



The Resettlement Experiences of People Supported by the Charity Prisoners Abroad

Final report

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Executive Summary

This report is based on a small-scale research study examining the resettlement experiences of people previously imprisoned overseas and who are supported by the charity Prisoners Abroad. For this study ten individuals were interviewed who had been imprisoned abroad and used the resettlement service of Prisoners Abroad. We also interviewed four members of staff from Prisoners Abroad, and two individuals who work for partnership organisations.

Our findings highlight that:

- Prisoners Abroad administer a comprehensive ‘through the gate’ service, that provides continuous and meaningful support to individuals during their prison sentence abroad, immediately upon their deportation and as they re/settle into life in the UK. This support addresses the practical, emotional and cultural barriers that their clients face after deportation.
- The support provided is fundamental in preventing homelessness with this group. Initial emergency accommodation can be sought for returnees immediately upon return to the UK, and the service then works with local authorities and private landlords to help individuals find permanent accommodation. Ongoing support is also provided to ensure individuals can sustain their tenancies. The Prisoners Abroad model of working understands that housing is a critical factor in re/settlement.
- Many clients returning to the UK face a range of barriers to their re/integration. Often this involves the trauma of the prison sentence and deportation, the unfamiliarity of UK society and its structures and difficulties in attaining employment through criminal records checks. However, our research also looks at two other factors that respondents faced; the digital exclusion regarding an unfamiliarity with modern technology and the internet and also the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic that has hindered accessing services and support.
- Despite these barriers, Prisoners Abroad staff have a clear set of values and an ethos that provides meaningful and valued help and support to a marginalised client base. These values prioritise ‘human caring’, are non-judgemental and are strengths-based in their approach – helping individuals to reach a level of self-sufficiency. We believe that the wider criminal justice system could learn from this approach.

Report structure

Chapters one and two provide a brief introduction to the Prisoners Abroad service and the aims of our study. These chapters also briefly discuss resettlement practice and wider trends in deportations. Chapter three provides an overview of the methodological choices for the study as well as information on the respondents.

Chapters four, five, six and seven present our data and are arranged both chronologically and thematically. We found the accounts given by the study participants in terms of relaying their resettlement experiences followed a common sequential pattern. This can be broadly separated into three phases. The first phase includes the support and communication received from Prisoners Abroad while in prison, in preparation for deportation and on immediate arrival back into the UK after deportation. The second phase is as the months unfold settling into life in the UK and the third phase over the longer-term period. The chapter findings are presented in a way which enables linking participants’ coping and resettlement success to the building blocks Prisoners Abroad’s resettlement service prioritises and puts in place.

Chapter eight discusses the Prisoners Abroad service, outlining the core aims, values and ethos of the service and what lessons the wider criminal justice system could learn from the work of Prisoners Abroad. Chapter nine provides a final discussion and conclusion, summarising our main findings. We also make three brief recommendations.

Author Bibliographies

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Dr. Jenni Ward and Dr. Matt Cracknell are co-conveyors of the Prisons Research Group (PRG) at Middlesex University which brings together staff and students to critically examine prison reform issues in the context of ambitions for change, transformative prison rehabilitation and supported reintegration on release.

Prisons Research Group research is underpinned by principles of social justice, humanity and the interaction of these with criminal justice processes and organisational delivery. These values inform our study of penal policy, law and practice. We are committed to prison reform so that prisons are places of real life change and contribute to positive future outcomes for those incarcerated within them.

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1.0 Introduction and background to the study

This report is based on a small-scale research study examining the resettlement experiences of people previously imprisoned overseas and who are supported by Prisoners Abroad. The research was commissioned by Prisoners Abroad through a grant from the UK charity 'Comic Relief'. The study was carried out between September 2021 and June 2022 by researchers (DR. Jenni Ward and Dr. Matt Cracknell) from the 'Prisons Research Group' (PRG) of Middlesex University, UK.

Prisoners Abroad is a UK charity that supports and assists British citizens who are imprisoned overseas. Since its beginnings in 1978, the organisation has evolved into a service with three main strands of work - the prisoners overseas service, the family support service and the resettlement service. The core values of Prisoners Abroad are to reduce the isolation and deprivation experienced by prisoners overseas and their families; to prevent destitution and street homelessness on return to the UK and to assist people to rebuild their lives on return. The Prisoners Abroad approach is non-judgemental, and although the organisation is risk-aware, they are not a formal arm of the criminal justice system and see beyond the conviction. As a charity, Prisoners Abroad is funded by Government contracts, charitable grants and individual donations.

The aims and objectives of this study was to carry out in-depth qualitative interviews exploring the resettlement experiences of people previously imprisoned overseas and who were engaged in the Prisoners Abroad resettlement programme. This was to gain a detailed understanding of participant's lives in terms of the practical and emotional aspects faced during the resettlement process and how they manage and cope through this period. Issues such as securing accommodation, establishing financial stability, and planning future goals were of interest. The different dimensions of the Prisoners Abroad resettlement service and how it assists a person's re/integration and social inclusion and the avoidance of homelessness were examined.

The particular approach to resettlement adopted by Prisoners Abroad is grounded in 'desistance theory'. Desistance is the study of why people stop offending and continue to sustain non-offending behaviours. Studies on desistance place importance on the individual attaining social ties as well as developing a non-offending identity (Maruna, 2001). In this respect, work with individuals should involve adopting a holistic, flexible and person-centred framework of practice to help develop a 'good lives' plan, which is a strength-based model of working, centred on creating practical opportunities, relationships and social support (Ward, 2010). Particular importance is also placed on the initial period after deportation. For many individuals, Prisoners Abroad are their only source of support. As such the service fills a crucial gap in need by providing necessities, such as ensuring individuals have adequate food clothing and shelter – without this fundamental support, desistance would not be possible.

A wider objective of the study was to draw lessons from Prisoner Abroad's resettlement approach that might be applicable to the wider prison and probation service of England and Wales. Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and the wider criminal justice sector share similar goals of successful resettlement for people leaving prison. In particular, the 2004 *Reducing Re-offending Action Plan* introduced a framework for reducing high levels of re-offending (Home Office, 2004). This action plan emphasises seven critical pathways to support positive resettlement back into the community. These seven re-offending pathways include: accommodation; education training and employment (ETE); health; drugs and alcohol; finance benefits and debt; children and families; and attitudes, thinking and behaviour. Therefore, prison

and probation services should provide access to services in these areas. It is found without adequate support across these pathway services such as housing, health and social welfare services, the risk of homelessness and a return to previous offending lifestyles and to prison is high (Cracknell, 2021a). Over a third of 'rough sleepers' in England have served prison sentences (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2018). Therefore, understanding the links between prison release and alleviating homelessness and offending 'risk' is important for policy development across the interconnecting sectors tasked with addressing this issue. Below, we outline resettlement further, summarising what the literature recommends as good practice for providing effective resettlement support.

1.1 Resettlement

There is no universal definition of resettlement – or re-entry, as it is commonly referred to in America. Visser and Travis (2003) describe re-entry as a transition from prison into the community that is both a process and a goal. However, this process is seldom straightforward and to successfully resettle, individuals will frequently have to face a set of practical, social, environmental and emotional barriers when reintegrating back into the community.

In order to help understand resettlement as a process that takes time and will have inevitable pitfalls to overcome, Moore (2011) outlines a three-phased approach to community re/integration. The first phase *social re-entry* involves developing the important practical building blocks that is required in order to navigate the various challenges that a person faces, for example; settled housing, financial support and access to healthcare. The second phase *re-entry as emergent social integration* encompasses a more developed transition and is viewed as a mid-stage of assimilation into important social support networks and becoming part of society. The last phase - *re-entry as social integration or reintegration* - consists of attaining a settled place within society that encompasses a more extensive level of inclusion. This includes a personal narrative not to re-offend, a supportive society and structural opportunities to reinforce both. This three-phased approach is applicable to the approach of Prisoners Abroad.

A review of the literature regarding resettlement, outlines three key factors that can help support people as they move through these phases of re/integration. Firstly, resettlement services should provide continuity of support that starts pre-release and then follows the individual into the community. This is most commonly referred to as a 'through the gate' model of working (Malloch et al. 2013). Continuity of support also places importance in fostering a meaningful professional relationship between the prison leaver and practitioner.

Secondly, support offered should be holistic in its approach and pay equal attention to therapeutic and emotional help as well as addressing practical needs. Maguire and Raynor (2017) stress that providing practical help alone is not sufficient in assisting an individual to reintegrate back into society. This help needs reinforcing with addressing an individuals' thinking and behaviour.

Thirdly, practitioners should prioritise 'bonding' and 'bridging' people to appropriate welfare, treatment and community resources, working as a 'community connector' (Best, 2019:7). This involves helping a person draw on a set of resources, including personal capabilities, families and partner networks and community resources, in order to successfully resettle in the community. This approach emphasises the importance of multi-agency partnership work.

These three factors and Moore's (2011) approach to resettlement can be identified within the work of the Prisoners Abroad resettlement service and their own 'resettlement step' process that is covered in more detail in section 2.1.

2.0 Aims of the study

This study aimed to gain an understanding of how clients of Prisoners Abroad experience the resettlement process and how they manage and cope with establishing a life back in the UK after return. An additional aim was to examine how in particular the Prisoners Abroad resettlement service operates to assist a person achieve the different milestones they face.

Thus, the underpinning research questions were:

1. What are the resettlement experiences of people supported by Prisoners Abroad?
2. What role does the Prisoners Abroad approach play in strengthening resettlement and reintegration pathways and avoiding homelessness?
3. What can the wider homelessness and criminal justice sectors learn from the Prisoners Abroad resettlement approach? What lessons might be applicable to these sectors?

The study's main findings are therefore conceptualised within themes of professional practice and the 'sequencing' of the Prisoners Abroad response to addressing the practical, emotional and cultural priorities 'returnees' face, housing stability as the main factor that enables personal progress and engagement with future planning (*ie.* employment and meaningful activity), digital technology competence that links to aspects of exclusion and the 'human caring' style embedded within Prisoners Abroad service. We argue this enables the building of 'personal resilience' to cope in the face of deep trauma and loss. Lastly, adaptation and 'personal identity' as individuals transition to living in the UK is an organising key theme.

Different terms are used throughout this report in reference to the people we interviewed who have spent time in prison and been deported. We mainly refer to them as Prisoners Abroad clients. On occasion we use the term 'returnees'.

2.1 Prisoners Abroad resettlement model

Prisoners Abroad have two resettlement pathways for their clients through their 'resettlement step' process. The two pathways include a 'direct' pathway and a 'long-arm' pathway. Some Prisoners Abroad clients have links to other parts of the UK and do not remain in London. These clients will come under the 'long-arm' pathways and in these cases, Prisoners Abroad does offer advice and guidance by phone and email as necessary in these situations and can signpost to local services and advocate for people. A client's needs are commonly determined pre-release through a needs assessment. For clients using the direct pathway, there is then a three-stage approach to resettlement. The first stage is crisis intervention when someone immediately returns to the UK and needs support for essential needs. Stage two is 'supported move on', where clients are supported to find a more permanent base and the final stage three is 'enabled move on' where clients are given support to build support groups and networks. Prisoners Abroad resettlement service provides a model of help and support that is conducive to a 'through the gate' approach. Below, we outline the support provided in each stage in more detail.

This support can begin pre-release when a person is serving their prison sentence. Prisoners Abroad staff provide an extensive survival grant programme that assists with purchasing medical

assessment and care, food and clean water, also information provision and keeping in contact with family and friends as well as sending practical items such as reading materials and essential toiletries. If a person is aware they will be deported to the UK, a needs assessment is undertaken in order to help prepare them for their life back in the UK and to determine the level of support they might need on the resettlement step process.

On immediate return to the UK, the social care charity - Heathrow Travel Care - can provide essential help and support at the airport. For individuals on the direct pathway, Prisoners Abroad can also fund emergency accommodation, and then work with an individual to help them find longer term accommodation. All resettlement clients are provided with a dedicated keyworker who can support each person as they transition to life in the UK. Keyworkers provide practical support with essential needs such as housing, medical appointments, social care and applying for benefits. Emotional support is also provided as the reality is people are dealing with the trauma of family separation and harms done by the prisons sentence and deportation. Once initial practical needs have been resolved, individuals move into stages two and three of the resettlement steps pathway as Prisoners Abroad staff help individuals to assimilate into life in the UK. This can involve helping people to sustain longer term tenancies, support them to apply for employment or voluntary work and provide assistance with cultural adaption to UK life. As part of this process, Prisoners Abroad work with a number of third-sector organisations including the House of St Barnabas and their employment training programme, Forward Trust who can assist people in finding housing and the charity Fine Cell Work.

This model of working, provides continuity through the gate between the prison sentence and post-deportation life in the UK, it provides holistic support for practical, emotional and cultural needs and sequences these to ensure that immediate practical needs are first resolved, before helping people to feel more settled and find a place in British society. Below, the Head of Service Delivery for Prisoners Abroad explains how this model functions:

it's simple pathways that I think they use in probation, whereby there's the crisis point of the first three months, then maintenance; is everything still okay and then what is the next step. Some of that is about checking on the practical things, but also again reflecting back with the person how far they've come. They can experience that as a journey that's a positive one, that they have achieved stuff, that they are functioning in the UK and out of prison. And trying to put a bit more focus on endings (service manager).

2.2 International deportation trends

Before moving to explain the study methods, sample characteristics and main findings, it is necessary to acknowledge the wider context in which Prisoners Abroad and the resettlement service is operating. This is within international and country-wide trends of tightened legislative frameworks in respect to the treatment of 'Foreign National Offender' populations (FNOs) (Fekete and Webber, 2010). A number of countries more readily deport 'non-citizens on criminal grounds' to their countries of birth than in previous periods. Moreover, as McHardy (2021) notes from her research on Australia's detention-deportation regime introduced under the *Migration Act* 2015 that the range of offences deportation legislation applies to, has expanded to include less serious crimes impacting a larger number of people. It is important to point out that the work of Prisoners Abroad is operating within this international environment with a growth in the number of people returned to the UK from countries such as the USA and Australia. This

includes people taken to those countries by their families as babies and as young children and who have not lived in the UK for much of their life.

Criminal justice and migration experts link these developments to the ‘control of migration’ within sovereign nation states (Bosworth and Guild, 2008; Aas, 2013) and often discuss these as controversial, pointing to questions of human and citizens’ rights and notions of belonging and citizenship. The concepts of ‘crimmigration’ (Stumpf, 2006) and ‘bordered penalty’ are used to explain and interpret the intersections between the management of migration and the criminal justice system and there is a growing literature drawing attention to the problems.

The work of Prisoners Abroad resettlement service can therefore be defined as difficult and challenging due to the nature of the population being supported. These are people returning to the UK who are experiencing both the immediate impacts of imprisonment (*ie.* the ‘pains of imprisonment’ -long prison sentences, isolation, sometimes brutal prison regimes, on occasion questionable criminal convictions) alongside the ‘pains of deportation’. Increasingly so, they have been forced out of the country they have resided in for the majority of their young and adult lives (*ie.* 50 plus years) and where they have left behind families, children, grandchildren, their role as parents and grandparents, the country to which their work skills are applicable (*ie.* snow mountain gear specialist, phlebotomist) and sometimes their language (*ie.* Italian); in essence, their whole sense of purpose and identity (this can be said to apply to 7 out of 10 of our respondents). This means they serve a ‘double punishment’ –the initial prison sentence and then deportation, which can be a highly traumatic event.

Prisoners Abroad are supporting people who are experiencing deep personal trauma and loss as a result of these border control and citizenship policies that cannot be ignored when reporting our findings. Without drawing on any formalised medical data, it is likely the majority of the people we interviewed were suffering a state of ongoing trauma linked to the prison circumstances they have lived through and the feelings of loss and abandonment that these country-specific deportation policies have caused to these people.

3.0 Methods

The study comprised semi-structured interviews with a sample of ten people who had been deported to the UK following a period of imprisonment overseas and who were being supported through Prisoners Abroad resettlement service. We aimed to purposively sample participants, in order to include a range of experiences in terms of the time since they had returned to the UK. Our sample included people who were relatively recent arrivals, such as having returned within the last six months, those who had been back in the UK for 18 months and those who had returned two to three years ago. Using this timeframe allowed for an understanding of the immediate stage after arrival and the initial urgent needs, how those who have been back longer become more settled and those who have been back for two to three years become resigned and manage their circumstances as best they can. Table 1. shows the breakdown of the sample according to their time back living in the UK. Of the sample, one had recently returned (less than 3 months), seven had been back for between six and 18 months and two had been back for between two and three years.

The majority of the interviews (n=8) were carried out in person at the Prisoners Abroad premises in Finsbury Park, North London. One was conducted online over the video-conferencing platform ‘zoom’ and one by phone due to that participant not able to operate the video platform technology. This links to the theme of digital exclusion discussed further later in this report. The interviews lasted approximately one hour and were audio-recorded for later

verbatim transcription. The fieldwork was completed over four months between December 2021 and March 2022.

Table: 1. Months back in the UK at interview

Months back in the UK at interview	No. of participants
3 months or less	1
6 to 18 months	7
2.5 to 3 years	2
Total	10

3.1 Staff interviews

Interviews were also carried out with four members of Prisoners Abroad staff (Head of Service Delivery and Resettlement Manager interviewed on two occasions and two casework Resettlement Officers) to gain a detailed understanding of the particular approach that underpins the Prisoners Abroad model of resettlement. Staff employed within two partner agencies were also interviewed for their role in supporting Prisoner Abroad, specifically Heathrow Travel Care and the House of St Barnabas employment preparation programme.

Prisoners Abroad work in collaboration with a number of external partner agencies to achieve the best outcomes for their clients. However, it was not possible to include these in this study. As such, there are limitations to the depth of our analysis in terms of the multi-disciplinary team working that goes in to linking Prisoner Abroad clients to available opportunities.

3.2 Participant recruitment

Participant recruitment was carried out by Prisoners Abroad resettlement staff who approached known clients on whether they would be willing to take part. This required only inviting those considered emotionally stable enough to cope with a detailed interview that would raise difficult past and present memories. Although offence history was not of interest to our study, people with sex offence convictions were not included. This client group are subject to ‘multi-agency public protection arrangements’ (MAPPA) and ‘risk’ monitoring on return to the UK, which establishes a different set of resettlement practices. Due to the selection criteria we put in place, it can be argued the sample reflects a particular set of Prisoners Abroad clients who have managed to settle into UK more easily than others. Participants were remunerated with a £25 supermarket voucher for their time¹.

3.3 Sample socio-demographics

Of the ten clients interviewed eight were men and two women. This corresponds with wider Prisoners Abroad data, where in 2021 only 3% of returnees were female. The age range of our respondents was 28 to 73 years with an average of 55. The age profile of our sample is reflective of the wider Prisoners Abroad client group. A rise in the number of older aged returnees in recent years is reported, with individuals aged between 55-64 rising from 14 returnees in 2014 to 46 in 2021.

¹ Ethical approval for the study was received by Middlesex University’s Business and Law Faculty Research Ethics Committee.

Table 2. Sample socio-demographics

Socio-demographics	
Gender	
Male	8
Female	2
Age	32 to 73 years (av. Age 55)
Ethnicity	
‘white’	4
‘people from ethnic minority backgrounds’	6

Of our ten respondents, seven had lived most their life in the country from where they had been returned (three from the USA, two from Australia, one from Jamaica and one had lived for an extensive period in Italy). The remaining three had temporarily been in the country where they were arrested and imprisoned (two in Morocco and one in Myanmar) and were keen to return to the UK so they had a slightly different experience compared to the others. Prisoners Abroad’s data confirms that Australia is the country with the most returnees with 58 in 2021, followed by the USA (21) and then Thailand (8).

Table 3. shows the countries our sample had been returned from and the length of prison sentence they had served. Though for a few of them, this is difficult to calculate due to the additional time spent in immigration detention while awaiting the deportation process.

Table 3. Participant details

Participant	Country of return	Length of time in prison (years)	Age at interview (years)	Country of birth
01 male	Italy	12.5	59	UK was living in Italy for since age 27
02 male	Myanmar	5	28	Sri Lanka civil war refugee to UK at age 10 years
03 female	USA	16	32	UK moved to US as young child 5 years old
04 male	Morocco	6	58	Born in Ghana, no date for move to the UK
05 male	Morocco	3	60	Born and raised in France, moved to UK early 20s
06 male	Jamaica	4	54	Born in UK taken to Jamaica age 2
07 male	USA	4	66	Born in UK taken to US age 6?
08 female	USA	12	54	Born in UK taken to US at age 4
09 male	Australia	13.4	73	Born in UK taken to Aus as baby
10 male	Australia	11.6	65	Born in UK taken to Aus at age 6 months

All but three of the sample were parents and a few were also grandparents. This was a situation that amplified their sense of loss and yearning and was particularly troublesome with relationships now long-distance and reduced to communications through video technology platforms and phone-calls.

3.4 Current situation of sample

Some of the people we interviewed were accommodated in their own flats or studios with more housing stability than others, depending on the length of time since their return. All aside from two were on benefits and were therefore living with limited financial means and in some regard struggling financially. Two were in paid employment in the retail sector. Also, most were living with some form of quite serious health conditions that would impact their ability to get work.

The data presented in the following sections is organised chronologically and thematically. We found the accounts given by study respondents in terms of relaying their resettlement experiences followed a pattern that aligned with the deportation and resettlement and integration process they are going through. The sections are therefore separated according to three distinct phases onto which corresponding forms of Prisoners Abroad support is mapped. The first phase is the in-prison support, preparation for deportation and the immediate practical and emotional support required during the process of arrival into the UK. The second phase is the months that unfold as people are settling into life in the UK, establishing 'new beginnings' and forward planning to assist a sense of normalcy. The third phase is the longer-term resettlement as the circumstances they are now faced with are slowly accepted and limitations become apparent.

4.0 In prison, pre-deportation and immediate return support

This section covers the pre-deportation and immediate return period. Usually the first point of engagement with Prisoners Abroad support services involves making contact with UK citizens who are imprisoned in a foreign country. This is a formal process carried out in collaboration with the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO) and functions to provide a sense of connection for people. The support Prisoners Abroad offer is voluntary and not everyone chooses to engage. For those that do engage, support is primarily through the range of services providing advice, information and relief from isolation. Essential information is also collected on individuals' specific needs and vulnerabilities, in order to help make preparations for an individuals' release. This process can begin as soon as Prisoners Abroad are aware of an individual and the support can be provided over a number of years, and not just before deportation. This support also serves the purpose of necessary consular support through the FCDO as well as helping people to prepare for life back in the UK.

The people we interviewed had a range of prison/deportation experiences with some not aware until late in their sentence they would be deported and therefore not connecting closely with Prisoners Abroad while in prison. For a few, contact with Prisoners Abroad while in prison was crucial providing a sense of not feeling so alone, hope and reassurance that there was someone who would provide support when they would return to the UK and a sense of connection to the outside world. This is most important for those returning who have no family or friend connections or any foundations due to the length of time they have lived in their country. The following comment is by a young woman imprisoned in the USA as a 16-year old for 16 years. She emphasises the hope the Prisoners Abroad contact gave her while in prison and how meaningful this was:

I knew because of my sentence that I was going to be deported. I think I wrote a letter to Prisoners Abroad, I wasn't expecting to receive a response, because being in America we don't have access to internet, getting in contact with anyone, so I really couldn't prepare for coming back. But my only hope was writing this letter to Prisoners Abroad... From that point I continuously received cards, or just encouragement. The holidays I would receive cards, I would receive newsletters, so other people who had been deported, just how they were transitioning back. There were people in the same situation who had written in this newsletter how they were actually coping after being deported. So it was like hope for me, because I felt alone, I know I'm going back to nothing, you know I don't have any skills, I don't have anything, I'm going back to a place I don't know and just being honest with you, you know survival kind of kicks in, survival mode... So I had hope I was able to know okay at the end of my sentence that I would come here (03).

Many respondents who received mail from Prisoners Abroad while serving their sentence found this form of contact particularly important. It provided a sense of connection to the outside world and to the UK. It also helped to set their mind at ease that there would be available support after their deportation.

4.1 Deportation and immediate return

What can be said for almost all the people we interviewed was the visceral experience of the actual deportation. A number of people's accounts embodied the difficulties endured during the deportation process, including the demeaning and shameful way it played out. For instance, having the few belongings they could bring packed in 'a couple of carrier bags', having a food allergy and unsuitable food served during the flight resulting in hunger on arrival, the shame of being handcuffed during the flight, having to sleep the night in Heathrow airport on arrival:

You cannot bring much ...you are only allowed maybe a bag...You are handcuffed, they bring you into the plane and everybody is looking at you and it's very traumatic, it's very shameful. you don't necessarily want to be displayed like that.... So it's a bit disturbing to be deported, ...it would be better for somebody to decide to come back on their own (05).

A few of those interviewed were not aware they would be deported following their prison sentence, in which case preparation for return to the UK had not been engaged with in any orderly way.

I had no preparation at all. I came here with carrier bags, not even briefcases, suitcases, nothing, not even a rucksack, nothing. I was in Terminal 2 with a trolley full of these bags, carrier bags and I found a nice comfortable seat and I just put my feet up on the trolley (02).

The following comment illustrates the deep emotion and fears that were generated through the abrupt return and arrival into the UK:

Terrible, isolated, lonely, scared, terrified of where to start, because everything happened, (clicks fingers) in such a short space of time, everything. nobody could be prepared for that (02).

For the returnees that Prisoners Abroad are aware of, the service works closely with Heathrow Travel Care based at Heathrow Airport who provide support to any individual in crisis. The point of arrival back to the UK is often traumatic for returnees, and there can be a range of critical welfare needs that require urgent attention. Heathrow Travel Care can provide initial help and support and works closely with Prisoners Abroad to ensure someone is met at the airport and given early care. The service manager at Heathrow Travel Care explains how they work with Prisoners Abroad clients and try to ease the anxieties of returnees. This involves meeting individuals at the plane door to provide an immediate response, as well as an initial triage of any physical or mental health needs:

We've got three small client rooms and we offer them the phone, if they want to call back home to family. They may not have spoken to the family before they left. So, we give them that opportunity to call abroad straightaway and hopefully that's quite helpful. Again, even just having a pack there with the Prisoners Abroad literature, walking them through all the different aspects of their resettlement, I would imagine it would be quite reassuring... I think the pack, the support, mobile phone, we set them up with an email address, there's a letter there to sign up with the local medical centre, if there are medical needs there. I think it's massive and the onwards support is almost more important. ... Once they've gone to the hotel, they've had a sleep, you know, they are now feeling like they need to look at things, you know 'what am I going to do now' and then they get a call from Prisoners Abroad soon after, a friendly voice at the end of the phone.... We hope it is positive (Heathrow Travel Care service manager).

For people who have accessed the Heathrow Travel Care service, a practical 'travel pack' of goods that includes a mobile phone, an Oyster travel card and food vouchers can be provided. This initial support service is seen as particularly meaningful and appreciated. It offers a small amount of dignity and can help provide reassurance during an intensely difficult and often traumatic experience of deportation and arrival to the UK:

I remember being on the plane and when they deported me, I'm allergic to dairy products, they forgot to put that down, so I didn't eat the whole flight. They didn't have food. And getting off the plane and I remember I was so hungry and they didn't allow us to bring anything but a suitcase and when I got to Heathrow a lot of the terminals were closed. ...The police officers helped me to get to Travel Care and I waited and just knowing that when Prisoners Abroad opened up that day, they would be helping, they were working hand in hand. I think [resettlement worker] had left some stuff at Travel Care. So I was given a little cell phone. I was given ...some stuff to go to sleep in, some underwear, like knickers and stuff like that, some sanitary napkins and she left it there for me, like little package.

INT: What did that mean to you?

Yeah, a lot (03).

Prisoners Abroad can also help source emergency accommodation to make sure that a person will not be street homeless and has an initial place to stay before more permanent accommodation can be found. This support is crucial in preventing homelessness and for

respondents interviewed was incredibly important and helped significantly to reduce anxiety. This level of provision is fundamental in returnee's initial resettlement journeys:

She [resettlement worker] helped me set up, get my national insurance number, she helped me to get universal credit, temporary accommodation, which I'm in now. So she helped me get a hotel, so I was able to get a hotel for the two weeks quarantine (08).

5.0 Barriers faced upon return – and how Prisoners Abroad help

Immediately upon return, people often face a range of practical, emotional and cultural difficulties as they adapt to their new life in the UK. For many people, this is a daunting experience of 'starting again' in a country they are not familiar with. However, Prisoners Abroad allocates each person a dedicated keyworker, who provides support and guidance through this journey. Below, the resettlement manager outlines how a support plan is first formulated with a person upon their return to the UK.

People have arrived in our office, they'd just come back that day. Travel Care have sent them over, they've turned up and they sit in the office and they're just like metaphorically and physically lay everything out on the table – "I need help with this, I need help with that, how is this going to work, I don't know about this, I've never been able to do that". And that is a very big tangled, stressful mess of stuff that people have no sense of how to work through. So the way we'd do it, is to try and unpick that and go okay, we're going to deal with this thing first and that's where action planning comes into the process. I guess it's separating things out, so we can work on the priorities (Prisoners Abroad resettlement manager).

This method of working with clients is reflective of a professional practice known as 'sequencing' that is often applied within offender supervision and intervention programmes. The sequencing approach is designed to respond to an individual person's 'readiness' to take steps towards change and achieving overall sentence plan goals and success (Stephenson *et al*, 2018). Wherein, the people Prisoners Abroad are supporting are not on a sentence plan, the way Prisoners Abroad organise their programme of resettlement follows a sequenced approach firstly addressing immediate priorities before moving to tackle longer term plans. It is this stage-by-stage approach that appears to underline the success they achieve with people. This combined with the 'human caring' that defines their service assists to build self-reliance and resilience among their client group even when daily life carries difficulties. Literature providing understandings of 'care' is useful to refer to here, to better explain the way we interpret the human caring sensibilities of Prisoners Abroad staff. Brown *et al*, (2019) in their research on the conceptualisations of care among 'looked after children' draw attention to definitions of care within discussions of policy and welfare. They cite Sevenhuijsen (2000) who argues that to define care in its fullest possible manner is to understand "care both as a concrete activity in the sense of caring about and for daily needs, and as a moral orientation – ... a set of values that can guide human agency in a variety of social fields" (*ibid.*: 6). Brown *et al* state, in other words, care is a practice that entails a moral disposition – and therefore is made up of inseparable elements of 'being' and 'doing'. This a fitting way to explain the professional practice approach of Prisoners Abroad that is underpinned by caring through the practical support provided and the moral disposition that emanates the nature of the service's work.

5.1 Practical support

Often, the immediate needs people have are practical ones, such as housing, healthcare and financial related needs. The following comment made by a Prisoners Abroad resettlement worker when summarising her day-to-day work role makes clear the key priorities that are focused on to assist a returned person to become established:

If someone had recently arrived, we would be looking at trying to set up their benefits, look at housing options for them, anything else like accessing healthcare, getting bank account set up, ...it really just depends on what they need. But for a typical client it would be those kind of initial conversations and seeing what other needs they might have like mental health, substance misuse whatever, if there is anything more pressing (resettlement worker).

Below, a recent returnee reflects on the issues she faced in the initial few weeks of returning to the UK, illustrating the extent of need people arrive with, that is compounded by skills they have lost while being in prison and the lack of familiarity with the processes and structures of the UK:

I came back homeless, so I needed everything. I'd moved to the States when I was four years old, so I didn't know anything about the culture, I didn't know anything about London. So I needed anything from the smallest things from getting my NI number, I needed help getting that. I needed help with how the streets ran, I needed help with everything, even food, different food, my thing was I had been in prison for 12 years, so I even needed help with the telephone. I needed help like taking a picture, because we did everything remotely, because it was Covid, and I needed help with everything. So basically they guided me as if I was a child, they took me by the hand and just did everything for me, until I learned how to do it by myself. They gave me confidence, oh 'you can do it, you can do it' (08).

Many of the clients that Prisoners Abroad work with are unfamiliar with the systems and structures of UK society, so as well as sourcing and paying for emergency accommodation, Prisoners Abroad guide their clients through the bureaucracy of attaining a bank account, a national insurance number, applications for suitable benefits and other essentials to function in society. For many clients who have returned homeless, Prisoners Abroad try to provide emergency accommodation. This is often on a temporary basis, but a fundamental priority is to then help these individuals to navigate the local authority and private landlord housing systems to help locate a more permanent base.

5.2 Emotional support

Although practical needs are an immediate priority, many individuals who have been deported can experience a range of emotional issues, this can include the trauma related to the prison sentence and the experience of deportation. This is often compounded by a sense of loss that people feel for their life prior to their imprisonment, including the severing of family ties, and previous employment. One such example is outlined below:

I'm living a lot of, still a lot of fresh memories from my incarceration... that's very raw. That is not only as a trauma ...I've got terrible insomnia ...I can't sleep before 3 o'clock in the morning, I wake up all the time. I have problems, so not only I mean how do you call it, I mean they are traumatic kind of experiences on their own... It's very raw (05).

Prisoners Abroad staff also try to work with people if they feel isolated after their deportation, which several respondents expressed as a common issue. Most returnees had no pre-existing family or friendship ties in the UK. In these circumstances, resettlement workers encourage their clients to access services and local activities available within the community and offer group and 1-1 sessions themselves to support clients through difficult emotional periods. This can include being a source of support and by listening to people and their concerns. Helping individuals find a sense of stability in their resettlement and integration into the UK is also beneficial:

The resettlement work encompasses all those kind of things, all the practical things, but also the emotional side of supporting someone. Quite often people are very overwhelmed, sometimes genuinely traumatised by their experiences maybe in prison, or maybe you know something that happened before prison... It's all enmeshed and the thing is people get very stressed out when something is not happening or they can't get their benefit claim sorted out, or if they haven't got ID, so it's all kind of mixed (resettlement manager).

A lot of what we do is taking all that into account and someone's background and very difficult experiences or trauma they might have experienced and I guess trying to manage that in a sensitive way.... the way we were sort of facilitating those groups was coming from an understanding that ...there's a lot of commonality between people's experiences, but there's also very unique situations and very unique experiences that people have had and encouraging people to talk without going into areas that are too sensitive... We are trying to help people integrate and part of that obviously being interactions and relational stuff with other people and going out into the world and doing what they need to do and how they manage very difficult experiences and whether that is someone holding a lot of anger about their deportation and how they process that, or how they express that, or a lot of anxiety (resettlement worker).

5.3 Cultural adaptation

The unique experiences of Prisoner Abroad clients and the unfamiliarity with the UK mean difficulties with acclimatising to UK culture and society. This is outlined below by one interviewee:

I'm trying to still get used to the culture and sometimes people are talking and they are using words that I don't have a clue, 'what does that mean'? It's more with the food I think, when you are talking about food, I'm like 'what's that'?... I was in prison a long time and then Covid and then I'm still kind of adjusting and I think it's going to take a minute (03).

Below, a resettlement worker outlines how aware the service is of these particular – yet crucial – client needs, and use group sessions and 1-1 keyworker contact in order to provide reassurance as these individuals integrate into UK culture. Food seems to occupy a central place in conversation and appears associated with people's sense of place, belonging and cultural identity.

We always talk about food with our clients, because it often comes up in our support groups... people say when they go into a supermarket that the brands are different so it can be quite disorientating, especially for people who have

been in prison for a very long time. It's just like the choice is completely overwhelming isn't it and also food is so much to do with your own culture and your family and in some way it can be your identity. So when we have support groups, quite often we talk about food and ask people what they've noticed and we kind of give them little tips on supermarkets to go to, or you know the differences between food and things like that (resettlement worker).

6.0 Settling into the UK: establishing 'new beginnings' – housing, meaningful activity, recognising barriers, goals and motivations

The following section concentrates on the period that unfolds after a person has got over the initial few months and is beginning to establish themselves independently. This is after their immediate needs have been catered for to the extent they are 'able to function'. For instance, a regular financial source has been set up through the Universal Credit benefit system or receipt of the old age pension, they have moved from emergency housing into more stable accommodation, are finding their way around London and are becoming less dependent on the everyday availability of Prisoners Abroad resettlement staff. This is the intended resettlement step pathway model followed by Prisoners Abroad. Thus, this period can be identified as a phase defined by hope and aspiration, but also by frustration at the realisation of the barriers to opportunities that are associated with an ex-offender status and employment.

Stable housing is a key theme in this section and is a main finding in respect to achieving success in resettlement goals from a Prisoners Abroad organisational perspective. Prisoners Abroad staff work closely with local authorities (where appropriate), housing charities and private letters to help people secure permanent long-term stable accommodation. They then continue to work with clients and local authorities to ensure that this accommodation is suitable and has all the basic necessities, and will liaise with services if there are issues with heating, plumbing or electrics. Ongoing support is also provided to help ensure clients can sustain their tenancies. The following comment illustrates the importance of stable housing for clients to achieve any form of success in their resettlement pathway:

I don't think you could even say someone is resettled if they are not in accommodation. ...having somewhere stable is where you can kind of start building life again and without that I don't think it's possible to do anything else really (resettlement worker).

Not unusually, all of the people we interviewed emphasised how critical housing was to their situation. This was from the point of arrival and being accommodated securely in a hostel/hotel and not having to sleep on the streets. A number had visions of homelessness and how street sleeping could easily have been an outcome of their circumstances. Stable housing also enabled them to establish a sense of home, to make their space 'homely', to be able to cook food. These things helped to maintain cultural connections with the place they had left behind and created a sense of safety and security. It also assisted to establish a sense of motivation to progress and get on with other aspects of their resettlement.

I feel like I'm in a good place, like I have a place to lay my head. I can think straight, you know I'm doing positive, I'm not doing illegal stuff, I feel good (01).

I made it like homely, like it's my home and so I feel good just walking in and knowing that this is where I live (03).

One woman was in a transition stage towards holding the status of 'permanently housed'. This was tied to the training and employment course she had been on through with the House of St Barnabas employment project. Another mentioned how having stable housing enabled them to move forward. Indeed, it can be a point at which a person is no longer as dependent on Prisoners Abroad as they have previously been.

Once I got my house I started moving forward slowly. Then I didn't really need her help, up to that, she really helped me a lot (02).

The significance of having accommodation cannot be underestimated for this population. Homelessness was something most respondents had come close to in their thoughts of what deportation would result in. Arriving into the UK with very little aside from a bag of belongings, some existing distant relations for a few and little knowledge of the extent to which Prisoners Abroad would help, housing was the single most important thing to them. This was also from the point of being able to plan ahead with the stronger sense of stability they had achieved.

When it comes to accommodation it is Prisoners Abroad that have done everything since I've arrived. ...I would have been on the street ... you have please to highlight this kind of thing. It's very difficult because a lot of us otherwise will go back to committing crimes (05).

Following the initial stage of support that Prisoners Abroad work on providing when a person returns to the UK, a longer-term view of resettlement is envisioned for Prisoners Abroad clients. This places stable accommodation as a key factor, and the ability for people to make choices and to start shaping their life. Below a resettlement worker outlines the main aims the service has for individuals as they begin to become more settled into the UK:

it's just someone engaged in a normal life. the aim in resettlement is to provide the best options for people in terms of making a successful life in the UK. It's not necessarily perfection, but it's just trying to get someone to a stable position where they're capable of making decisions or having the luxury of making decisions and doing things and moving on. ... where someone has options, you are not homeless, everything is not limited anymore, you're aware that you've got options and you can move forward and do something that you want to do next (resettlement worker).

6.1 Employment, education, meaningful activity and volunteering

Prisoners Abroad work with a number of individuals who have reached retirement age, or have long-term health problems so are not searching for work. However, many respondents to this study were actively searching for work. In light of this need, the Prisoners Abroad resettlement service offers a work preparation programme. This programme aim is for individuals to gain an understanding of the UK job market and to identify how their skills, qualifications and employment history can be transferable. This can include CV writing workshops, interview preparation and skills identification.

For respondents to this study, a crucial part of becoming more settled involved securing employment. In comments about settling in over the months following return, respondents also

mentioned job searching as an important priority. In particular, younger respondents articulated a sense of urgency to secure work and move forward. This was primarily based on a desire to make up for lost time during long periods of incarceration.

“I’m coming in at 32, I just feel like I can’t be slow. I can’t, and xx [resettlement worker] told me this, one thing she said and it always will stick with me, she said you will not always have every opportunity you have to now jump on it. So I sat there and thought, because I used to be kind of like ‘oh I don’t want to do this’, because then, I kind of felt embarrassed, I felt like my past will come back up, let me not speak up, you know just to be quiet. And she said no and then ever since that point I’m like I’m going to go in full force. I’m already delayed enough (03).

Being able to secure employment was the wish of most of those we interviewed, with it evident among those who were working that it fundamentally alters their sense of ‘self’, their sense of self-worth and their feelings of progressing towards successful re/settlement.

It’s like something you are doing, you are improving your life, ... you are meeting new people, you are doing new task, you’re learning new skills, so that’s keeping me motivated And then you have better friend circle, work colleagues and all this, that gives you another environment, right, rather than staying alone, you are going out, you are having new friends and things, it’s better (02).

However, a number of barriers were faced by individuals in their search for work. A main one involves the disclosure of criminal conviction rules. Although Prisoners Abroad staff provide information to returnees on disclosures prior to release and during casework sessions in the UK, this issue was preventing some from getting paid work. Many respondents were aware that securing employment would be incredibly difficult if not impossible. Yet, it consigns people to an existence on Universal Credit and voluntary job positions, rather than becoming more autonomous members of society:

I would have loved to have been a driving instructor, but I found out that that takes a DBS check and I will never get anything with a DBS check (01).

The following comment was made by one of the women we interviewed who had an established career before prison in the medical services. The criminal conviction disclosure meant she was not able to apply her skill and expertise which was a source of great frustration.

With the job situation, because I had been in prison and because I had been in so long, I have to disclose it and it really hinders me from a lot of jobs. So I had the worst time looking for jobs, it was horrible and it really stressed me out, because I’ve never really had a problem looking for a job. ... when I was in the States I worked as a Phlebotomist in the hospital, so that’s what I would really like to do. So I’m still going to try, but it was just the worse, that was really stressful for me. It really had me down, ...I always have to say something about it [the conviction] ...I’ll find a job that I really want that would complete me (08).

I’m getting universal credit, I’m trying to find a job, ... In my case I think that after three years without working... there is a gap in your CV and also most

jobs will ask for a criminal check. So with a criminal record... you don't stand a lot of chances ...there are a few things I've applied for. Even cabbage, mini-cabbage, no - there is a disclosure, you cannot work for schools, you cannot work with children, there are many jobs that you cannot do. So it's a bit difficult, so now I'm thinking well maybe I might try to apply for a course, I do not know where, or which one.... I mean that would take me to something else. So that is where I am at this point in time (05).

One younger adult we interviewed whose imprisonment did not result in a criminal conviction was not impeded in same way. While grateful for all the Prisoners Abroad support he had received, he felt more could be done for people like him. He was the youngest person we interviewed and at age 28 after five years in prison abroad, he was desperate to be re-established and in work that matched his earlier university education.

It is evident that valuable workplace skill and expertise is being under-utilised through disclosure requirements that are placed on people with a criminal conviction. This in the long run denies society of eligible labour and at a time when there is a significant skills shortage within the workplace and in certain sectors. The 'Ban the Box' campaign calls for the removal of criminal conviction disclosure on job and higher education applications and for levels of 'risk' to be assessed at the point of a job offer, rather than a blanket exclusion from the process at the form filling stage. We can see from the experiences of our sample that processes of exclusion are at play in all layers of these people's existence and having work would alter that.

Prisoners Abroad's work provides structure and building blocks for resettlement. One of the primary ways that this takes place is that Prisoners Abroad works closely with a number of voluntary agencies in the local community, and resettlement workers encourage their clients to access resources, such as the local library in order to learn new skills and meet new people employment services *etc.* Below, a resettlement worker with Prisoners Abroad outlines the importance of ensuring their clients are actively engaging with community services and why it's such an important step in the resettlement process:

I guess for us, we just need to encourage people to link in with courses and getting out into the community, finding a library, finding out from the job centre if there's any programmes that they can do. We've got links to, the House of St Barnabas and we've got other organisations as well, St Giles, Bounce Back, Fine Cell work (resettlement worker).

One organisation Prisoners Abroad works with is The House of St Barnabas. This project, based in central London provides a 12-week employment preparation programme. The programme has taken on a number of Prisoners Abroad clients and has assisted in helping people find employment and secure housing as well. Below the service manager for the House of St Barnabas explains how the programme works:

The programme itself is broken into three strands. The first strand is around employment, so we do a lot of stuff around interview skills, CVs and things like that. The second part is around communication and wellbeing, so how we communicate with others, how we communicate with ourselves. Then we do a lot around wellbeing, we do things like stress management, Tai Chi, Yoga, creative writing, a lot of art therapy as well. Then the third part is around work experience. So it's either going to be hospitality, or business admin (House of St Barnabas).

Another organisation that Prisoners Abroad returnees have been referred to is a charity called 'Fine Cell Work'. The charity has a London-based workshop, and run a 'Open the Gate' programme which provides work experience, formal training and employment to ex-prisoners. Below, a Prisoners Abroad client outlines some of the therapeutic benefits of engaging with these activities:

That definitely helped me with my mental state, because sitting in a house looking at the wall was awful and that's when I was in the hostel. I hated being there. When she [resettlement worker] called with that, that was very therapeutic for me (08).

7.0 Longer-term resettlement, adapting and identity

This section covers the final substantive phase that people are moving into after they have been back in the UK for a longer period of time. Usually, at this point, people will have acquired a stable base and be more acclimatised to British society. However, respondents reflected on their cultural background and personal identity. Belonging and inclusion is a fundamental part of how we feel about ourselves. And the circumstances our participants were faced with were challenging, particularly in regard to how people configure their life and sense of self post-deportation. It can be argued this is the same for people who are leaving prison and there is work done with prison populations on shaping and constructing new identities.

I want to belong here, even when I was in America, I didn't have citizenship there, so I knew I didn't belong there (03).

Even though I've been raised there all my life, ...but now I finally want to be here and I'm British, I have a British passport and I'm proud for like a second chance (03).

It's funny that you ask that, I don't know where I fit in, I really don't, because my parents are of Caribbean background. I was born here, got raised here and I ask myself, it's funny I asked myself that all the time, who am I. I don't know, I don't know where I fit in, but I guess I'll figure it out (08).

The service manager at Prisoners Abroad recognises the exaggerated sense of otherness that returnees can feel after their deportation, and the difficulties they can face in their resettlement and adaptation, as they question and reflected on their identity. This can mean that even as people do become more assimilated in British life, their accent and identity can still be called into question:

I think that's common to prisoners coming out of prison wherever they're coming out. But I guess it's probably exaggerated because of their otherness, you know their accent, they don't feel British, people don't identify them as British. We've struggled before to get housing on occasion, or explain to people, no this person isn't an American, just because they sound and look and behave a certain way... So you struggle, you've been thrown out of a country because you are not from the US and then you come to Britain and you're not accepted as British, because you are different... So I would say they

probably do carry that as a deportee and that difference with them for some time (Service manager).

A primary aim of Prisoners Abroad is to ensure their service users have attained a level of stability in society and have the tools to progress in their life in the UK, before exiting the service. For many clients, the most intensive support would be in the first 6-months post-deportation, however for some clients this process can take longer, and Prisoners Abroad maintain that they are happy to provide support for longer if necessary, but wish to avoid dependency. However, for most returnees interviewed, a sense of attachment to the service and their keyworker appeared common. People expressed a desire to maintain contact and support and wished to have ongoing involvement with the service:

I don't want a time limit, I hope they don't have a time limit with me. I told them, any time they need me I'm here, I want to always have a relationship with Prisoners Abroad. I think this is a structural programme for life, that's what it is, it's not saying that I'm going to complete it, right now this is just helping me stay focused, but in a structure, because I need it (08).

7.1 Technology and digital exclusion

Competence with digital technology and exclusion was a key theme within our research and requires a separate discussion. This is for the challenge it presents to Prisoners Abroad clients who due to imprisonment have missed out on acquiring skill that come alongside the development of new technologies. Prisoners Abroad staff also need to spend time coaching clients to function in a world that is dominated by digital and online systems. Many Prisoners Abroad clients experience 'digital exclusion' whereby they are unable to accomplish certain administrative tasks or engage in personal communications now typically conducted through digital devices, such as 'smart phones', 'ipads', laptops *etc.* Digital competence issues among returnees is something Prisoners Abroad have faced for some time due to the often-lengthy periods of time people have spent in prison. Yet, the scale of online systems and document authentication processes now required in many areas of civic and administrative life poses a challenge. Prisoners Abroad clients need to engage with photo uploads, document transfers to prove benefit eligibility and online forms *etc.* leading to problems and stress in realising these tasks.

Digital technology difficulties were the experience of most people we interviewed. This was compounded by the scale of tasks they need to engage with on return (virtually everyone we interviewed returned during Covid). It carried a greater level of exclusion and hardship for some clients with limited real-time communication possible for some. When family are far away the only means of maintaining a relationship with sons and daughters and grandchildren is through the use of digital technology:

I'm thinking I'm too old to learn. I might go back to the library and see if they've got any more advanced courses coming up, because I can do WhatsApp with my daughter but that's all I can do. I don't know how to receive WhatsApp (10).

It's really a problem, ...just to know how to be able to send an email and for instance with Covid you know there is no face-to-face (05).

I got so much problems I was taking pictures of documents, I had to take pictures of my birth certificate, send it over, because I came in June of 2020, when the Covid was just, it was there. So I couldn't even come in physically to this office, I had to do everything remotely and ...me being away that long, technology had advanced so much, I didn't know anything. But xx, who was my case manager, my support worker, ... she just walked me through everything (08).

Below, a resettlement worker outlines the importance of digital literacy and how crucial it is to function in society and connect with people. For Prisoners Abroad staff, assisting people with using technology is an important issue:

They need a huge amount of input and sometimes that does involve hours on the phone with people, making sure that they're understanding things, teaching them how to use the phone and making sure that they've understood how to do certain things and talking through wi-fi and data. you need to go right back to the basics, but I've had a client who recently came back and he was in prison for 30 years and at first he was really, he had no idea how to use a smart phone. But he had such a good attitude and we went through it together and he picked it up (resettlement worker).

The pace of change occurring within society linked to the advance of communication technologies is being referred to as 'the automation of everyday life'. It is a wider societal issue that is receiving greater levels of attention. It is apparent the reorganisation of business and services post-pandemic means many in society are excluded from important aspects of life (Seifert, 2020). This issue will continue to be a key challenge within the package of support Prisoners Abroad's resettlement service provides and links also to the overall older age of Prisoners Abroad client group.

7.2 The impact of Covid-19

Our research results cannot be presented without a discussion on the impact of Covid-19 and the resettlement experiences of our respondents and for the Prisoners Abroad resettlement service during this time. This is linked to the previous section on digital competence but also to the deportation backlogs Prisoners Abroad experienced. The resettlement period of the majority of our respondents was during the Covid-19 pandemic. They arrived and were re/settling into life in London under highly restricted terms that impacted access to in-person support groups and face-to-face meetings with staff at the Prisoners Abroad premises. This was alongside the ability to apply for support and undertake opportunities for volunteering work or employment, all of which are critical services in respect to successful resettlement pathways. All these crucial services and sources of support were reduced or only available remotely.

For Prisoners Abroad service users interviewed for this study, the majority of support they have received from Prisoners Abroad was provided remotely, usually via frequent phone calls. In a few examples, clients had only been able to meet their keyworker face-to-face for the first time recently. This support has been greatly received and is a testament to the adaptability of Prisoners Abroad during a very difficult time. However, the pandemic caused an additional barrier to resolving the vital practical, emotional and cultural needs these clients have as they try

to build a life in the UK. Three Prisoners Abroad clients outline the additional stresses and strains they had in their resettlement caused by the pandemic:

It's again online and these forms are all on computers and oh it's a problem. It's really a problem, I mean just to know how to be able to send an email and for instance with Covid you know there is no face to face. This is the first time I've seen a few of the people and everything has got to be online.... It's a problem, it's almost a course, a whole course you know to be able to do all that (05).

I've been working on it, [finding a forklift driving course] but with Covid it's been hard to go and do the training and do the practical work. (07)

I'm still adjusting. The only reason I think I'm still adjusting is because I came in Covid and I think just not being around people that's why it's taken me so long and me not being from here, and not actually being around people, it's just taken a little longer for me (08).

The service manager also outlined concerns regarding the challenges of resettling people during the pandemic and when face-to-face meetings were either not possible or highly restricted, and outlines the detrimental impacts this can have for their ability to work effectively with clients:

I can't help thinking that it can be a more positive impact for when people could come into our office, see the person, we could see them if they were physically degenerating or whatever, you can tell a certain amount on the phone, but it's not the same as seeing somebody. You can usually see when they're in trouble (Service manager).

The Covid-19 pandemic has also presented wider challenges to the deportation system. During the height of the pandemic deportations were briefly stopped in certain countries. However, in Australia they have since resumed and to clear backlogs, charter flights holding multiple returnees have been undertaken. Below, the service manager outlines the difficulties these charter flights can have on the Prisoners Abroad service and which place significant pressure on a charity the size of Prisoners Abroad that operates with small staffing models and within limited budgets:

It's really challenging. We've been talking to the Australian border force about it, they don't intend to stop that. We have obviously got to take them, but when you're talking up to potentially 15 people on a flight, that just changes the nature of the job and we were trying to manage and protect how we work, but to be honest, it just becomes all-encompassing for that few weeks before, trying to do the preparation, because some of them can be people we don't know very well, or we've only known recently, or only signed up because they're in immigration detention and they know they are going to need assistance, whereas they'd been in denial about it before. Then coming back to a sort of a post-Covid world that is still not operating and functioning as it was before, to the fact that we're not seeing people in the office as a matter of course, just makes the job really challenging, because everything is on the phone, or email and you're explaining everything to people on the phone and basically it's very, very hard. Also I suppose it's a bit more of a

conveyor belt than it ever would be normally... it's just changing the nature of the job ... Because we would rather not work like that (service manager).

These themes are returned to in the conclusion.

8.0 Prisoners Abroad the service

The above sections have explored the resettlement journeys of Prisoners Abroad clients, from the initial imprisonment abroad, the deportation experience and the gradual resettlement and integration in Britain. These sections have also explored the barriers people can face while resettling and how the Prisoners Abroad service helps. Below, we discuss the aims and underpinning values of Prisoners Abroad, and the value and meaning that the Prisoners Abroad clients we interviewed placed on the service.

8.1 The aims of Prisoners Abroad

The service manager for Prisoners Abroad outlined what she hoped to achieve with each client that accesses their service. The aspirations outlined below primarily involve ensuring people have attained a sense of stability in British society and are 'sewn into the community' and are able to function:

Our ultimate goal I would say, it's probably quite aspirational to some extent is that somebody is sewn into the community, so they know they can function and they know where to get help from, the basics are in place. So they are in the welfare system, they have got access to medical care. They are in at least their first permanent accommodation and they know what they need to do ... or they've got a plan, or they've joined our work preparation programme,and they can sort of function (Service manager).

Likewise, the head of resettlement outlines that the aims and the goals of the service is different for each individual, but often encompasses achieving a sense of stability, both in regards to practical needs like finances and housing, but also achieving regarding emotional stability.

What we would call successful, shouldn't really be about what we think is successful, it should be what works for that person. So the initial foundation, being self-sufficient in terms of money, benefits initially that's the situation for most people, some form of stable housing. So someone has got a base, they've got their own base, it's only when they've got their own base and they start thinking about the next steps really, work, or more voluntary work, or how they want to progress. I suppose a place of emotional stability as well which is sometimes a consequence of someone feeling more settled in terms of their housing situation. But I think it also means really someone feeling more orientated in the UK, more confident about their future, more aware of what their options are (resettlement manager).

The aims and aspirations articulated above are also shared by the clients of Prisoners Abroad. These returnees saw Prisoners Abroad as a crucial link to accessing British society and essential services. Respondents also recognised the crucial role the service plays in preventing homelessness:

I just think they generally want to help people succeed, that's what their goal is. Their goal is to help you come here and succeed and not to be one of the

statistics of homelessness here. That is their goal, that is what they want for you... But they definitely are the link. I would say they are like the octopus and they have the tentacles everywhere (08).

8.2 The values of Prisoners Abroad

Our research has noted that the service has a particular set of values and ethos in their approach to their clients. The individuals they work with have often experienced trauma from their prison sentence abroad, their deportation and loss of their previous life. The staff at Prisoners Abroad should be credited for their ability to manage these emotional issues, while also helping their clients achieve practical necessities essential for their resettlement. Many of the staff at Prisoners Abroad have previous experiences in a variety of sectors including housing charities, the probation service, domestic violence charities or social work. The experiences and values Prisoners Abroad staff possess both individually and collectively as an organisation, help them to work with people in an individualised and empathetic way and which we associate to the individual resilience that is built within the people they support. Below, we outline four key values of the Prisoners Abroad service.

A first core value of the Prisoners Abroad organisation is to be non-judgemental in their approach to the clients they work with. Prisoners Abroad can undertake offence focused work and although the service is not a formal arm of the criminal justice system, managing risk is still an important aspect of the service. This can include working pre-release to ascertain risks and vulnerabilities, and working with the police and other formal parts of the criminal justice system to manage individuals with serious offences, including formal MAPPA arrangements and being mindful of risks to staff, the public and safeguarding processes. However, despite taking risk seriously, Prisoners Abroad prioritise a person-centred approach that is not solely offence-focused. Prisoners Abroad describe themselves as a welfare organisation who take a human rights perspective of their work to ensure all returnees they work with have the opportunity to resettlement in British society:

The key values are really the belief that everyone should have a chance to make a fresh start after a prison sentence. While someone is in prison everyone deserves the right to be treated like a human being and have their human rights respected. People should have the chance to make a fresh start when they come back to the UK. what does that mean in practice; listening to someone, give them the chance to express themselves about their experiences, trying to put some structure on what someone needs in the UK and help someone through the initial period of being back here, where they are navigating a lot of different things, but doing it in a non-judgemental way (resettlement manager).

Crucially, the non-judgemental perspective of Prisoners Abroad staff, does seem to be realised by the people that the organisation works with. One respondent below outlines his thoughts on the approach, echoing that this supportive and non-judgemental approach appears to be central to staff practice:

Prisoners Abroad's values are very important. They are not judging you for what crime you committed, but they are there to support you of your wellbeing, your health, mental health, for your physical and for you to have something in mind that there's someone behind you, even if your family have neglect you. Prisoners Abroad is there to help you until you, to get you come

back to UK. Then they will settle you down and help you out, whatever you want to do in your life, if you want to take education, if you want to take employment... your wellbeing is very important to Prisoners Abroad (04).

A second core value of Prisoners Abroad is an approach to their client based that is centred on 'human caring'. Staff interviewed for the study reflected a clear passion for the work that they do, viewing this as a vocation, rather than a job. This approach means Prisoners Abroad have a client-focused and responsive attitude that puts their clients first:

Everyone is really passionate about what they do and I felt very early on at PA, I felt really inspired, I mean in the casework team as well, ... every week we have a casework meeting, ... just the kind of problem solving and clients are always at the forefront... so everyone really cares and is willing to go that extra mile for our clients. When I think of Prisoners Abroad service delivery is that, it's very much the people that work for Prisoners Abroad have made it that (resettlement worker).

Below a Prisoners Abroad service user explains his perspectives regarding the approach of the organisation and how he encapsulates his experiences with staff. Again, as a reflection of other respondents, this person felt that staff treated him humanely and respectfully, and felt that staff were committed in their approach:

A sense of humanity, of trying to help ... trying to do the best they can towards the people in difficulty... a sincere desire to help their fellow citizens and human beings, I mean without that it would be impossible.... I think it has to be and again there's no way to do it very well if it is just a job... I think they are very concerned about people's wellbeing... I think it needs a lot of understanding, a lot of patience, a lot of empathy and a sincere desire to help, otherwise you wouldn't be able to do it (05).

A third core value of Prisoners Abroad's working model supports staff and enables them to problem solve together, placing great emphasis on team-work and utilising each other's strengths to find the best solution for clients.

The team plays a really big part, we share with each other when things are tough and we've had a difficult conversation or the client is particularly vulnerable, we share with each other and I think that really helps kind of take the load off a little bit... so I think we know each other's strengths and we can ask (resettlement keyworker).

The final key ethos of Prisoners Abroad is that they take an individualised strengths-based approach to each person they work with. This is in line with the 'good lives' model approach (Ward, 2010) outlined previously. Prisoners Abroad resettlement workers work closely with each client to draw on their strengths and outline particular needs and to put an individualised support plan in place that will best help develop an effective resettlement plan:

Everybody needs that different approach and that's been refined over time... So it requires a basic level of focus on the person and what their abilities and capabilities are, as well as understanding that they've got to do certain things and there's only certain things we can achieve without understanding the complex, emotional needs sometimes, as well as having to focus on very

practical sort of things. But that can be different for everybody. So we find that providing that supportive flexible approach (Service manager).

Reflecting back on this period all of the people interviewed had immense gratefulness for Prisoners Abroad resettlement staff taking the time with them and approaching the support and guidance they provide in a non-judgemental way and with 'human caring'. It is apparent the human caring exhibited by Prisoners Abroad staff is key to helping these individuals build personal resilience in establishing new beginnings. Respondents truly valued the help and support provided to them, which was often perceived as more meaningful than a professional relationship. One respondent described staff as like his 'brothers and sisters' and the Prisoners Abroad offices like a second home. This language demonstrates the strength and support and the importance they placed on what they have received.

Life changers, completely. There's no way that I could have been able to make it without her, there's no way. Today where I'm at and the things that I'm doing, there's no way"... I was able to talk to her.... she seriously cared. When it came to filling out forms if I was slow, because there were tons of forms and some things I just didn't know. She didn't get frustrated, not one time has she gotten frustrated with me, the questions, the phone calls, it's never been... it was just priceless (03).

The first few months I had no-one, it is just Prisoners Abroad, ...just meeting the person who had helped me through every step of the way and she's not family, that's what just blows my mind. I had questions about things that probably seem stupid, I just didn't know, I've never lived on my own, made choices...I counted on her for every single thing (03).

What does she mean to me? She was a lifeline to me, that's it in a nutshell. She was there for me... They made me feel wanted and relevant. They were non-judgemental... I knew that there was a warmth and level of professionalism, what I didn't envisage was how they actually truly cared (10).

8.3 Lessons for probation and the wider criminal justice system

We find that the approach of Prisoners Abroad and its key values could be replicated in other organisations that work closely with people in the criminal justice system, like the probation service. This support is clearly meaningful and valuable for the people they work with and the acute circumstances and traumatic experiences many of their clients have faced. Recent research on probation notes that the 'through the gate' experience promised by the Transforming Rehabilitation probation reforms have largely failed to materialise (Cracknell, 2021*b*). However, Prisoners Abroad are able to offer a truly 'through the gate' service, where meaningful contact is made while the person is serving their sentence and initial plans are drawn up, people are then met at the airport gate, and emergency accommodation can be sought. The Prisoners Abroad client works closely and co-productively with a keyworker to provide practical and emotional support. This is a truly wrap-around service, which makes a notable difference to its service users and is central at preventing homelessness among this population.

Furthermore, several Prisoners Abroad staff are former probation officers, and they noted that the combination of a person-centred approach of Prisoners Abroad and smaller caseloads,

means that staff feel they are better able to make a difference and work closely with their clients as well as research available resources in the community to find creative solutions to problems:

In terms of just having a smaller caseload is a massive thing, because you can just focus on someone, even if you don't necessarily have the resources... but just having a smaller number of people that you can focus on and you can look for services.... we work with so many different organisations in West London, ... I was working as a probation officer for years and I don't think I'd contacted a fraction of the number of organisations that I have working here. So you just have time to have research and look up different avenues for people (Resettlement worker).

9.0 Discussion & conclusion

Our report underlines that Prisoner's Abroad provides a comprehensive 'through the gate' provision of support to its client base. Initial contact is often made when the individual is in prison, in this respect Prisoners Abroad can provide meaningful support as well as practical guidance to help prepare someone for life in the UK. Once someone is deported Prisoners Abroad work closely with Heathrow Travel Care to ensure that returnees are met at the airport gate and are provided with initial support. If needed, then emergency accommodation can be provided, before a dedicated keyworker will work closely with individuals to help find more settled long-term accommodation, as well as help with other practical needs.

It is accepted that for any individual to leave prison and try to resettle in the community is a particularly daunting and complex process, filled with various barriers and potential pitfalls. This is of course no different for Prisoners Abroad clients, but this client-base have particular and unique circumstances. For many respondents to this study, they left the UK as young children, with the majority of their family ties, networks of support and employment experiences in another country. Many respondents had traumatic experiences in prison, before facing a dehumanising deportation process. This means these individuals have a particular traumatic set of experiences. Therefore, immense credit should be given to Prisoners Abroad for the way that staff help individuals with practical needs, alongside providing support and understanding for emotional needs and advice and guidance with cultural needs as they assimilate into a new culture and society. Because of their experiences, many returnees are not familiar with how the system works and how and where to access crucial aspects of resettlement, such as healthcare or financial support. However, Prisoners Abroad staff help guide individuals through these complex and bureaucratic systems to ensure they have access to essential services.

The resettlement support provided is in line with Moore's (2011) conceptualisation of resettlement as a three-stage approach. Through their 'resettlement step' approach, Prisoners Abroad firstly seek to address immediate practical needs and resolve acute issues and points of crisis. Then once an individual has reached a more settled state, Prisoners Abroad work closely to ensure that individuals become 'sewn into the community', and can start to see a future for themselves and have options and choices regarding their life in the UK. In this sense, clients should become more resilient and self-managing.

Our research also finds that the work the Prisoners Abroad undertakes is incredibly important and impactful for the individuals that they work with, particularly in relation to housing and preventing homelessness. Prisoners Abroad staff understand that helping an individual secure stable and permanent housing is fundamental, and no further aspects of a resettlement plan can

be completed until a stable base has been secured. All respondents interviewed for this study were immensely grateful for the support provided, and realised they were likely to have been homeless without Prisoners Abroad. Initial emergency accommodation helped ease the immediate stress and crisis that recently deported clients felt, and further support aided individuals to navigate the complex local authority and private housing systems. This has clearly helped many Prisoners Abroad clients to find long-term housing, as well as ensured that the housing is safe, secure and adequate for an individual's needs.

Prisoners Abroad has a clear value-base and ethos that is present in their work with each of their clients. Above, we have outlined four key values of the service. Although Prisoners Abroad are cognizant of risks and offending behaviour, their approach is non-judgemental and focused on the individual helping them achieve a fresh start, rather than on the offence itself. Prisoners Abroad staff also clearly display genuine care and commitment for their clients (Brown *et al*, 2019), taking a vocational attitude to their jobs and strive to ensure each individual is treated fairly and decently and with every chance to resettle in the UK. Team-work is also a central element of support, with staff working closely to draw on each other's strengths and expertise, as well as an interest and openness to draw from resources in the community. Lastly, Prisoners Abroad take a strengths-based approach to their clients, working co-productively and in an individualised manner to ensure that each person has the ability to live a 'good life'. In return, the returnees interviewed were all highly appreciative of the support they had received and realised the central role the service had played in their resettlement. Staff who had previous experience of working within the criminal justice system, were also aware that managing smaller caseloads allows more impactful and in-depth work to take place.

Amidst the positive work of Prisoners Abroad, there are a number of barriers faced by staff and service users that are making resettlement in the UK more challenging. The first barriers concerns the wider environment regarding international perspectives on deportations and specifically relates to international human rights. Deportation to a country that a person has not resided in since they were a small child and much of their adult life in a brutal and cruel system. It causes intense personal hardships for the person concerned, their wider families and also places significant demands on the charitable services of a small organisation such as Prisoners Abroad and the welfare services of the receiving countries - "if you left before you even have a memory of the UK, what does that achieve for anybody...except you get rid of a problem".

The second barrier concerns the impacts of Covid-19. Many respondents interviewed returned to the UK during the pandemic, and longer returnees' resettlement was also impacted by the lockdowns. During the height of the pandemic, accessing services became difficult, and for many individuals the only option to access services was remotely – clients not familiar with the internet and computer systems particularly struggled. Keywork appointments also had to take place over the phone, with many respondents not meeting their worker face-to-face until months after their arrival. Although Prisoners Abroad had to adapt to the situation, and clients felt supported, staff realised the importance of being able to see a client in person, in order to get a better perspective of their current situation. Since lockdown has eased, Prisoners Abroad has faced an influx of deportation flights, particularly from America and Australia. These were paused during lockdown, but the service is now managing charter flights of deportations, with numerous people returning at once, and increasingly these people have complex needs, making it difficult to manage.

Another barrier faced within people's resettlement relates to digital exclusion. We increasingly live in an automated world of smart phones and the internet, and accessing services is often only possible through knowledge of this technology. Many Prisoners Abroad clients – particular older

clients who had served long sentences – found themselves unfamiliar and unequipped to use modern technology, causing a severe impediment to accessing services and contacting families. The last barrier highlighted in this report involves exclusion from employment due to criminal record checks. Many respondents in the study were keen to find employment, but found that increasingly arduous requirements acted as a severe impediment to securing employment.

9.1 Recommendations

Below, we outline three recommendations that we believe would further strengthen the work of Prisoners Abroad:

The Covid-19 pandemic saw much service delivery that usually took place in a face-to-face format necessarily transfer to online meetings over video-conferencing platforms. While this worked well to maintain contact with the client groups of different organisations and to provide support services during the pandemic, there are a number of support service types that are best delivered in person. The work of Prisoners Abroad is one of these services with the nature of the client resettlement work engaging with people who have been isolated and denied human relationships while in prison, have come out of prison with significant gaps in fundamental knowledge and experience with technology *etc.* Based on our research findings and the comments made by people about loneliness, technology struggles and general motivation, we recommend that Prisoners Abroad resumes its on-site resettlement service to full capacity is a key message to make. A number of workplace settings are adopting models of hybrid working as they move out of the pandemic involving a mix of working from home and at the workplace. While these might be favoured by staff who have experienced and performed well working from home, they are rated less favourable by certain user groups and we would argue that the Prisoners Abroad user group is one of these.

Prisoners Abroad has limited access to housing provision for deported clients of their service which amounts to sourcing emergency hostel accommodation on immediate return and then through partner organisations such as Forward Trust or through private letting agencies when settling people into their longer-term arrangements. The housing support provided needs to be viewed within the wider context of a housing crisis, with diminishing housing stock available and rising costs. However, given feeling secure and comfortable within their housing arrangements appeared to be one of the most fundamental aspects of Prisoners Abroad clients' ability to develop a positive outlook and begin to establish connections to work and community, it is vital people are being assisted to secure housing tenancies and that the housing provision used for their client group is of a satisfactory standard. This could potentially involve **seeking a wider network of housing providers and partners in the private rented sector.**

We note above the difficulties of Prisoners Abroad clients securing employment, with criminal records checks acting as a significant barrier to securing work. This meant that many individuals were unable to move forward and are reliant on Universal Credit benefit payments. As such, some of the younger respondents interviewed hoped that Prisoners Abroad might be able to introduce further opportunities to gain new skills to enhance their prospects for employment. Although the service already provides a work preparation programme, perhaps the work programme could play a greater role in this.

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