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Penal Arts Interventions and Hope: Outcomes of Arts-Based Projects in Prisons and Community Settings*

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*In memory of Jahmaine Davis- Artist

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Abstract

The value of arts-based projects within the criminal justice system is well documented, as research has identified positive outcomes relating to inmates' behavior and their relationships with others. This article examines the work of the Soft Touch Arts project at HMP Leicester, UK and identifies the importance of hope as a transformative outcome. Interviews with artists in prison and community settings demonstrated the value of engaging in creative and purposeful activity, generating hope which enabled artists to aspire to a better future. This occurred alongside ameliorating the harms of prison and helping artists manage their relationship with probation services.

Keywords
prison arts, wellbeing, social prescribing, innovation, rehabilitation, hope

Introduction

This article examines the work of the Soft Touch Arts based workshops, Unlocked, in prison and community settings. The workshops adopt the principle of *social prescribing*, which aims to engage imprisoned and re-entering citizens in creative learning. *Unlocked* was funded between 2017–2020 in order to improve wellbeing of both inmates and probationers.

The program is distinctive in its approach, as lead artists facilitate the participants to shape their own learning and create their own meaningful artworks. To date, the program has delivered two public exhibitions in 2018 and 2020, and contributed to projects inside and outside the prison. The research team was actively engaged with *Soft Touch Arts* and routinely invited to team meetings and consulted in decision making, which enabled them to respond to emerging issues. The participants were known as 'artists' from the onset, an ethos which directly challenged the lived experience of those in custody and those returning to the community, in that they were not solely labeled inmates and/or ex-inmates.

The program followed the principles of Leamy et al.'s (2011) CHIME framework, which advocates an approach based on health and recovery models. The elements of this model are connectedness, hope (and optimism), identity, meaning in life, and empowerment. This aligns with the aims of Unlocked's activities to shift rehabilitation strategies from a sole focus on risk towards practices in which incarcerated persons can engage with a different identity and more purposeful activities. The juxtaposition between techniques of control, risk management, surveillance, and empowerment through creative outlets is vivid in the research data (Anderson, 2018; Herrity et al., 2018; Wilson et

al., 2009). In the context of penal studies, this distinctive project illustrates how innovations in the criminal justice system can not only soften the harms of incarceration but trigger feelings of hope and resilience that are crucial for meaningful re-entry into the community (Anderson, 2018; Stephenson & Watson, 2018). The purpose of this article is to explore how innovative arts interventions can be deployed with enhanced wellbeing benefits and can, therefore, be adopted and recognized as meaningful rehabilitation initiatives. This is examined in the context of social prescribing as a framework to understand how innovative working practices benefit those within the criminal justice system. It also identifies the direct impact of this innovative arts' intervention, demonstrating the importance of hope, creativity, and building trust and social skills to prepare for re-entry and recovery.

Hope as a Social Contagion

Norman et al. (2010) examined the importance of hope and resilience in leadership to create a positive working environment, building on the empirical evidence of the 'social contagion effect' as identified by Blumer (1939, cited in McPhail, 1989) and others (e.g., Pastor & Mayo, 1994; Williamson & Cable, 2003). This study highlighted how interpersonal communication and interaction create unity by spreading hope and resilience among workplace groups. While its focus was on commercial organizations and the role of leadership, the research shows the impact of sustained positive reinforcements on groups of people. In carceral settings, overcoming deprivations felt by the incarcerated and instilling hope and resilience is something which those engaged in arts-based projects have achieved (Anderson, 2018; Herrity et al., 2018; Wilson et al., 2009).

This could be attributed to the behavior of practitioners who do not judge inmates but motivate them to be creative and empower them to feel valued and heard in this endeavor. This process temporarily changes the prison setting from a place of oppression and deprivations to one of enjoyment and positive social interaction, consequently offering participants a different vision of their future. Empirical research has linked this 'contagion' effect of hope with self-efficacy and optimism in healthcare settings (Luthans & Jensen, 2005). While *Unlocked* practitioners do not wish to be seen as leaders and authority figures, they do begin the program in the role of leaders, guiding the volunteers through workshops and encouraging and reassuring them as they engage in creative activity.

Innovation in the Penal Landscape

The underlying principles of *Soft Touch Arts* deliver arts interventions that challenge the harms from both the prison environment and sentence and 'soften' the punitive landscape with its mechanisms of control. In this vein, Soft Touch offers an initiative that values rehabilitative principles; such aspirations are discussed by Graham and White (2016) who highlight the tensions of working in this sector, drawing attention to '*issues of power and politics in considering which 'innovative' justice initiatives are genuinely predicated on a logic of reform*,' as opposed to reaffirming the 'status quo' and masking the '*effects of the carceral problems they are supposed to resolve*.' (Graham & White, 2016, p. 267).

In essence, any intervention should actively seek to disrupt punitive consequences that cause harm in order to improve outcomes for those in prison and to support rehabilitation. They propose four types of disruptive innovation: *amelioration*, *transformation*, *disruption*, and *accommodation* (Graham & White, 2016, p. 274).They explain that ameliorative strategies attempt to deal with immediate problems, but, for example, they will not bring about a radical transformation of the penal system. Instead, the provision of education, creative activity, and in-cell television (Herrity et

al., 2018; Knight, 2014; Wilson et al., 2009) may help counter the effects of long periods of time spent in cells. In contrast, *transformative* and *disruptive* strategies challenge the status quo by rejecting current penal policies, to offer solutions which advocate radical change and strategies that could be considered as revolutionary (Graham & White, 2016). This kind of innovation accepts the prison and its people as part of the wider community. Accommodation strategies are subtle because they accept the status quo but gently seek to adapt existing structures of penal power, bringing about incremental change rather than radical shifts (Graham & White, 2016). Therefore, it is of value to consider how interventions are 'prescribed' and what effects they have on individuals within the punitive context. It is also important to understand to what extent the *Unlocked* program challenges the punitive effects of the penal experience.

Social Prescribing in the Penal Landscape

With this model of disruptive innovation in mind, the role of *social prescribing* is a helpful concept to understand the intention and motivations of arts provision while exploring the impact on its beneficiaries. Borrowed from medical practice, social prescribing is appearing within the penal context and so it is important to ask if consolidated efforts to disrupt punitive harm can be effective when adopting social prescribing approaches. An accepted definition of social prescribing is 'a mechanism for linking patients with nonmedical sources of support within the community' (Centre Forum Mental Health Commission, 2014, p. 6). A central premise of social prescribing is that *prevention is better than cure*, and that a decentralized approach to healthcare is required to enable innovation and the development of more holistic approaches. Referring patients to creative activities was established in the mid-1990s, to support those with mental health issues, such as anxiety. These activities encompass dance, drama, film, music, and painting among others, to increase opportunities for social contact and participation and increase self-esteem (Huxley, 1997; Thomson et al., 2015). Purpose and meaning were also cited as important components, to reduce the negative emotional impact of social exclusion and isolation (Hacking et al., 2008).

In the context of the prison setting, voluntary participation is an important aspect of the project delivery and creation of a more effective learning space. Therefore, Behan (2014) argues, a compulsory attendance strategy would be counterproductive. This aligns with interventions which are described as 'social prescribing light', a process of referral and signposting to include personal development through education and arts. A 'medium' level of social prescribing is more proactive, involving developing roles within primary care to facilitate access to interventions. A more holistic approach requires a combination of all these social prescribing forms to signpost to local and easily accessible services, working in partnership with a dedicated contact, and ensuring interventions address social, practical and emotional needs.

Thompson et al.'s (2015) evaluation of social prescribing schemes has identified several beneficial outcomes, including increased self-esteem and confidence, a sense of control, overall improvement in wellbeing, and a reduction of anxiety and depressive symptoms. However, the setting for prescribing arts is as important as the activities themselves, because in order for creative thought and engagement to occur, a place of safety and inclusion is required to enhance the 'social psychological and occupational benefits that are enjoyed' (Stickley & Hui, 2012, p. 578). This 'social bonding' (ibid) occurs more readily among smaller groups, where there is a participatory approach and a focus on maintaining well-being.

Johnson (2008) examined the place of arts in prison in the USA, as a counter-argument to the notion than 'nothing works' in correctional policy, aligning with a similar pessimism found in the UK during the 1990s. He concluded that there is a wealth of evidence showing the benefits of artistic activity in prisons, but that implementation requires a strong theoretical foundation, co-operation from all

involved, and proper support and training for arts professionals. He emphasizes that the prison setting subculture among staff and inmates can act as a barrier to successful implementation if staff do not demonstrate trust and respect to arts workers. Also, inmates do not engage if they perceive such activities as a threat to their sense of self as tough and stoic. In addition, the prison environment's punitive ideology may lead to censorship of creative activities, which are inherently rewarding and empowering (Gussak, 2007).

However, it is clear that inmates' desire for self-expression and engagement in rewarding activities may drive the need for arts in prison projects, as long as this is recognized by senior staff as a viable and effective mechanism for reforming offenders. In the UK, an evaluation of a music-based education program at HMP Dovegate and HMP Grendon assessed the *Good Vibrations* project. This project uses gamelan percussion music from Indonesia to empower people through creative involvement. The workshops were made available to inmates who did not need any prior musical experience and who would work towards a concert attended by staff, other inmates, and family members (Wilson et al., 2009). The outcomes included increased engagement with other forms of education, improvements in communication and social skills, better relationships with staff, and decreased levels of self-reported anger. Crucially, the evaluation also found that the benefits of the program were specific to participating in creative activity and the overall approach of Good Vibrations staff as facilitators who included inmates in the process, as well as the end goal of a performance of the music and the production of a CD to send to friends and family (ibid). This study illustrates the importance of delivering prison arts-based programs in a manner that advocates inclusion, empowerment, and enables positive outcomes beyond the boundaries of risk assessment tools, particularly in relation to the role of education in rehabilitation (Clements, 2004).

Furthermore, research into theatre-based projects demonstrated positive outcomes on participants' wellbeing, hope, self-esteem, and decreases in depression and anger (Stephenson & Watson, 2018). In addition, according to Walsh (2018), '*participation in arts activities enables individuals to begin to redefine themselves, an important factor in desistance from crime*' (page 24.) The role of arts-based projects on desistance needs to be acknowledged. but is perhaps limited to addressing desistance as a process of individual identity change within carceral settings. However, arts projects in the community can continue to enable participants to engage in meaningful activity and find support in their community, emphasizing the need to recognize desistance as an interaction between individual change and social support (King, 2012).

Hope in the Penal Landscape

'…hope is fueled by the perception of successful agency related goals.' (Snyder et al., 1991)

It is well established that individuals in the criminal justice system experience a lack of autonomy, control, and choice due to the penal mechanisms placed on them (Styles, 2019). It is, therefore, no surprise that they can feel hopeless and disorientated about their present and future. Imprisonment and community sanctions create 'goal interference' (Snyder et al., 1991, p. 571) by disrupting life course trajectories. In essence, pathways become compromised, and opportunities become closed down, with resulting hopelessness, diminished self-efficacy and optimism the result. Snyder et al. (1991, p. 571) recommend that 'building a client's sense of agency and pathways' is necessary for people to achieve their goals. Associated with this is the salience of certitude, which derives from Warr's (2016) work on the complexity of deprivation for those in immigration detention centers. Whilst there are some stark differences, Warr addresses aspects of deprivation whereby confined people become, 'frustrated at their lack of progress and feel despair towards an unknown and unknowable self.' (2016:, p. 13). It is this 'deprivation of certitude' that brings about losses of 'surety' and an inability to find a route or pathway out of their immediate and future circumstances. Or, as

Warr suggests, 'navigatability' (p. 6) is of value, and it becomes increasingly difficult for inmates '…to 'imagine' themselves beyond their current situation and thus results in a deprivation of hope. (2016:, p. 14).

Commentators on hope acknowledge that it is crucial for human drive, striving, and, importantly, coping with present circumstances (e.g. Smith, 1983). Adaptation to life in prison and on probation manifests in strategies to cope with deprivation. Liebling's (1999) work situates coping in prison with indigenous features of imprisonment, namely being 'banged up' leading to higher levels of hopelessness (1999:, p. 315). Furthermore, Martin and Stermac (2010) investigated the role of hope on recidivism, and found it to be a protective factor in that lack of hope creates a higher risk for recidivism, as incarcerees struggle to believe that they can achieve different goals. Therefore, the impact of prison can interfere with a personal ability to realize feelings of hope, meaning it is important to understand how to mitigate this and to also examine the role of the arts and creativity in this process.

Method

The overall approach to the study took inspiration from a social action methodology in which the researchers would routinely provide feedback to the project. This was in to allow the project to develop and evolve to meet the needs of participants, as well as to establish a rapport with the researchers. The sites of access included two adult male closed prisons in the UK and a community setting based at the arts project headquarters. Permissions were granted through principal governors and chief probation officers and/or community rehabilitation managers to engage with participants either in prison or under supervision as directed by the courts. In addition, this access extended to staff both in the prison and the community, and written consent was obtained. Distinctive semi-structured interview schedules were designed to explore arts practice and wellbeing. Sampling was therefore purposeful and opportunistic for all participants.

A total of 16 arts students (10 men in the prison and 6 men and women in the community) were interviewed. These were supplemented by five key staff and other project-related stakeholder interviews; the researchers also attended meetings and two exhibitions. All interviews were digitally recorded (with consent); they were then stored safely, transcribed, and analyzed thematically, deploying the CHIME model (Leamy et al., 2011). The model was developed from an empirically-based conceptual framework applied in recovery-orientated research and practice. In line with Cheliotis and Jordanoska (2016), we were very clear not to measure 'hard' outcomes, rather, focusing on 'soft' outcomes stipulated alongside the *Unlocked* program. Leamy et al.'s (2011) framework provides five recovery themes: (C) Connectedness, (H) Hope and optimism about the future, (I) Identity, (M) Meaning in life, and (E) Empowerment.

In utilizing this framework, we were able to design artists' interview schedules that sought to document different phases of their journeys during their time with the Unlocked project. Moreover, our knowledge of prisons and probation was woven into the interviews to explore everyday life in prison and probation by acknowledging the impact of punishment on their lives. This article focuses particularly on one of the themes – hope – that was found in all participant and staff interviews and observations, routinely and with depth. Hope is thus a key element in the data analysis, as it is a primary resource for change among the participants, along with the social contagion effect that can occur in educational projects, specifically relating to arts-based practices (Blumer, 1939; cited in McPhail, 1989). These foundations trigger further developments towards self-efficacy and optimism, as well as social skills which provide realistic conditions for reintegration after prison (Snyder, 2009).

Instilling Hope

It is important to distinguish how the artists valued the ways in which the arts intervention was delivered, as the project did not seek to teach or instruct, but instead facilitated creative work and participation, with sign posting and encouragement, as opposed to control and demands for engagement (Behan, 2014). Furthermore, the conditions of delivery, especially within the prison, meant that a strict curriculum would neither suit the environment or the participants. This aligned with two of Graham and White's (2016) forms of innovation, amelioration and accommodation – to engage inmates in activities which took them away from harmful prison life experiences, and to advocate for incremental changes to the regime. For example, within the prison, weekly sessions dovetailed with another project led by Soft Touch Arts, which largely focuses on music production. As a result, performance and visual arts were delivered together and led by two practitioners. The benefits of this mixed delivery meant that participants were brought together and could benefit from learning about different styles of art, including digital. Unlike traditional arts education, the artists were appreciative of the choices of arts practice that they could undertake:

> I've never been in a prison where this has been on offer. Drawing but digital is something else to the table…I've never been to a jail that has had this…

The importance of choice and options for inmates to engage with was clear, as the project would allow individuals to develop an approach based on their own preferences and abilities. Crucially, the reference to inmates as artists was the start of changing their identity in addition to learning new skills. As a critical stage in the desistance journey, this shift was important in encouraging participation and moving away from the more oppressive controls experienced day-to-day (Cheliotis & Jordanoska, 2016; Walsh, 2018). In addition, the social contact with others in a setting geared towards learning, interaction, and generating hope was also important (Huxley, 1997) in encourage innovation:

> Anyone that is trying to come out and do something of an artistic nature…it gives you an opportunity for a head start. Made CDs cover of their music. It gives you that bit of confidence…I am already part way there.

Being suited to the project was also important, with one participant describing as '*bang on…I wanted to have a look and to be fair this suited me*.' In essence, the manner in which this project was run provides a distinctive vehicle for artists to explore their own creative skills. In the context of the prison setting, the engagement offered a safe space for novel activities. As one artist explained, they felt that the project was '*bringing the artistic side out of me*.' The creativity was cited as important, as was the sense of purpose and meaning these activities had to them (Hacking et al., 2008).

Hope As Self-Care

All respondents in both prison and community settings noted the value of arts practice as a mechanism for self-care. References to hope were attributed to their relationship with arts practice as a mechanism for taking care of themselves or coping with their penal experience. Hope is therapeutic in nature, and is often cosseted because of its nourishing qualities (Begley & Blackwood, 2000). Artists frequently attributed this in their arts practice as being '*a confidence boost*'. This was particularly vivid for those in prison settings:

> When you are in your cell banged up - without creativity you can feel quite depressed and even suicidal, and you just want to get out so the creative side helps you to feel relaxed for a few hours a week. Then you tend to handle bang up and it centres you and balances you. We all need to exercise

our creative side and if one good thing from the prison experience and I wasn't doing this outside I was just going to the pub. I was getting drunk and watching TV.

The creative outlets initiated by the project lingered past the time spent with the lead art tutors during the scheduled sessions. The need to overcome prison life deprivations, such as lack of hope, social contact, and mental stimulation (Liebling, 1999; Warr, 2016) is enhanced by their developing personal artistic practices. Not only did the project fill time, it created positive social interactions and therapeutic relief to the monotonous and empty prison regime:

> When I am banged up I spend time playing and learning songs. I sing as well. I have lost my inhibitions. I'd make sure no one heard me before….for the hour or two with the art class it is relaxing and we are encouraged to be creative. It's the best way to kill time. Anything to make time go by and when you are in the moment you are not in prison- in yourself spiritually. You are in the moment and time has flown by. I'd like to do prison like this. It's a relief to come here. Sometimes TV does your head in- the negativity of it all. Sometimes you have to switch it off.

The process of self-care is associated with hope as a protective feature within the criminal justice landscape, defined by deprivation (Warr, 2016). In order to be able to take responsibility for their own wellbeing, the artists were reflective on their emotional state and behavior. By accessing the arts projects, this artist recognized that this experience was significant in triggering positive emotional and behavioral changes:

> I would say everything I am doing here with the art has a whole it has put me in a more positive mind frame. Before I came to this prison I was quite anti-social I didn't like socializing with people especially staff- I am not rude but we don't need to have a conversation. Coming here I got an extra sentence I could have gone on self-destruct mode. Being here has helped to stay positive…. Helped my well-being…The staff on the wing- I now have a good rapport. I was angry at the system for this extra sentence. But now I have mellowed.

This demonstrates the value of the project in helping artists navigate prison life and manage their emotions, having the space to reflect on their own attitudes, how they have shifted from their 'criminal past,' and see their worth (King, 2012; Walsh, 2019). In addition, another artist recognized the social benefits of engagement that was helping them to plan ahead:

> It helps me get on with people. I am polite with everyone. But I am easily distracted. My well-being is alright. But I am a person of extremes. I have to form daily goals. I am going to have a diary…

Given the importance of goal setting in sentencing planning, this ability to plan ahead becomes an important outcome and evidence of inmates' working towards sustainable change and desistance (Cheliotis & Jordanoska, 2016; Walsh, 2019; Wilson et al., 2009). Furthermore, this individual illuminates the significance of goal setting in signalling their hope. Another artist reported on changes in their confidence, which is supported by the ethos of the project:

> Had a lot of low times and times reflected. I was single cell for a long time. I have ideas in my head and you are unsure…it's different when you work with people. Makes you feel a lot more confident and somebody to go to. It's that confidence. The support you get here is more personalized and makes you feel like a person. Different to the wing-person to person rather than person to inmate.

The space created by the nature of the project is also extended to community settings:

> This is a creative place and creative people will come. When I leave here I realize how and I go back into society I realize how slave dead the mentality is- people get up and go to work- that is not living that's existing. When I leave here I look at people and think what are you doing man? Is that it? We

are all creative and we could all be doing something. I have loads of positive feedback. My confidence and self-esteem has improved. Soft Touch is so valuable.

Again, this demonstrates the need for a change to self-identity and sense of worth, prior to release in order for ex-offenders to have purpose and motivation to continue this change. However, this does not diminish the challenges that can lie ahead, including barriers to meaningful employment, secure housing, and income security, all of which factor into desistance (King, 2012).

The value of self-care is well documented in prison studies; adaptations to prison life are necessary for people to get through their sentence (Liebling, 1999). In many senses, these outcomes hold and ameliorate the existing prison structure, so that incarcerees get through their time in more comfortable ways (Graham & White, 2016) However, the distinctiveness of the Soft Touch project outcomes is the recognition of hope and the valuing of social interaction in a creative space. This triggers a process of transformation that includes aspiration and goal setting, along with learning social skills and valuing teamwork.

Hope As Aspiration

Snyder et al. (1991) state that 'hope is fueled by the perception of successful *agency* related goals…the perceived availability of successful *pathways* related to goals' (p. 570). In this sense, the presence of hope means that individuals are able to see themselves (their agency) being able to do something, and that the environment (pathways) allows them to imagine and ultimately realize this. Awakenings to new opportunities (pathways) or skills were directly related to the project. As this artist explained:

> I never knew anything about drawing on t-shirts, using carbon paper and finish it off by hand. I have never done anything like this. It's opened my mind up to new possibilities. Music has been my hobby exclusively to my bedroom and not really shared it with anyone and since coming to prison I perform to small audiences. It has made me a bit more assertive and fearful of people's judgment. I'd probably play in bars and clubs you know.

For this individual, the development of a pro-social identity was aligned to his engagement with the project; he was able to see the pathway and acknowledge his agency. In reflecting on his interests, he found an illuminating opportunity, despite the depriving regime of the prison. The project helped him to target his skills:

> It's all daunting (prison) and I don't know how it has happened. I walked by his cell and I got a guitar from the library. Playing guitar in my bedroom all my life. It makes a change and I have never shared before. The lessons have been very helpful. I didn't expect anything because it is prison. I found the classes and I hadn't seen anything on the outside either. It's helped with creativity and with the sentence.

All of the respondents made a connection to their own wellbeing, particularly experiencing an increase in confidence and an ability to focus on the future -- a significant indicator of 'goal-setting behaviour' (Snyder et al., 1991). One individual explained, '*with any goal in life I break it down to miniature goals. And this helps*.' This goal setting is crucial to transformation. Moreover, the appraising of their goals in light of the constraining context of the prison became possible. Hope emerges from the ability to create destinations, both personal and practical. As this artist describes the relationship between his aspirations and their own wellbeing is emancipating:

> I have calmed down since being here. My family thinks it is great. They encourage me. I could be semi-professional. I could get a job. I wouldn't have done. And now I think it could be a possibility. My

inhibitions have gone…I was good at art as a kid and now doing this the art and the music has calmed the beast in me…This frees you like a child. It gives you hopes and dreams and frees you from fears.

A distinguishing feature of the project is helping artists to realize their own potential. Critically, it is the presence of hope that helps them overcome their fears of not being able to aspire. Without this creative outlet, the prison would remain a place of oppression, fear, and hopelessness (Liebling, 1999; Warr, 2016). The amelioration of these deprivations (Graham & White, 2016) is clear and extends beyond simply providing a change of setting, as this artist explains:

I am coming not to get out of my cell it's more than that. There's enough talent in here.

For him, the distinctiveness of the engagement can also be understood in the manner in which the project is conducted and delivered away from the usual prison regime experiences into a space of learning, interacting with others in a positive way, and then reflecting on making changes for a different life (Hacking et al., 2008; Huxley, 1997).This reflection was not necessarily located within the arts per se, as this artist had ambitions to go into construction and property development:

To come out of prison and start my own business…property development which is more down the line. I want a smaller business. Gaining more knowledge about construction.

Others expressed how the venture was assisting them in their plans for resettlement, 'making inroads'; and others could see the potential for a career in the arts, specifically in tattooing after speaking with the tutors. This rapport was vital to helping them make plans and consider a different future.

One artist was impressed by the project's novelty and distinctiveness as a mechanism to plan and forge new identities:

Never been into a workshop like this before, its just being here and its amazing. Being kind, being friendly, give them your help. I am good at making. I am really creative. Making stuff that I have never made before. I am more calmer, not getting any more trouble. Being safe. Hopefully I am growing and growing. Getting me ready for the real world. This place has helped me a lot, make friends and working up something I want to do and have an impact in the world. I want to get probation behind me.

There is clear reference to valuing safety and security and having a purpose (Hacking et al., 2008). Notably, opportunities to envision growth are catalyzed from experiences with creative art. It is this journeying that disrupts negative patterns of self-identity, and hope serves as a crucial mechanism for transformation.

Hope as a Mechanism for Change

Accessing the project after release was something they valued:

Yeah I feel positive about my release but apprehensive at the same time. When I leave I want to be able to use art in my free time and meet positive people in the area. Then I am not forced into old social circles until I am strong enough. They are not a negative influence but seeing those options is a big red flag to me. If I am around different people I will have their support.

This recognition of the need to be reintegrated into a community that supports the change of self-identity is important for the inmates to show the self-awareness of the risks of returning to their life before prison. This also emphasizes the contribution of social prescribing in signposting more innovative options for them at community re-entry, where practitioners can build on the work done

in prisons and refer those on community sentences for supportive services (Huxley, 1997; Stickley & Hui, 2012; Thomson et al., 2015). Again, in relation to desistance, there is also a clear value placed here on having opportunities, in a place where they can feel safe and can avoid associating with contacts from their past (King, 2012).The recognized worth of involvement in the arts projects is propelled through hope instilled through engagement and interaction, with many participants, particularly those on probation, being able to utilize the experience as a mechanism for change in social interactions and behaviors:

It's keeping me out of trouble and focusing on my skills. Doing a lot more spraying and not illegally. I'd rather learn a skill now. I think of ideas for artwork. Family members notice I am doing better at your templates… I could make a career of it easily. I'd still come to this if I wasn't on probation. Giving decency back and in a wicked idea. Given me a good idea about business. Making creations out of rubbish and a lot more worthwhile. It's not probation that keeps me here.

This reference to *staying out of trouble* also reflects a clear process of change linked to desistance - becoming a person who contributes to society and is open to new opportunities. Cheliotis and Jordanoska (2016) refer to this course as beginning with change in the perception of self, to then advancing to the development of social skills and the capacity to learn, and contributing to desistance.

Extending Hope– Transference

Much like the prison experience of the arts programing, the experience in the community was deemed extremely valuable:

> Probation put me in touch with this place. Without that I wouldn't have a life changing opportunity. That has now opened doors to go into schools to promote the knife crime project. Creativity – my hunger to progress. An opportunity to express my skills. Gave me confidence. An opportunity to create something that lasts a long time after I have gone. To work with genuine people.

The presence of the project in the community allowed those on probation to *socially prescribe* a creative outlet, which as in prison, mitigated against the challenges clients faced in reintegrating into the community, sustaining their changing self-identity and their sense of hope and belonging (Stickley & Hui, 2012). In fact, in terms of the arts delivery within the prison, participants wanted more sessions and more time spent on these valuable activities:

> Work in the prison shouldn't stop them going to the art work. T**his is rehabilitation**- it's weird. An agreement should be set up to make sure people get here. They can't hold people back. You should let people come.

> I get depressed when I leave here as it is only once a week. I have to wait. I have created something that will stop kids killing each other. This is my life and my business now. I have been invited by DMU (De Montfort University) to perform at schools.

An important aspect for some of the participants was that they were invited to take part in the project's public exhibition. This represented an important goal and experience of affirmation, as also found in Wilson et al.'s (2009) work on the 'Good Vibration's' music-based project. One participant reported:

> Got a few pieces in the exhibition- there's one she is an Indian- hipache girl. Basically based on that style and she has tattoos. She is sitting down with a paintbrush and covered in tattoos. She is wearing shorts and basketball jersey and I personalized the shorts.

The public display of their work and opportunity to get feedback demonstrates the emotional resilience of all the artists who were able to show their creative skills and value others' opinions (Wilson et al., 2009).

Conclusion

The penal landscape benefits from the social prescription of creative arts, in both ameliorating the harsh conditions of social isolation and deprivation, and contributing to purposeful use of prison and probation time. Less obviously, these types of interventions enable personal transformations, disrupting the harsh penal stigma visited on those who enter the system. The binding features are variants of hope inspired by creative interactions, conversations, and opportunities. The co-production of artistic materials between the artists and Soft Touch disrupts the penal structures that limit and sedate those within the system. It is clear from these data that the Soft Touch arts project is having a positive influence, and one that is located beyond developing artistic skills. The evidence supports the project's positive contribution to changes in the artists' levels of confidence, social skills, aspirational goals, and more sustainable rehabilitative plans. In providing an environment of social interaction and teamwork, a mechanism is created and sustained in which participants support and learn from others, and cope with the regime of prison or the demands of probation.

In addition, the findings demonstrate that the ethos, delivery, and focus on creativity are key components in achieving the aims of *Unlocked*, alongside the creation of a relationship of trust and reciprocity. It was less a process of teaching and more about developing skills in inmates beyond learning how to produce music, to work with others, to learn to trust, and to learn the value of this. Importantly, the element of choice in the various forms of available arts practice created a novel situation for engagement - for those who could make choices based on their own strengths and desires, far from the controlling and surveilling atmosphere of the prison. That said, individuals were encouraged to try new things, enabled by the Unlocked practitioners and their ethos of creating trust and an inclusive approach, in a space different from the carceral setting, around activities that encouraged decision making and a sense of empowerment and hope created during and after the sessions.

Hope and self-worth were the key emotions and responses drawn from those engaged in activities in which the focus was on themselves, their skills, and the use of time as a means of coping with time outside the arts workshops. The therapeutic element of hope was clearly important (Begley & Blackwood, 2000) in counteracting overwhelming emotions and feelings of depression, anxiety, and hopelessness about the future. This focus on thinking ahead and creating space in which hope could thrive had a marked effect on the artists, who came to understand that they could create, be of value to others. and contribute something to society. This confidence led them to overcome the pains and deprivations of prison life, compensated for the loss of social contact and mental stimulation, not just to be passing time with the monotony of the regime.

The focus on the future and value of planning ahead became something which began to be valued and understood as important to one's rehabilitation and resettlement. In particular, the social interaction leading to positive outcomes helped those who had felt overwhelmingly that most of their social interaction was negative, stressful, and left them feeling judged. In addition, the element of creativity was important in developing the understanding that the world outside was a place in which they could continue this work, again placing a clear value on looking ahead and thinking positively about release. Besides hope being an essential part of the pathway to resettlement, the impact on an ex-offender's identity was observed - by offering them a way to imagine themselves as someone else, as an artist, as someone with something important to convey. This focus on agency interacts with the environment to create an imagined different future for oneself (Snyder et al.,

1991). Specifically, a pro-social identity was created for participants to understand their sense of agency as important to their rehabilitation, an insight which establishes a basis for a conducive and effective relationship with their probation officer. Goal setting behavior (ibid) and techniques to recognize how to achieve seemingly daunting goals associated with resettlement and rehabilitation were other positive outcomes from the project. Within the prison, these artists experienced a form of emancipation in which they could envision achieving goals, whether in their newly discovered creative skills, or in the exploratory process of finding ways to manage their emotions and attain a sense of calm. In sum, emancipation occurs as a release from anxieties and fears associated with prison life, replacing them with 'hopes and dreams'.

Hope was also an important mechanism for change in that the artists came to understand this was needed for rehabilitation, taking agency over this process, as opposed to giving this to the state to make happen. There was a clear recognition of what they could do, how they could change with whom they associate, how to react to situations, and when to appreciate and accept an offer of support. For those on probations, the change affected their interactions with others, of importance in appreciating the power they had to turn their lives around, and to create a different future that extricated them from their criminal past.

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