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Restorative Practices with prisoners on indeterminate sentences

Dr Jon Hobson (jhobson@glos.ac.uk), Dr Sara Correia-Hopkins (S.Correia@Swansea.ac.uk), Kate Smyth, Dr Rebecca Banwell-Moore, Dr Zoe Cross



25th Annual Conference of the
European Society of Criminology
September 3-6, 2025 Athens / Greece

Context

- Indeterminate Public Protection (IPP) orders = no parole date
- introduced in 2005 > Abolished in 2012
- As of 31/03/2025 there are still 2,544 people in prison on an IPP sentence
- Labelled as a **'violation of human rights'** by the United Nations.

PRESS RELEASES | SPECIAL PROCEDURES

UN expert urges UK Government to prioritise the review of indefinite prison sentences

19 August 2024

Share   

GENEVA – An independent human rights expert today called on the recently elected UK Government to review the sentences of Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) prisoners, stressing the need for the remaining IPP prisoners to be resentenced without delay, and for the indeterminate sentence system to be brought to a definitive close.

"IPP sentences are inhuman treatment and, in many cases, amount to psychological torture," said Alice Jill Edwards, the UN Special Rapporteur on torture.

Context

Restorative Practice/Approaches

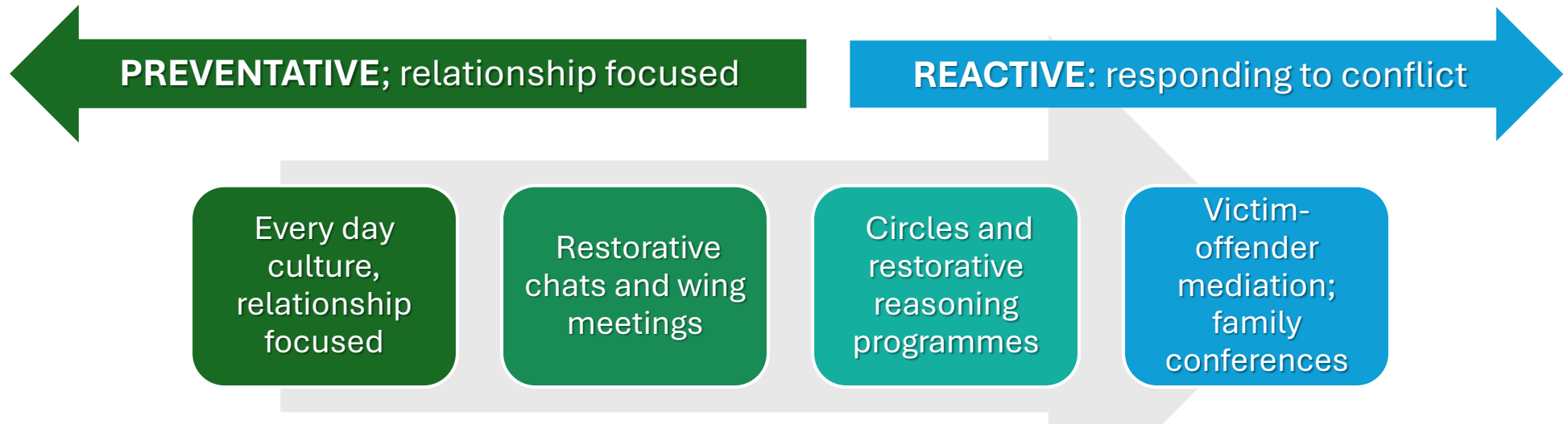
Broad, informal, every day practices used to build relationships, foster empathy and prevent harm.

HMP Buckley Hall - whole prison restorative approach (Fair and Jackson 2018).

Restorative Justice

Formal, structured, reactive tools used following a harm, often involving the harmed and the harmer.

Corrective Services NSW Restorative Justice Programme: emotional healing and deeper accountability. (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2020).



The intervention

Project Aims

- Improve wellbeing and safety for POIPP community and families, particularly those affected by trauma.
- Work with secondary and vicarious trauma affecting staff and others in the POIPP support network.

Funding & Timeline

- UK Ministry of Justice, HMPPS Innovation Grant 2023-25
 - Grant Programme: Enabling the voluntary sector to contribute to better outcomes for offenders in Prisons, under Probation Service supervision, and in Youth Custody. Theme 3: Improving Safety.
- 2-year project, Nov 2023-2025, but due to initial delays, it has recently been extended to end of March 2026.

The intervention

Culture Change

Restorative
Adjudications

Recognition of
POIPP needs

Restore 'My Community'

121 coaching and
peer mentoring
training (POIPP)

RA Training (staff)

Family Work

Restore 'Me'

121 Coaching and Wellbeing
Circles (POIPP)

Therapeutic Reflexive Practice
and Clinical Supervision (staff)



The evaluation

Adapted 'QUALIPREV' mixed methods Process and outcome evaluation (Rummens et al, 2026; Hobson et al, 2018; Rees and Hobson, 2021)

Phase 1 (Collected)	Phase 2 (Dec 2025)
Interviews and focus groups (n=14) • Intervention delivery team (n=6) • Intervention Org CEO • Prison staff (n=6) programme manager, head of offender management, head of rehabilitation, delivery staff, lead psychologist IPP Circle • 1x circle with n=6 men Secondary data • Delivery feedback and reflection forms • Participation data	Interviews and focus groups (n=16 est) • Interviews with original cohort • Clinical supervision lead for delivery team • Family member interviews (or survey) IPP Circle • Second circle with participants Secondary data • prison data (incidents etc) • programme feedback

Initial findings

What's working

- I. Well received with high participation from the men (including some first-time intervention engagement)
- II. Men report impacts on 'self' and behaviour
- III. Some move towards prison 'culture change' for IPP and prison more broadly

What's challenging

- I. Initial deployment, access to keys, systems and space.
- II. Complex, dynamic, high-risk prison environment
- III. Multi-part intervention covering multiple groups (inc. IPP, their families, prison staff, delivery staff)

Initial findings

Trusted relationships aren't common in [the prison]. And the fact that we have them and have maintained them, I think is very powerful... quite a few men whose POMs said that they've never worked with anyone, they wouldn't engage with anything...and now we've got those same people who are at the doorway to sell the course every week...They're coming back week after week.”

Delivery Focus Group

“You give us a voice because you really listen. Other staff are either too clinical or don't give a shit. You are the only ones who lay in the middle and actually seem to care”.

“You cheer me up and give me hope”.



Initial findings

“the interventions team have all of the rooms blocked out all morning every morning. So from the very beginning 50% of the availability was gone. So that has been a struggle because if we had more opportunity to use rooms, we could have done more circles and more courses.”

“It took six weeks to even get like an interview [for security clearance] (...) We still don't have a laptop. We technically don't have a room... We now have an office, but we've been told many times that it's not ours and we're about to be kicked out and we have to leave. So at the moment we are just in it until someone physically removes us.”

Delivery Focus Group

“They say that they can't cope, we double check on the system, you know, because we want to encourage group work because the additional benefits or they getting bullied or they're learning needs, their cognitive delays are extreme. They just couldn't [and] we couldn't accommodate that. So we're doing more one to ones than we thought we would.”

Charity CEO Interview



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