research exemplified, peer-supporters appear able to construct and maintain viable redemption scripts and recovery stories by “doing good”. In enabling behaviours underpinned by “making something positive out of a negative” and “giving something back”, peer-support roles are illustrative of wounded healer roles, and participants in this research were effectively using them to maintain viable “reform tales” (Maruna, 2001, p86). This is an important feature of peer-support, and offers several reasons to be optimistic about its future utility.

Maruna (2001) reports the prevalence of his participants securing either paid or voluntary work as counsellors, social workers, or positions involving youth-offender support. He also emphasises this is not a new phenomenon, citing research from Brown (1991) who revealed that a significant 72% of those working in substance abuse treatment centres were once themselves substance users. This trend may be best explained by the research finding that individuals who experience life-threatening illnesses attempt to make sense of their adversity by searching for some form “silver lining” from what would otherwise be meaningless trauma (Holman & Silver, 1998). In the offending context, Maruna



and Ramsden (2004) have argued that through this coping strategy, offenders can build their unwanted pasts and subsequent experiences of prison into a constructive purpose and consequently reconcile the anguish of having otherwise wasted time. The field of peer-support is densely populated with individuals who journey through this process; who have overcome an array of difficulties in their lives and, at some point, recovered and employed this experiential knowledge to help others. Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous, and Anger Management programs are palpable examples. Peer-support programs in prison, then, are well-placed in that the demand for roles characterised by transforming trauma into applied wisdom is high amongst those who have offended. An critical advantage of this niche is that through peer-support provision, offenders needn't wait until they leave prison to source these transformative opportunities – they can seize them in advance, and benefit from the extensive range of outputs they appear to offer. In this research, participants articulated how they were becoming qualitatively different from past selves. The existence of this identity shift was not only being validated by the peer-supporters themselves, through 'doing good', but also by other prisoners and staff members, who were continually commenting on how they had changed. As a consequence, participants were able to offset the internal anguish they may have dwelled on as a product of their harmful and wasteful pasts. Instead, they were able to channel energy into a more life-fulfilling trajectory, one underpinned by helping others. It appears then that wounded healers can, and may already, exist inside the prison. This can have implications in terms of how prisoners are socially perceived.

Maruna and Ramsden (2004) have observed that offenders are often perceived to be innately unempathetic and self-centred. This public perception is one of many that threatens the success of reintegration attempts made by ex-offenders (Pickett, Mancini, & Mears, 2013). However, redemption scripts, galvanised by peer-support roles, represent an "inversion of this [apparent] egocentrism" (Ibid, p142). Wounded healer narratives, and the analogous ones across this research, are characterised by frequent themes of reciprocity, mutual helping, and making amends (i.e. 'giving back'). These principles underpinned many of the participants extracts in this thesis, and are the same principles

that comprise contemporary theoretical models of peer-support (Gartner & Riessman, 1982; Mead, Hilton, & Curtis, 2001; Solomon, 2004). This synergy between the theory of the wounded healer and the themes drawn from the transcripts in this thesis highlights a vacant space in terms of the resources available for prisoners to make changes to themselves. Peer-support can occupy this space, and in doing so can assist in bridging the gap in through the gate interventions. Peer-support roles can enable prisoners to satisfy a common desire to give back through a generative helping dynamic (McNeill & Maruna, 2007) and encourage a momentum for change that could continue through the gate and into the community. The desire for this to happen was explicitly articulated by several participants in this research, with Jeremy (study 1), for one, repeatedly expressing his excitement at the prospect of being involved with the Samaritans charity upon release.

There are of course many challenges that stand in the way of this idealistic vision coming into fruition, not least of which the criminal record blockades that suppress ex-offenders' opportunities once they leave prison. However, in time, this prison to community pathway may go some way to challenging the widespread perceptions of offenders as universally callous and unmalleable (Levenson, Brannon, Fortney, & Baker, 2007). Prisoners who can demonstrate reform as well as complete programs that explore it are perhaps more likely to convince both themselves and members of the public that they can reintegrate. At the very least, enacting a wounded healer role in prison and/or community might generate some level of understanding from the public, who are often coerced to make sense of prisoners as unassimilable objects (Simon, 1998; Douard, 2008).

### *Peer-support alongside programs and treatment*

Recurrent statements from participants across the first two empirical studies in this thesis that pointed to the potential utility of peer-support alongside a prison-based programs. Participants repeatedly articulated a preference for owning their own rehabilitation and displayed their frustration at the over-use of courses and programs. A general consensus amongst all participants, therefore, was that peer-support roles represented opportunities for autonomy, liberty, and agency in terms of the

changes required of them. Although there is strong empirical evidence for the effectiveness of many programs and courses delivered in prison (especially CBT-based programs (see Lipsey, Landenberger, & Wilson, 2007; Schmucker & Lösel, 2015)), and while there is no suggestion here that the development of such interventions should be abandoned, the findings from this thesis indicate some ways in which peer-support roles can exist alongside and potentially compliment them. Due to the heavy reliance on sexual offender treatment programs (SOTP) in therapy-driven establishments, the clearest link in this regard is perhaps between peer-support roles and the treatment of sexual offenders. The intense treatment focus and the specificity of the behavioral expectations that characterise sex offender treatment establishments makes for a context in which peer-support may be especially influential. However, participants from the mains sample also alluded to many ways in which peer-support could influence offender change. For this sample, peer-support represented an alternative pathway to change (participants spoke with a degree of negativity and reluctance about ‘courses’ and programs). For the sexual offender sample, peer-support could be construed as complementary to the objectives of treatment (participants articulated ways in which peer-support could promote skills and behaviours that could help them offset offence-supportive attitudes).

#### Peer-support and SOTP

Until this year, there had been cautious optimism for the effectiveness of sexual offender treatment programs (SOTPs), with Lösel and Schmucker (2005) revealing a mean recidivism rate of 11.1% in treated groups and 17.5% in control groups. This difference appeared to remain constant over a decade (Schmucker & Lösel, 2015). However, SOTP effectiveness has not been without controversy, and a recent MoJ review (Mews, Di Bella, & Purver, 2017) revealed that the “Core” program, embedded within a spectrum of sexual offender programs, had no effect on recidivism rates. The findings from this report are still being heavily debated, and recommendations will be forthcoming. However, there is a history of uncertainty from researchers and practitioners regarding the weighty reliance on SOTP, and its effectiveness in the prison environment (Polizzi, MacKenzie, & Hickman,

1999). Furthermore, with prior widespread evidence suggesting that at least one in ten sexual offenders will re-offend after completing a SOTP (Langstrom et al., 2013), it has been long-acknowledged that there is significant room for improvement. Accordingly, there has been a concerted effort from researchers and practitioners to identify methods of improving sexual offender treatment. This will, of course, be ongoing. One important finding from Schmucker and Lösel (2015) was that prison-based treatment was found to be less effective than outpatient treatment. While this outcome was likely confounded by the fact that high risk sexual offenders were more likely to receive treatment in prison, it still raises the issue of what can be done to improve prison-based treatment.

Responses to this issue have largely focused on the content of SOTPs, but are increasingly asking questions about context in which they are delivered (Frost & Connolly, 2004). The result is a large cumulative body of theoretical and empirical literature which has fostered the development of new etiological theories (i.e. *why* individuals offend), better risk prediction procedures (*who* is likely to reoffend), new treatment targets and techniques (*what* is targeted within treatment), and, the subject of more recent focus, effective methods and procedures (*how* we should deliver treatment content) (Ware, Frost, & Hoy, 2010). While there is some consistency in this regard, there remains much variability in the treatment methods and procedures employed for conducting it. This is of considerable significance, given that methods of SOTP delivery appreciably impact on treatment outcomes (see Marshall et al., 2003). For example, there is now evidence highlighting that SOTP effectiveness significantly hinges on therapist characteristics, quality of therapeutic relationship, and the degree to which group treatment environments are cohesive and emotionally expressive (Beech & Fordham, 1997; Beech & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2005; Marshall et al., 2003). These findings highlight the importance of the environmental factors that surround SOTP delivery, and there is some early indication from the participants in this research that peer-support can be influential here.

Context and environment are especially important factors when considering programs delivered in secure settings such as prisons or psychiatric hospitals, for these are often regarded as the least optimal environments within which to treat both sexual and violent offenders (Blagden et

al., 2017; Briggs, Sundt, & Castellano, 2003; Harkins & Beech, 2007). From the perspective of someone who has sexually offended, there are especially limited opportunities for learning, practice, rehearsal, and modeling of new knowledge and skills that will assist them in leading future pro-social and offence free lives. Rather, the knowledge and skills of most immediate concern to imprisoned individuals, and therefore most commonly practiced by them, relate to surviving the prison experience. Prison, therefore, is often seen as a context for the maintenance and reinforcement of antisocial attitudes and behavior (as per the inmate code), rather than a place of constructive and rehabilitative change (Dhami, Ayton & Loewenstein, 2007; Trammell, 2009). This is especially the case for sexual offenders, who represent an extremely denigrated and vulnerable population and thus need to protect themselves by “learning to pass” (creating and maintaining viable identities) (Schwaebe, 2005). However, this did not appear to be the case for the peer-supporters in this research, especially those who had sexually offended, who articulated how their roles enabled them to move away from harmful labels and to cope with prison more effectively. The sexual offender participants in this research were more able to take stock of their position in prison, and they continually evidenced their ability to be reflective and self-analytical. This was expressed within recurrent identity narratives, through which participants described “old me” and “new me” processes of gradual change. This sits in contrast with many findings that highlight the propensity for sexual offenders to remain insular throughout their sentences and to struggle to engage in forms of introspection (especially when attempts from practitioners in this regard are experienced as intrusive or overbearing) (Blagden, Winder, Gregson, & Thorne, 2013; Marshall, Marshall, Serran, & O’Brien, 2011). Therefore, the finding that peer-support involvement may gently ease people who have sexually offended into becoming more organically self-reflective illuminates at least one feasible use for peer-support in the treatment context. That is, peer-support may serve as a preparatory mechanism for pre-treatment groups, who are often unfamiliar and uneasy with the prospect of exploring their innermost selves and their crimes with others (Marshall, Marshall, Fernandez, Malcolm, & Moulden, 2008). Such a mechanism may enhance treatment program retention and completion. More importantly, however, in the current climate of

doubt surrounding the effectiveness of SOTP, peer-supporters appear to afford themselves opportunities to embed, model, and rehearse constructive knowledge and skills. Such activity could be undertaken alongside formalised treatment with the aim of bolstering its effectiveness, or could be encouraged in isolation. Either way, there were recurrent assertions from participants in study 2 that peer-support roles were helping them to become better people. This warrants further exploration in the context of improving prospects of reform for sexual offenders.

#### Peer-support across mains prisons

Though the focus so far has been on the utility of peer-support in sexual offender treatment environments, there were suggestions cross all studies in this thesis that peer-support programs can potentially boost program gains across the board. In carrying out meaningful activity on a routine basis, all participants across all studies were able to earn trust, protect themselves from becoming consumed by the antagonistic conditions of prison, and construct viable working identities. Prisoners who are able to cultivate this kind of environment for themselves are more likely to experience prison as one with a rehabilitative climate (Blagden, Perrin, Smith, Gleeson, & Gillies, 2017) and more likely to show program alliance (Cordess, 2002). Ultimately, the prisoners in this research were not “hiding” from the prison and trying to pass their time using strategies underpinned by the inmate code and traditional subversive behaviours (Crewe, Dhami, Ayton & Loewenstein, 2007; Ricciardelli, 2014). Instead, participants were engaged in purposeful activity that was perhaps intended for self-preservation, but gathered from pro-social and community-related contributions. Through their peer-support roles, participants seemed to be developing a stake in the prison community and therefore its overarching objective to support the rehabilitation of its inhabitants. Peer-support programs could thus represent one initiative for use in breaking down the many obstacles dividing the prisoners and the establishment.

### *Peer-support as offender-led reform*

There were reiterated indications from participants that any kind of offender reform had to “come from within” – it had to be triggered and maintained by the offender themselves. Indeed, there is ample empirical support for this assertion, with a broad range of literature pointing to the importance of program readiness (principally measured by motivation to change) (see Day et al., 2009; McMurren & Ward, 2010). Across such literature, a notion recurrently emphasised is the importance of offenders having some ownership over their own rehabilitation (Stevens, 2012b). Research consistently reveals that feeling overly controlled and lacking a sense of personal agency (Day et al., 2010; Toch & Adams, 2002) can have detrimental effects on prisoners’ willingness to change. Conversely, when prisoners feel they are in control of their ‘treatment’, they are more likely to engage (McMurren & Ward, 2010).

The participants in this research expressed that their peer-support roles provided them with an increased sense of liberty and autonomy – they were more likely to be trusted to move around the prison, and more commonly viewed as ‘responsible’ and ‘well-behaved’. Simultaneously, they were well-regarded for their prosocial behaviours and often appraised for ‘changing’ or becoming better. As such, there was a strong indication across the data that peer-support roles constituted a chance for offenders to be prosocial and to practice constructive skills and behaviours in the comfort of their own structure and space. This gave rise to the possibility that prison-led programs and courses should not be considered the sole route for encouraging offender reform (also, see Wakeling, Mann, & Carter, 2012 on consequences of “over-treatment”). This aligned with a buoyant theme across all studies that peer-supporters ‘do desistance’ rather than just talk about it. This was an important feature of peer-support for the participants, and has implications for policy and practice in terms of providing offenders with individualised pathways for change. Individualising rehabilitation is important, given that desistance is an inherently personal and subjective process (Maruna, 2001; McNeill, 2006). However, many rehabilitation interventions are heavily ‘manualised’ and consequently fail to account for the person-centred and subjective nature of ‘going straight’ (Wormith & Olver, 2002). In this research, participants were engaging in personal and subjective sense-making processes that were

responsive to their own individualised circumstances and life-worlds (Bonta & Andrews, 2007). This should be encouraged and may sit beneficially alongside formal interventions.

## Limitations

There are numerous limitations within this thesis. The most palpable relates to the trade-off made at the design level of this research, where a small N approach was selected over a variable-orientated approach (Collier, Brady, & Seawright, 2004). Munck (2004) points out qualitative research will always be limited to the number of observations that can be made. If a qualitative researcher tries to compensate for the lack of observations by increasing them, they risk shifting the focus of the analysis. Nevertheless, there is, of course, limited ability in this thesis to generalise to wider populations. The trade off in this regard is discussed here, along with issues to do with causality and selection bias. Conceptual issues associated with how desistance can be defined and understood are also discussed here, along with an outline of broader sociological considerations that should be registered. These areas have been selected for exploration principally because they have been the subject of peer-review deliberations, and also because they are issues that future researchers should consider.

## *Qualitative reliance*

The methodology chosen for this research has aided one of its core objectives to gather in-depth and rich qualitative data pertaining to the subjective experiences of offenders who hold peer-support roles in prison. This has been achieved and the result is a thorough and phenomenological account of what it means to be a peer-supporter in prison and what the impact of this might be for offending and desistance. Nevertheless, what is missing is the ability of this research to claim any cause and effect relationship between peer-support experience and desistance. This would have required quantitative explorations of samples of offenders who have and have not upheld peer-support roles and what the impact of this is in terms of recidivism rates. It would be a requirement of such an investigation to follow samples of offenders through the gate, in what would ideally be a longitudinal study to capture



the potential long-term gains of peer-support experience in prison. Studies of this nature have been considered in this research but not carried out due to feasibility restraints and ethical barriers relating to the problem of gaining consent from offenders after they leave prison.

The lack of quantitative data in this research that highlights any causal linkages between peer-support and reduced reoffending threatens to limit many of the claims made regarding the potential redemptive influence of participants' roles. This research may especially face attack from proponents of evidence-based and evaluative research techniques, which largely aim to respond to the 'what works' agenda. In addressing this, and in asking questions about what constitutes 'evidence' in criminological research, Maruna (2015, p315) has argued that "qualitative research is, for the most part, screened out of reviewing processes; hence not included as "evidence," because it typically addresses issues of process rather than cause and effect". Consequently, the criminological literature is saturated with program evaluations, meta-analyses of statistical findings, and studies on risk prediction. This has led scholars such as Raynor (2003, p339, cited in Maruna, 2015) to contend that the 'what works' agenda has led to the fetishising of programs in England and Wales and the belief that only programs matter. However, the participants (primarily the main prisoners) in this research alone clearly and consistently contested the effectiveness of programs in prison, deeming them as 'tick box' exercises, unrealistic, manipulatable, and overly generic and standardised. This is certainly not the first example of disconnect between what quantitative evidence affirms and what qualitative accounts reject. Such disconnect might be explained by the way in which 'evidence' is often generated – in a "post-hoc and partisan way, whereby conclusions are reached first (based on ideology or intuition), supportive research findings are cherry-picked to defend it, and contradictory evidence is dismissed, undermined, or ignored" (Maruna, 2015, p315). This can result in a research environment governed and biased by extant policy, rather than one which looks to inform and mould new or developing policies. Such an environment paves the way for a research culture capable of supporting almost any policy (even contradictory ones) in any context (Dodge & Mandel, 2012; Maruna, 2015).

Perhaps the most patent research to fall victim of such dynamics is that which led the 1993 Home Secretary Michael Howard to the conclusion that ‘prison works’.

While it has contributed enormously to what is known about offending behaviour, critics of the ‘what works’ agenda (and the methods it is traditionally associated with) assert that it is far from unproblematic. The evaluative nature and quantitative reliance of such approaches are incapable of adequately exploring the subjective nature of many constructs within the criminology arena. Desistance, for example, has been defined as an “inherently individualised and subjective process” (Weaver & McNeill, 2010). As such, approaches to rehabilitation and supervision that operate in a one-size-fits-all capacity (as programs often do) are unlikely to work (Ibid). Instead, it is crucial to understand the experiences of offenders who want to, are doing, and have turned away from crime. Some of the most important research in the area of desistance has done just that, with so many works on desistance narrative (see, for example, Abrams & Aguilar, 2005; Maruna, 2001; McNeill & Maruna, 2007; Vaughan, 2007) representing fine examples. Indeed, quantitatively-oriented strands of inquiry leave gaps in knowledge that can sometimes only be bridged using methods that seek understandings of subjective constructs, i.e. the experience of being bullied in prison, the personal impact of marriage on a career offender, or the meaning attached to ‘being’ a peer-supporter. Thus, the trade off in this research has been to understand the meanings participants attach to their subjective experiences of being peer-supporters, rather than to attempt to correlate poorly-understood constructs in the interest of impact evaluation. In fact, poorly understood constructs are too often the subject of quantitative explorations that go on to hinder real policy progress. This is where the findings demonstrated within this thesis can be considered truly impactful. Indeed, Campbell (1984, p36, cited in Maruna, 2015, p330), the figurehead behind the ‘what works’ agenda, commented that “qualitative knowledge is absolutely essential as a prerequisite for quantification in any science... We failed in our thinking about program evaluation methods to emphasise the need for a qualitative context that could be depended upon... The lack of this knowledge... makes us incompetent estimators of program impacts”. Furthermore, Stame (2010) has described how qualitative techniques are necessary when

first attempting to explain causality in quantitative research. Before arriving at conclusions in this regard, researchers must gather sufficient subjective evidence in order to ascertain whether other factors (i.e. environmental, cultural, social influences) could have elicited outcomes that the evaluated program intended to. This cohesiveness between quantitative and qualitative approaches is important for theory development. The status quo in criminological research however, is that theory is postulated from interventions, rather than the reverse. Ultimately, this threatens to undermine the development of robust theory and also sustain potentially ineffective interventions. The focus of the research within this thesis therefore, has been to build a comprehensive theoretical framework based on the qualitative accounts of the 'experts'. This "prerequisite for quantification" can now be tested in numerous ways, and it is hoped that this will yield true impact, not "incompetent estimations of program impact" (Campbell, 1984, p36).

### *Causality*

While causality is largely a quantitative construct, this research is likely to draw some concern over the claims that can be made in terms of peer-support prompting positive change in offenders. Ultimately this research points to the impact of 'doing good' in prison. It has been found through repeated themes in the data that participants, at the very least, feel good as a consequence of the work they do – being a peer-support volunteer seems to buffer stressors characteristic of the prison environment and contribute to the well-being of those who uphold these fundamentally selfless roles. The first conclusion to be drawn, therefore, is that giving help appears to help the givers as much as the recipients. This is not a new finding. A broad body of research highlights the health, mental health, interpersonal, and social benefits associated with those who engage in altruistic behaviours (Borgonovi, 2008; Brown, Consedine, & Magai, 2005; Post, 2007; Schwartz, Meisenhelder, & Reed, 2003). While this correlation is well-known, there are selection bias and reverse causation issues that are not easy to resolve. Regarding the former, the underlying drivers that motivate an individual to volunteer or 'do good deeds' in the first place might also be those that influence well-being. Regarding

reverse causation, volunteering might indeed enhance well-being, but well-being might also be the factor that increases a person's likelihood of opting to become a volunteer. Following this assumption, it may be the case that those who elect to become peer-support volunteers are already set to embrace change and make steps towards desistance. This of course places some restriction on what can be claimed in terms of the influence of peer-support.

In attempting to untangle these issues, Musick and Wilson (2003) qualitatively interviewed participants (volunteers and controls) over an 8-year period and found that those who volunteered showed fewer depressive symptoms than those who did not over a sustained period. Volunteers also reported incremental increases in other well-being markers such as self-esteem and social interaction, compared to non-volunteers. These findings are encouraging, and future research that replicates such a methodology might indicate that peer-support volunteer work in prison can have a causal protective impact on those who engage. This is important given the strong association with indicators of general well-being and risk of reoffending (Dooris, McArt, Hurley, & Baybutt, 2013; Marshall, 2010; Marshall & Marshall, 2000; van der Laan & Eichelsheim, 2013). However, while qualitative longitudinal studies might be able to neutralise the problem of self-selection bias, and perhaps that of omitted variable bias (interviewing at several time points allows for an exploration of potentially influential variables affecting the link between volunteer work and well-being), reverse causation would remain a problem. That is, the drivers underlying decisions to begin volunteering could still be forcing its correlation with well-being.

Only one study has attempted to disentangle these complications, by controlling for omitted variable bias, selection bias, and reverse causation. Borgonovi (2008) collected self-report data on participant (volunteer and control) health and happiness and employed several statistical techniques (chiefly a second-stage least squares regression procedure described by Greene, 2003) to explore the link between volunteering and different aspects of well-being. Findings showed that the volunteer group were significantly happier than the non-volunteer group, and this held when controlling for two indicators of well-being (perceived self-control and social participation and support). In utilising a least

squares regression, the study controlled for the possibility of reverse causation and found a causal effect of volunteering on happiness but not on health. As such, while physical health likely influenced an individual's decision to become a volunteer in this study, wellness did not, indicating that volunteer work does indeed (at least in this study) bring about enhanced well-being. Therefore, the methodology utilised should perhaps be considered exemplary in future explorations of the causal impact of being a peer-support volunteer in prison. As it stands however, the qualitative interviews analysed within this research provide an in-depth and phenomenological account of 1) the mechanisms underpinning peer-support that might influence change within the givers of help; 2) the impact of 'doing good' on the self; 3) how such an impact can alter the behavioural trajectories of those who participate in peer-helping. Furthermore, this research is the first and only to qualitatively explore the subjective accounts of prisoners who opt to become peer-supporters. In doing so, it offers those who wish to undertake future explorations a comprehensive framework on which to stage more deductive investigations.

#### *When does desistance start and stop?*

The empirical chapters in this thesis have highlighted several constructive outputs associated with being a peer-supporter in prison. One of the most encouraging outputs is that peer-support appears to allow for a much more positive and constructive experience of imprisonment – those involved are able to cultivate trust, meaning, purpose, and positivity while serving time. Furthermore, through such roles, prisoners are potentially able to make initial moves away from crime, through fuelling desistance narratives, and building hope, self-confidence, and ultimately 'good lives'. However, the experiences this thesis analysed did not transcend the parameters of prison. Therefore, claims made regarding the future reintegration of prisoners who were peer-supporters must be treated with caution, and the author has endeavoured to observe this throughout the empirical chapters in this thesis. While the impact of being a peer-supporter in prison has been given a comprehensive analysis in this thesis, little can be claimed about its potential influence in uncharted territory – through the gate and back into the community. For the bridging of this gap, as mentioned above, quantitative

explorations utilising reconviction statistics of those who were peer-supporters in prison contrasted with a control sample would need to be undertaken. There may also be a requirement for this to be carried out at several time points, in a longitudinal context. After all, desistance is defined as “the sustained absence of a certain type of event (in this case, crime)” (2001, p17).

However, one conceptual problem with this approach and this definition is that it assumes that any form of desistance can only ever be achieved and therefore detected post-prison. This is harmful in the sense that it likely shapes researchers’, practitioners’, and society’s perceptions of the capabilities of prison: if we are to accept that desistance can only happen and be measured post-prison, then we are in essence undermining much of the constructive work that goes on inside the walls – we are saying to prisoners “none of this counts unless you can leave here and not reoffend”. While of course this is true – if people leave prison and reoffend, they have not desisted – there must be a better way of easing individuals into desistance and reducing the high burden of expectation that is placed upon them the moment they walk through the gates and into the abyss. To this end, this thesis challenges researchers and practitioners in the field of imprisonment, rehabilitation, and desistance, to address some problematic assumptions regarding offending behaviour. The status quo is to refer to ‘prisoners’ and ‘offenders’ interchangeably, and to only identify successful desistance in individuals who have left prison and have not offended. This is problematic for a number reasons. First and foremost, how long must an individual not reoffend for in order to consider them a desister? Moreover, when does desistance start and stop? And what does this mean for the desistance journey and where researchers should measure it from and to? Secondly, individuals in prison are not offenders, they are prisoners, and were they never to commit a crime again, then they would have desisted long before accepted definitions of desistance would adjudge. Thirdly, if the focus on desistance is overly weighted on what happens when an individual leaves prison, then there is the risk that interventions inside prison might be regarded immaterial (to an extent) by both prison staff and prisoners. Fourthly, by placing emphasis on what might happen when an individual leaves prison, there is a risk of representing prison as a place where positive behaviours do not hold any value. This

risk was perhaps best articulated by Imran in study 3, who asserted that “you can’t just walk out and be a peer-support volunteer out there...there’s no promised land”. These issues point to the problem of construing desistance as a post-prison phenomenon, and while it is important to do so in analysing the impact of prison-based interventions, there is no reason why prisoners cannot be ‘desisting’ while they are still in prison. Standpoints that do not view desistance as a fluid journey that begins in prison and travels into the community collectively serve to enforce the disconnect between those two environments. This disconnect is that which makes for punitive public attitudes and social isolation for reintegrating individuals. Instead of placing so much emphasis on desistance as the success or failure of reintegration, the argument is made here that desistance can and should be supported, observed, and measured from the moment an individual is imprisoned. In this research, there is some support for the notion that prisoners can begin desisting through their prosocial peer-support roles as they are serving time. This is showcased in the striking resemblance between the self-identity, redemption, and reform narratives in this research, and that within seminal works within the field of desistance over recent decades (i.e. Farrall & Calverley, 2005; Laws & Ward, 2011; Maruna, 2001; McNeill, 2006, 2012; Shapland & Bottoms, 2011; Weaver, 2013).

### *Social obstacles*

This research is psychological and, although attempts have been made to focus on context and situation, the approach has been largely idiographic and individualised. Also, the studies in this thesis were carried out inside prisons, and only indications and projections can be made regarding how peer-support can shape a prisoner’s possible future. This research lacks the ability to include into its analyses many critical social processes and structures that likely shape the experiences of reintegrating offenders. Research from LeBel, Burnett, Maruna, & Bushway (2008) found that men recently released from prison were forced to navigate through a plethora of social obstacles and disadvantages, such as homelessness, addiction, unemployment and familial separation. Such problems are likely exacerbated by having spent time in prison, and are likely to have great impact

over one's ability to go straight. As far as reasonably practicable, future research should account for such factors.

## Future directions

### Recommendations for policy and practice

Studies 1 and 2 within this thesis highlighted many ways in which peer-support can assist offenders in achieving more positive and desirable futures. In essence, peer-support can contribute to desistance by encouraging several processes that have been found to assist individuals in 'going straight'. For these contributions to be fully maximised, certain features of peer-support need to be recognised for their full worth. Study 3 indicated a variety of institutional challenges and 'stumbling blocks' that may be limiting the utility of peer-support. By way of offering recommendations to overcome these issues, this subsection looks to unshackle peer-support from its current status as an untapped resource.

### *Acknowledge peer-support without manualising it*

Peer-support roles appear to offer something different to common trends in rehabilitative work in that they are offender-led. In articulating a weariness of having rehabilitation happen to them rather than with them, many participants in this research picked up on what some have tagged a fetishisation of prison programs (Raynor, 2003, p339, cited in Maruna, 2015). While programs can be invaluable in promoting reform, they can also prompt fear and anxiety in prisoners (Marshall et al., 2008), and damage their motivation to change in the event of 'over-treatment' (Wakeling, Mann, & Carter, 2012). This is not just the case for sexual offender treatment but seems to be the prisoner experience of 'mains' programs also (Fox, 1999). Peer-support can alleviate some of these problems by offering a level of rehabilitation-ownership to prisoners. Prison-based peer-support programs need to be acknowledged for providing this level of utility, but not manualised, packaged, and enforced on prisoners as the solution. The fundamental niche of peer-support roles is that they exist outside of the



confines of the prison regime, and represent a social microcosm in which prisoners can interact and operate autonomously. It is crucial that this space is respected and maintained by prison staff.

Nevertheless, some level of protocol and guidance surrounding what constitutes peer-support, who can be peer-supporters, and how peer-led schemes should operate will assist the smooth running of such programs. This would also help to reduce confusion surrounding the varying purposes they serve, and enhance transparency surrounding what their underlying intention is (this would help to address issues with peer-support sometimes being labelled 'grasses'). Regulations and guidelines should be crafted and should take into account the issues emanating from the 'stumbling blocks' identified in this research, and should be drawn up with the assistance of prisoner peer-support representatives. Finally, according to fears from many peer-supporters regarding losing the informal recognition they often receive as a consequence of their work, accreditation of peer-support training should be considered. Certificating and therefore officially recognising prisoners' achievements in this way can be motivational and can assist the momentums for change that were repeatedly illustrated throughout the studies in this thesis. This research has offered a framework that practitioners can use to implement these recommendations.

### *Stimulate buy-in*

There is now a broad and robust body of literature that testifies to the importance of prisoner/staff relationships. Much of this research warns how crucial it is for staff to 'buy-in' to the aims of the prison, and therefore to the aims of rehabilitating its inhabitants. Interventions are likely to only be effective when those delivering them believe in their success. This appeared to be true for peer-support, with many participants citing how the success of a scheme often hinges on staff attitudes toward it. Accordingly, prison staff should receive training with regards to peer-support; they should be continually updated and trained so as to ensure their understanding of how peer-support operates, what their roles are in certifying its effectiveness, and what the broader implications are. To this end, prison staff should [continue to] work collaboratively and closely with external supporting

organisations (i.e. Samaritans and The Shannon Trust). Such organisations should be encouraged to provide ongoing training to prison staff and prisoners as a quality assurance measure. Finally, there should be system in place for prisoners to anonymously report incidents where staff have undermined the duties of peer-supporters.

#### *Recognise the redemptive and reformative influence*

Participants in this research repeatedly alluded to the redemptive properties of peer-support. They spoke consistently about feeling better about themselves, feeling 'cleaner', and feeling as though they were getting their 'fix' of redemption. They also spoke about the importance of owning their own rehabilitation, and how peer-support affords the space in which this can happen. This redemptive and reformative influence of peer-support needs to be recognised by prison staff and by practitioners working with offenders. This recognition may necessitate explicitly aligning peer-support with programs and sentence plans, or creating procedures and guidance which enable prison staff to consider the impact that peer-support can have on the progress of a prisoner. There should be consideration over how the constructive inputs peer-supporters are able to cultivate can be interlaced with the fundamental objective of prisons to encourage reform.

#### *Support the peer-supporters*

The constructive and prosocial work that peer-supporters do should be encouraged. This not only means giving soft praise but creating an environment where peer-supporters can flourish. Practical and emotional support should be available to peer-helpers, so they can navigate through the prison system well enough to do their work, and also negotiate any stressors that could emerge (i.e. secondary trauma as a product of listening to suicidal prisoners). It is imperative that systems are in place to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all prisoners, and these systems need to take into account the challenges and risks specific to peer-supporters. These include the potentially negative attitudes that fellow prisoners can display toward peer-supporters, any emerging issues with prisoner / staff

interactions, and any other issues expressed by prisoners who uphold peer-led roles. As many participants in this research attested, they require several levels of support to be able to do their work.

### Recommendations for future research

This research has illuminated the ways in which incarcerated peer-supporters experience their roles, and offered an understanding of how peer-support can be better-utilised in the context of offender rehabilitation. However, there remain gaps in knowledge regarding the long-term impact of having held a peer-support role as a prisoner. It has not been the intention of this research to follow prisoners through the gate and into the community. Nevertheless, future research could adopt this design, and in doing so offer greater insights into whether prisoners who adopt peer-support roles in prison are any better equipped for reintegration. Theoretical propositions such as the wounded healer phenomenon (LeBel, Richie, & Maruna, 2015), redemption scripts (Maurina, 2001), possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986), and the good lives model of offender rehabilitation (Ward, 2002) support the idea that peer-support can help offenders go straight. A qualitative longitudinal design capable of exploring these mechanics (possible through two intervals of semi-structured interviews) with a sample of prisoners who uphold peer-support roles, and who then reintegrate back into the community after doing so, would be insightful. Such a study could feature a matched sample of reintegrating prisoners who did not possess peer-support roles while serving time. While causality would remain an issue here, this would illuminate the impact of temporal issues and challenges that impact on peer-supporters as they leave the prison and attempt to reintegrate.

The qualitative understanding generated from a study such as that described above could lay the foundations for some quantitative investigation. One suggestion is to utilise self-report measures that relate to indicators of successful or unsuccessful reintegration. These measures could be collected from peer-support and control group participants at several time points (for example, 1 months before leaving prison, 1 month after re-joining the community, and 6-12 months later). In terms of the measures that could be employed here, LeBel, Burnett, Maruna, & Bushway (2008) found that one's

ability to 'go straight' hinged, amongst other factors, on the hope they had of doing so. The authors used a battery of measures to explore hope/self-efficacy, regret and shame, the internalisation of stigma, and the internalisation of a prosocial label (i.e. 'family man'). These indicators had varying effects on reintegration outcomes. Considering how such factors repeatedly featured across participants' transcripts in this research, similar measures could be used to highlight any differences in the outcomes of prison peer-supports and control groups. Findings from this suggested study could indicate that peer-supporters are better prepared for facing the challenges, disappointments, and social obstacles that come with societal reintegration (see LeBel et al., 2008; Nelson, Deess, & Allen, 1999).

## Final comments

### *Overcoming the second prison*

This thesis has focused entirely on the experiences of incarcerated peer-supporters and what they think about its place in the prison environment. It has been argued that peer-support in prison constitutes an untapped resource that can be utilised for the means of encouraging prosocial change in offenders. This mode of offender reform has implications for policy and practice, principally due to the fact it is offender-led, can sit alongside other formalised interventions, and has strong theoretical alliance with core models of desistance. Accordingly, this thesis issues a final impassioned call for peer-support to be acknowledged as a resource that can help offenders transform their lives.

However, as with all prison-based research, the fundamental test of impact is the degree to which an intervention 'on the inside' can contribute to positive change 'on the outside'. In other words, the positive contributions that peer-support can inject for individuals serving time are subject to the environments they will be released into. Unfortunately, the landscape in this regard is tainted by a number of engrained social problems that ex-offenders face upon release. Sykes' (1958) pains of imprisonment denotes an environment that strips individuals of personal identity and, as per labelling

theories (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1951), reintegrating ex-offenders do not suddenly get the chance to rebuild this upon re-joining the community. As one participant voiced:

*The public will never be happy. If the public said we should stand on one leg and we did that, tomorrow they would say no you should fucking hop on one leg. If we did that then they would say nah, now they should be able to walk on their hands as well. You know, the public is very fickle. Society is very fickle. In prison and outside. They'll never be pleased. They're like hungry hounds. You can never please a hungry hound, you give them meat and they want more. That's the public, you give them what they want and then they want more. That's just the way society's built. You can't really change that. Imran*

Imran's words are dispiriting in their harsh realism but important. Until society rearranges itself to the degree that it becomes a place of acceptance and forgiveness, individuals like Imran are unlikely to feel accepted and rooted to the norms of the social world. Maruna's (2011), conceptualisation of social 'rituals of reintegration' frames this position well. Maruna essentially asks what is required of a person before they can be 'awarded' with a reintegration ritual (a marked moment of societal forgiveness and acceptance). In other words, at what point has a prisoner suffered enough or 'given back' enough for society to be able to say "OK, you can officially come and join us again now". Maruna notes that surviving prison and thus completing a sentence which symbolises 'paying a debt to society' should mark a moment of achievement that yields some form of reward or acknowledgement. In reality, released prisoners are faced with disenfranchisement, disappointment, and environmental shock which contributes to a chaotic world in which many fail to survive without reoffending (Visher & Travis, 2011). This chaotic world has been termed 'the second prison' by some scholars (Helliwell, 2011; Leong, 2011), and is characterised by a complex array of deep-rooted sociological problems, worsened by having spent time in prison. Ultimately then, in the present climate, a prisoner's conduct inside the walls often bears little relevance to their likelihood of acceptance upon release back into the

community. However, successful reintegration should be viewed as “a two-way process, requiring both effort on the part of the former prisoner (e.g. desistance, repentance), but also on the part of some wider community (e.g. forgiveness, acceptance)” (Maruna, 2011, p13). The participants in this study put forward a convincing case that they were invested in desistance – committed to ‘doing good’, ‘giving back’, and ‘making good’ on the harm they acknowledged causing. ‘Reintegration rituals’ could be constructed to recognise such attempts from (ex)offenders to re-join the community as active and law-abiding citizens. When wider society is able to do this – when the “hungry hounds” are finally satiated and can acknowledge and forgive – individuals like Imran may finally be considered of social worth, and accepted back into the community. Imran insists that this isn’t possible; that “you can’t really change that”. Let’s hope he is wrong.

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## Appendix

### Study 1 Interview Schedule

Before each interview, participants will read through information and consent forms. Each participant will return a signed consent form to the lead researcher. Participants will be made aware of their right to withdraw (and the process through which they can do so). The researcher will outline the purpose and structure of the interview. Participants will also be informed of the procedures associated with risk/harm related disclosures or anything that may warrant concern.

Below are sample questions that will be put to the participant. However, in line with semi-structured interviewing practice, participants will be encouraged to drive the conversation and talk freely about what is important to them. As such, exploratory sub-questions and additional questions that relate to emerging content may be asked. It is envisaged that data gathered from this schedule will directly relate to this study's overarching research questions, which are:

1. How are peer-support roles experienced by mixed offence-type prisoners?
2. To what extent does having a peer-support role in prison impact on offenders' behaviours, attitudes, and views of themselves?
3. How do incarcerated individuals who uphold peer-support roles make sense of imprisonment, and how do they construe their past, current, and future selves?

#### **Introductory questions**

- Could you tell me a bit about your life in prison? Perhaps tell me how long you've been in the prison system and take me through a typical day.
- What was it like when you first came to prison? How would you describe the way in which you adapted?
- What kinds of feelings did you have in your first months/years of being in prison? How would you describe your emotional state?

#### **Views and attitudes regarding peer support work**

- When did you first hear about the kinds of peer support schemes operating in the prison?  
What were your initial perceptions about them?
- What scheme(s) did you decide to volunteer for? Why?
- Have you ever used the scheme as a recipient of support? How did it help?
- What were your expectations?
- Were your expectations met or not? What were your thoughts when you first became a volunteer?
- What are your thoughts about the scheme now?
- What does it mean to you to be part of the scheme? Has being involved changed your prison experience in any way?
- How would you compare your prison life before you were involved in the scheme to after you joined?
- How do you feel about being a part of the scheme and doing what you do? How do you think you would feel if you were to suddenly leave the team?

#### **Impact of scheme involvement on the person**

- Do you think that becoming a volunteer has changed you in any way? How so?

- What do you think you have learned from your experience of being a part of the scheme?
- What do you think your time would have been like if you were not a volunteer? How might things have been different?

## **Future**

- How do you feel about your future?
- What do you hope for when you are released? What fears, if any, do you have?
- Do you think that being a member of the scheme has prepared you in any way for life on the outside?
- Is there anything else you would like to say?

## **Study 2 Interview Schedule**

Before each interview, participants will read through information and consent forms. Each participant will return a signed consent form to the lead researcher. Participants will be made aware of their right to withdraw (and the process through which they can do so). The researcher will outline the purpose and structure of the interview. Participants will also be informed of the procedures associated with risk/harm related disclosures or anything that may warrant concern.

Below are sample questions that will be put to the participant. However, in line with semi-structured interviewing practice, participants will be encouraged to drive the conversation and talk freely about

what is important to them. As such, exploratory sub-questions and additional questions that relate to emerging content may be asked. It is envisaged that data gathered from this schedule will directly relate to this study's overarching research questions, which are:

4. How are peer-support roles experienced by incarcerated sexual offenders?
5. To what extent does having a peer-support role in prison impact on sexual offenders' behaviours, attitudes, and views of themselves?
6. How do sexual offenders who uphold peer-support roles in prison make sense of imprisonment, and how do they construe their past, current, and future selves?

#### **Introductory questions**

- Could you tell me a bit about your life in prison? Perhaps tell me how long you've been in the prison system and take me through a typical day.
- What was it like when you first came to prison? How would you describe the way in which you adapted?
- What kinds of feelings did you have in your first months/years of being in prison? How would you describe your emotional state?

#### **Views and attitudes regarding peer support work**

- When did you first hear about the kinds of peer support schemes operating in the prison? What were your initial perceptions about them?

- What scheme(s) did you decide to volunteer for? Why?
- Have you ever used the scheme as a recipient of support? How did it help?
- What were your expectations?
- Were your expectations met or not? What were your thoughts when you first became a volunteer?
- What are your thoughts about the scheme now?
- What does it mean to you to be part of the scheme? Has being involved changed your prison experience in any way?
- How would you compare your prison life before you were involved in the scheme to after you joined?
- How do you feel about being a part of the scheme and doing what you do? How do you think you would feel if you were to suddenly leave the team?

#### **Impact of scheme involvement on the person**

- Do you think that becoming a volunteer has changed you in any way? How so?
- What do you think you have learned from your experience of being a part of the scheme?



- What do you think your time would have been like if you were not a volunteer? How might things have been different?

## **Future**

- How do you feel about your future?
- What do you hope for when you are released? What fears, if any, do you have?
- Do you think that being a member of the scheme has prepared you in any way for life on the outside?
- Is there anything else you would like to say?

## **Study 3 Interview Schedule**

Before each interview, participants will read through information and consent forms. Each participant will return a signed consent form to the lead researcher. Participants will be made aware of their right to withdraw (and the process through which they can do so). The researcher will outline the purpose and structure of the interview. Participants will also be informed of the procedures associated with risk/harm related disclosures or anything that may warrant concern.

Below are sample questions that will be put to the participant. However, in line with semi-structured interviewing practice, participants will be encouraged to drive the conversation and talk freely about

what is important to them. As such, exploratory sub-questions and additional questions that relate to emerging content may be asked. It is envisaged that data gathered from this schedule will directly relate to this study's overarching research questions, which are:

4. What is the status of peer-support in prison? How is it viewed by prisoners and prison staff?  
What are its main contributions to the prison context?
5. How does peer-support fit within the framework of offender rehabilitation?
6. What are the challenges faced by peer-support in prison? In what kind of prison environment would peer-support be best-utilised?

#### **Introductory questions**

- Could you tell me what peer-support means to you? What is it? How would you try to define it?
- What do you think peer-support is for?
- Are you a proponent ('fan') of peer-support in prison? Why?

#### **Prisoner and officer views and general status of peer-support and peer-supporters in prison**

- How do you think other prisoners perceive peer-supporters?
- How do prison officers and other prison staff perceive peer-supporters?

- Do you feel like peer-support programs are valued in prison? Are some valued more than others?
- What do you think peer-support contributes to the prison environment? In what ways is it useful?
- What do prisoners have to gain from being peer-supporters? What kind of individual might have the most to gain from it?

#### **Perceptions of rehabilitation and link to peer-support**

- What does rehabilitation mean to you?
- Do you think people are ever truly rehabilitated? How do you think is this achieved?
- Do you think peer-support can impact on offender rehabilitation? How?
- How can prison staff and prisons in general use peer-support for the purpose of rehabilitating people? Is there anything here about peer-support that you would prioritise?

#### **Issues, challenges, and recommendations for change**

- Are there any problems with peer-support? Can you describe 3 good things about it and 3 bad things?
- Have you had, or heard of any, bad peer-support experiences?

- What would you change about the way your program / peer-support generally runs in prison?
- If you could sit down with decision makers now and tell him what needs to happen for the future of peer-support, what would you say? What are the main things you'd focus on?

## Participant Information Sheet

Dear Participant,

You are invited to take part in research that aims to investigate your thoughts on being a member of a peer-support scheme in prison. The research is about trying to understand your views and attitudes about your experience as a peer-support volunteer and how this experience has impacted on your prison life. It also explores what you think about peer-support more generally, i.e. how it can be used in the prison environment.

If you agree to take part, you will be interviewed for around 60 minutes about your experiences of being a volunteer. You will be asked questions about your prison life and how being a volunteer may have affected it. You will not be asked about your offence, this will remain private to you.

Participation will not help you get parole, additional treatment or affect any aspect of your sentence. This research simply represents an opportunity for you to express your opinions in a non-judgemental setting about your volunteering experience.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw your data from the analysis at any point until publication. To do this, you can contact the lead researcher by writing to Christian Perrin, Psychology, HMP ..... (please make any requests for withdrawal in writing).

I am very grateful to you for giving your time to this study and hope you also gain something from it. The research is aiming to understand your experiences of upholding a peer-support role and it is hoped that the results of this study will highlight some important implications of such work in prisons.

Thank you for your time.

Please return a copy of this form to **Christian Perrin**

### Participant Consent Form

The research you are about to consent to aims to investigate how you feel about your peer-support role / what you think of peer-support in prison generally. It aims to explore your thoughts about how volunteering in such a scheme has changed your experience of imprisonment and your perceptions of your future. The research is also interested in your view of peer-support in terms of how it can be used in the prison environment.

This research will be confidential and you can provide or be allocated a fake name, to which you will be referred in the analysis and in any publications that follow. It is important to note that all interviews will be transcribed word for word and that passages and quotes may be used for research and teaching purposes. However, we will be very careful not to include any details through which you may be recognised. All data will be destroyed once the project has been completed and published. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw your data from the analysis at any point until publication. To do this, you can contact the lead researcher by writing to Christian Perrin, Psychology, HMP ..... (please make any requests for withdrawal in writing).

Please note that any views or comments made during the interview cannot be used for influencing requests for or outcomes of treatment programmes, nor can they be used to influence requests for parole. Please also be aware that any disclosure of an intention to commit an offence or information about offences for which you or others have not been tried, will result in advice being sought from the police, and any data materials still in existence (tapes or transcripts) may be shown to the police and others as a consequence. In addition, if you tell of anything that may be a threat to you or to others, this information will be passed on to prison security and the principal or senior psychologist.

**Statement of consent (please tick)**

- ☐ I have read the participant information sheet and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and I hereby consent to taking part in the above research study.
- ☐ I understand that by consenting to this research, I am agreeing to attend an interview with a member of the project team. I understand that interviews will be recorded using a digital Dictaphone.

- ☐ I am aware that the interview could last up to 2 hours in total.
- ☐ I understand that my data will be anonymised and will be identifiable only through a unique code attached to a false name. I understand that it is possible that quotes of what I say may be included in future publications or reports, and that I will not be identified in these.

**Signature of respondent**

*Print Name*.....

*Signature*.....

*Number*.....

*Date*.....

**Debrief Sheet – Post Interview**

Participant Number: .....

**Thank you**

Thank you for taking part in this study. This will help us to understand better what it is like to uphold a peer-support role in prison, and also how peer-support can help the prison environment in any way. Taking part in this research will not have any effect on your access to programs, treatment, or other services at the prison. It will also have no effect on parole and/or sentencing decisions.

**If you change your mind**

If you change your mind and do not want your information to be used in this research, you have until ..... to make this known. If you do this, you will not get into any trouble and all the information collected about you will be destroyed. If you wish to withdraw your data, please contact Christian Perrin through the psychology department and simply state your name and the fact you wish to remove your data from the research. You do not need to give a reason.

**Allow time for questions and discussion of interview / research**

**Extra support**

If you felt that some aspects of the research were quite personal and / or if you feel upset in any way, you should contact a member of your wing staff or use one of these services;

- *Support volunteers* – look on your wing and find out who they are
- *Listeners* – you can ask wing staff if you need to speak to a Listener
- *Counselling psychology service* – put an application in and speak to one of the team

**Thank you for your help,**

**Christian Perrin, PhD Researcher, Nottingham Trent University**

**Dr Nicholas Blagden, Director of Studies and Lecturer, Nottingham Trent University**