

The Voluntary Sector in Criminal Justice: Setting the Research Agenda

Conference Report



SHEFFIELD UNIVERSITY
CENTRE FOR
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RESEARCH



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Introduction

In early June 2017, the University of Sheffield Centre for Criminological Research hosted a two-day international, multidisciplinary, cross-sectoral conference entitled ***The Voluntary Sector in Criminal Justice: Setting the Research Agenda***. The conference, organised by Dr. Philippa Tomczak (author of [The Penal Voluntary Sector](#)), brought together academics, practitioners, and policymakers to launch a new research network, CRIMVOL: The International Criminal Justice Voluntary Sector Research Network. This network aims to shed much-needed light on the role of the voluntary sector within the criminal justice system and to foster ongoing partnerships between academics and practitioners in this area.

Delegates from England & Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Europe, New Zealand, and North America came together in Sheffield to share best practices, research findings, theoretical reflections, innovations, and frustrations related to their own work with the criminal justice voluntary sector – this report summarises and reflects on these discussions and hopes to stimulate further research and collaboration.

The first section of the report is an [overview of the conference](#) and provides a brief description of all sessions, roundtables, and discussions that took place over the course of the two-day gathering. The second section draws out the [key themes](#) of the conference, highlighting the common threads that weaved their way through the conference. The third section of the report considers [next steps](#) in setting the research agenda for the penal voluntary sector and emphasises the importance of ongoing communication and collaboration between academics and practitioners.

During her welcome remarks at the conference, Dr. Tomczak requested that everyone be kind to each other. This was an important request, and one that was respected throughout each of the sessions as well as during the social events. While little is known about the criminal justice voluntary sector in the academic sense, we know anecdotally that working within this sector – whether as a researcher or as a practitioner – can, at times, be isolating and frustrating. What became clear throughout the conference is that we cannot overcome this exhaustion alone, but must instead engage with each other and collaborate on meaningful projects that will truly speak to the role of the voluntary sector in the criminal justice system.

1. Overview of the Conference

This section provides a brief overview of the two-day [Voluntary Sector in Criminal Justice](#) (VSCJ) conference.

The full conference programme can be found in [Appendix A](#) of this report.

Day One

Day one of the VSCJ conference started with a meeting of early career researchers (ECRs). This meeting – facilitated by [Dr. Philippa Tomczak](#), [Professor Sir Anthony Bottoms](#), [Professor Joanna Shapland](#), and [Dr. David Thompson](#) – brought together ECRs to discuss their work, research, and interests in the voluntary sector. The purpose of this meeting was to officially launch a new international research network for academics, practitioners, and policymakers and to start discussing the logistics around building and maintaining this much-needed group, along with the particular potential and problems of being an ECR. Conversations that began during this early morning meeting around the opportunities and challenges of conducting research with the voluntary sector carried on through the remainder of the conference.

After lunch, the conference was officially opened by Dr. Tomczak, Professor Sir Bottoms, Professor Shapland, and Dr. Thompson. Professor Sir Bottoms spoke specifically to the ECR scheme, highlighting the importance of future research on the role of the voluntary sector in the criminal justice system. Dr. Tomczak and Dr. Thompson emphasised the importance of collaboration between academics and practitioners in the development of this research network. Everyone was encouraged to participate freely throughout the conference and to offer constructive criticism in a kind and considerate matter.

The first session of the VSCJ conference featured [Dr. Emma Hughes](#) (California State University), [Professor Martine Herzog-Evans](#) (University of Reims), and Sally Taylor from the [Koestler Trust](#). Presenters touched on the benefits and challenges of running volunteer-based programs in the prison environment, the effects of privatization on the probation service, and how to best evaluate the effectiveness/value of prisoner art programmes. Discussion from this session highlighted the importance of breaking down the barriers between prison and community as well as the barriers between practitioners and academics. The call to conduct research *with* the voluntary sector as opposed to *for or on* the voluntary sector started during this first panel.

The second session of the conference was split into two panels. Session Two (A) featured [Dr. Adam White](#) (University of Sheffield), [Dr. Iain Britton](#) (Institute for Public Safety, Crime and Justice), and Isabel McCue MBE from [Theatre Nemo](#). Dr. White spoke of the public ethos in the pluralised criminal justice system – adding nuance to claims that efficiency always overrules empathy in the private sector. Dr. Britton shared research on volunteers in policing from the national ‘Citizens in Policing’ research programme. Finally, Isabel McCue MBE shared the creative and therapeutic work of [Theatre Nemo](#), an arts-based program that serves to promote good mental health and well-being while building community.

Session Two (B) featured [Dr. Mary Corcoran](#) (University of Keele), [Professor Mike Maguire](#) (University of South Wales), and [Professor Kate Williams](#) (Aberystwyth University). This session introduced some of the early findings from a two-year study into the voluntary sector in criminal justice. The study empirically

tracked adaptation and change in the voluntary sector through interviews with managers, leaders, delivery staff, and policy stakeholders from *micro* to *super major* organisations.

Session Three (the final session of the first day of the VSCJ conference) offered all delegates an opportunity to bring together insights and challenges emerging from the day's earlier programme and to channel these into discussion of the research needs of academics and practitioners. Under the guidance of Dr. Tomczak and Dr. Thompson, small groups worked to answer the following questions:

1. What are your current research needs? What gaps in evidence or knowledge do you have? Do you have the capacity to meet your research needs?
2. Do you think there is a gap between academic and practitioner research needs?
3. Thinking about when you have worked with academics/practitioners, what are the benefits of these relationships and why? Have you experienced any barriers to engaging with academics/practitioners?
4. Do you engage with policymakers? If so, to what end? If not, why not?

These questions helped open the dialogue between academics and practitioners and got everyone thinking and speaking in a more practical and collaborative way.

Day Two

Day two of the VSCJ conference began with a panel featuring [Professor Michael Hallett](#) (University of North Florida), [Professor Tobi Jacobi](#) (Colorado State University), and [Grace Wyld](#) (New Philanthropy Capital). Professor Hallett reflected on specific findings from a three-year study on Angola Prison (Louisiana) which explored the rehabilitative power of religious faith in what is known as America's toughest prison. Professor Jacobi spoke about self-care practices amongst volunteers in a prison-based creative writing programme. Grace Wyld talked about the work of [New Philanthropy Capital](#) and their research² on the voluntary sector in criminal justice.

Session Five was a roundtable discussion facilitated by Dr. Tomczak, [Anita Dockley](#) (Research Director at the [Howard League for Penal Reform](#)), and [Nathan Dick](#) (Head of Policy and Communications at [Clinks](#)). The question guiding this discussion was: *What role should the voluntary sector play in criminal justice?* Both Anita and Nathan pointed to the *critical* role played by the voluntary sector, highlighting that this sector has contributed to shaping the criminal justice system by *challenging* it. While Anita expressed concerns that the voluntary sector is often exploited, Nathan reminded us that the sector is not a homogenous group and should not be spoken about, or researched, as such. Discussion during this roundtable highlighted ongoing struggles around funding, research, communication, and advocacy.

² In March 2017, New Philanthropy Capital released a report entitled "Beyond Bars: Maximising the Voluntary Sector's Contribution in Criminal Justice" – the report is available here: <http://www.thinknpc.org/publications/beyond-bars/>.

The final session of the conference featured [Dr. Sarah Armstrong](#) (University of Glasgow), [Dr. Rob MacMillan](#) (University of Birmingham), and Tammy Banks ([Circles](#)). Dr. Armstrong spoke to the relationship between universities and the voluntary sector and indicated that universities are moving into prisons and providing services other than research. Tammy presented information on Circles of Support and Accountability (Circles) – a program that provides support to people with a history of sexual convictions. Dr. MacMillan closed the panel by offering some theoretical reflections on the voluntary sector and suggested that a fields-based approach would provide a different (and perhaps more accurate) story about the relations and struggles for power between different organisations in the criminal justice system.

The conference closed with a practitioner meeting, facilitated by Dr. Tomczak and Dr. Thompson. This meeting reflected on the presentations and discussions from the two-day conference and gathered some final thoughts about setting a new and improved research agenda for the voluntary sector which could influence policy and practice.

2. Key Themes

This section of the report presents the key themes that weaved their way through the VSCJ conference.

Prison Culture and Community Ties

Several presentations focused on the role of voluntary programmes within prison walls that strive to counter many of the difficulties and challenges faced by prisoners, particularly as they attempt to desist from crime. An obvious challenge for many prisoners is low literacy levels and access to quality education programming. Professor Tobi Jacobi and Professor Sarah Armstrong spoke about two programmes run by volunteers, one in Colorado and one in Glasgow. [The Community Literacy Centre](#) is sponsored in part by the English Department of Colorado State University and is staffed by community and student volunteers. The Glasgow University [Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research \(SCCJR\)](#) organises prison reading groups. It too relies on student volunteers from the University to facilitate the reading groups within the local prisons. Both programmes experienced similar difficulties, namely the institutional pressures of delivering a programme inside prison walls and the power structure that exists within the prison. Professor Jacobi gave the example of volunteers being challenged by prison staff about whether paper is lined or blank, or the thickness of the paper as an alleged security risk. While Professor Armstrong spoke of the reality for volunteers who try to create an educational space based on respect and encouragement within a prison environment, but where the prison always manages to find its way back in. Both Professor Jacobi and Professor Armstrong spoke of the pressures on the volunteers who must, in order to provide these programmes, conserve their own resilience and wellbeing while managing vicarious or secondary trauma where it arises. For Professor Armstrong, her commitment is to the students who volunteer and ensuring that they maintain their wellbeing, while Professor Jacobi spoke of the different strategies used by the volunteers in the Colorado jail writing programme to provide support and solidarity to one another. This is an important consideration for anyone working in a prison environment, and particularly for those who do so in a voluntary capacity.

The need for resilience and to take care of oneself was also stressed by the ECRs conducting research within the criminal justice system. It was highlighted that researchers are effectively lone workers and there is a need to take precautions to protect oneself both physically and emotionally. Professor Shapland suggested that all researchers working in this field should look at the work of the [Suzy Lamplugh Trust](#).

Professor Hallett provided a very different example of volunteerism in the American penal system. He spoke of his research into religious volunteerism in America's largest maximum-security prison, Louisiana State Penitentiary (known as [Angola](#) Prison). Inmates who are trained at the Angola Prison Seminary offer service and spiritual nourishment to their peers and others in the prison, acting as skilled helpers offering support and solidarity in difficult conditions of confinement, and from where most will never be released. Religious voluntarism and faith-based programming have, however, become heavily relied upon and, arguably, in a context affected by neoliberal ideology and scant resources, have been co-opted into fulfilling functions which may veil an abdication of the duties of the state. These religious volunteers sometimes find themselves as being the sole resource available where other supports (especially professional supports) can and should be provided by the state. Professor Hallett, thus, describes 'the prison seminary business' as booming in American prisons. He did not refer to the emotional stresses and strains experienced by the religious volunteers in Angola Prison, but like their counterparts in Colorado and

Glasgow this must be a concern, particularly given their dual role as volunteers and prisoners. Professor Jacobi and Professor Armstrong also referred to the role played by volunteers within the prison walls and questioned the extent to which they are providing services to prisoners which should be provided by the State itself.

What the examples given by Professor Jacobi and Professor Armstrong have in common and in contrast to the situation in Angola Prison, is that they provide a way of bringing the community into the prison and fostering ties to the community for prisoners. This is particularly important from the perspective of desistance and re-entry. Two further examples of how links can be made between the community and prison were provided by Isabel McCue MBE from Theatre Nemo in Glasgow and Sally Taylor from the Koestler Trust. Speaking from personal experience, Isabel spoke of the importance of engaging people recovering from periods of poor mental health, or struggling with enduring mental illness, into therapeutic and creative activities. Theatre Nemo delivers creative arts workshops, led by professional facilitators, and aims to improve and promote good mental health and wellbeing, supporting those who are in hospital, the secure estate, and communities, together with their carers, friends and families. The aim of the Theatre Nemo prison project is to bridge the gap between prison and the community. The Koestler Trust is a charitable arts award scheme established in 1962 by the writer Arthur Koestler to award, exhibit and sell artworks by prisoners, detainees and secure patients. Theatre Nemo and the Koestler Trust, along with many voluntary organisations, play a significant role in linking prisoners to the community and increasing public awareness and understanding of prisoners, though a major source of concern is funding to continue their work.

Volunteers play a significant role both inside the prison walls and outside, often providing services that are not provided by the state. They also provide a valuable link between the prison and the community, and in doing so can foster and encourage desistance and re-entry. They can assist with overcoming prisoner literacy and training needs, such as in relation to literacy and education, they can support mental health and wellbeing, they can tap into individual creativities and they can provide spiritual assistance. But in doing so they must ensure that their own mental health and wellbeing is not neglected, particularly if they are working within the confines of a rigid and problematic prison structure, and where funding constraints are ever present.

Privatisation, Penal Drift, and Resistance

Pervading the two days of presentations and discussions was a preoccupation with the contexts of privatisation/marketisation in which voluntary sector organizations internationally increasingly deliver their services. The American experience, with its long provenance, proved instructive. Dr. Emma Hughes' outline of voluntary programmes run inside prisons in California highlighted the 'zip code lottery' of programme provision in a state where one prison, San Quentin, has more volunteers than all the other 35 prisons combined. Meanwhile, Dr. Michael Hallett's focus on Angola Prison in Louisiana offered an incisive critique of how the work of faith-based programmes and inmate-led ministries can do good work behind closed doors in the most difficult of circumstances, while also lending false legitimacy to a carceral system that is deeply unfair and unequal and needs to be challenged and changed. The need for the voluntary sector to challenge, not reinforce, the systemic failings of the system was also raised by Anita Dockley (The Howard League), so that while there might be a definite role for the voluntary sector in creating permeability and promoting transparency, it should do so as an innovative and critical friend.

A number of presentations dealt specifically with the impacts of the emerging mixed economy of providers in parts of the UK, ushered in by the [Transforming Rehabilitation](#) agenda and the broader, neoliberal political environment. Widespread caution was expressed at settling for simplistic narratives that fail to capture the complexity of the issues under discussion. Nathan Dick (Clinks) warned that we need to start talking about the diversity in the voluntary sector in recognition that it is not a homogenous group, while Dr. Rob MacMillan exposed the reductionism implicit in common framings of the current climate. He laid out two stories of the voluntary sector. The first, of jeopardy and loss – or the idea that everything is going to ‘hell in a hand cart’. This scenario is characterised by risk, mission drift, and the loss of distinctiveness between the private and voluntary sectors, especially as the voluntary sector becomes more market oriented. The second story is about necessity and transition – or an ‘adapt or die’ scenario in which the voluntary sector must become more efficient, more professional, more impact focused, and more entrepreneurial. Dr. Macmillan asserted that both stories render voluntary organizations as ‘simple and passive in the face of a broader environment.’

Dr. MacMillan applied the same critical eye to the idea of ‘marketization’ – calling it out as an ill-defined and oversimplified concept, and these complexities were explored in research findings reported in two parallel panels. Dr. Adam White focused on the concept of a public sector ethos in the pluralised criminal justice system, using a case study with Lincolnshire Constabulary to outline his findings. He questioned the notion of a clear binary between a public sector ethos, ring fenced within the public and not-for-profit sectors, finding that despite concerns among former Lincolnshire police employees that their public service approach would be eroded once enlisted into the service of a private company, that they, in fact, largely went about their jobs in the same way, delivering services as they previously had as public sector employees. Dr. White concluded that while sector definitions are important, there is not necessarily an exclusive ‘type’ of employee in each. The situation is considerably more complex.

Early research findings from a two-year study on voluntary sector organisations in criminal justice led by Dr. Mary Corcoran, Professor Mike Maguire, and Professor Kate Williams, empirically tracked adaptation and change in the sector through interviews with voluntary sector managers, leaders, delivery staff and policy stakeholders. While the emerging mixed resettlement market appears to be driving new patterns of organisation, it was argued there is a need to move beyond our assumptions that the voluntary sector has been co-opted politically or practically. Organisations do not appear to have been ‘captured’ by new contracting structures, but the picture is more fluid, with conflicted responses within a highly differentiated sector.

In order to expose and explore the nuances of this diversity Dr. MacMillan proposed taking a ‘fields-based approach’ to the relationship between the market and the voluntary sector. A fields-based approach would provide a more political conception of the issues at hand and would incorporate Bourdieu’s social theory and concepts such as change, conflict, and power. Such a perspective also enables clearer articulation of the desire for resistance, which became abundantly clear during the two days of discussions. From Professor Tobi Jacobi and Dr. Sarah Armstrong’s acknowledgements of the need for volunteers to employ instrumental complicity in their work in prisons, to bolder calls from some academics and practitioners for the two groups to work together to find strategies of activism and resistance, there was a strong sense of the need for research to consider the active and complex roles voluntary sector organisations are playing at the grassroots of criminal justice practice.

Collaborative and Creative Spaces

Many presentations at the VSCJ conference highlighted the importance of fostering creative and performative spaces within the criminal justice system as well as the need for collaborative space. The education and writing programmes described by Professor Jacobi and Professor Armstrong provide good examples of creative spaces within penal institutions, while Theatre Nemo and the Koestler Trust provide examples of creative and performative spaces both inside and outside prison walls. The Colorado jail writing programme publishes a regular journal entitled [SpeakOut!](#) where the writers can have their voices heard and be judged for the quality of their work rather than what they have done in the past. This is an important outlet and is strongly supported by the prisoners themselves and those on the outside alike. The programmes Theatre Nemo offers to prisoners include art programmes, drama, animation, and music workshops. These provide an important creative and collaborative space for the prisoners, but it also provides them with an opportunity to show their family and friends what they have done and what they have achieved. This is also an important feature of the work of the Koestler Trust, as it brings art out of the prison and exposes it to the wider community.

The importance of these creative and performative spaces within the prison walls is that they can be brought outside and, in doing so, foster an increased public awareness of prisons and prisoners. For Theatre Nemo, the goal is to assist the individual to overcome their mental health difficulties, while at the same time generating public awareness, understanding, and support for those with mental health difficulties. The in-prison writing and reading programmes provide prisoners with an alternative environment within the prison, where they can learn to express themselves and find their voice. The Koestler Trust, while not providing the creative space itself, encourages prisoners to be creative by providing them with the encouragement, support, and a wider outlet for their creativity. The result of these efforts is to enable prisoners to begin the process of changing how they think about themselves and what they can do or become, and changing how the public sees and regards people who have spent time in prison.

The above examples from the presentations by Isabel McCue MBE, Professor Jacobi, Professor Armstrong and Sally Taylor, all attest to the need for the criminal justice system to provide creative and performative spaces and the need for greater collaboration between what goes on within the prison itself and the world outside. But what about collaboration between the victims of crime, the wider community, and the perpetrators of crime? Tammy Banks of Circles spoke of the need for a collaborative space for the victims of sexual crimes, the community, and individuals who have been convicted of sexual crimes. Circles is a completely voluntary based support network and is based on the [Canadian model](#) of Circles of Support and Accountability. Its role is to work with and support persons convicted of sexual offences in their resettlement and desistance efforts. At its core, Circles believes that something different and meaningful must be done about preventing sexual harm and the position of persons convicted of sexual offences within the community if we are serious about encouraging desistance and integration. In order to do this, community-based interventions must be developed and funded, and communities and victims alike must be given the collaborative space to discuss their fears and anxieties, and to open dialogue and discussion. This will provide a voice to the community, the victim, and the perpetrator and in doing so will create ongoing dialogue and awareness, and will encourage the desistance and re-entry of persons convicted of sexual offences.

‘Good’ Research and Knowledge Sharing Practices

There was a lot of talk throughout the conference about what constitutes ‘good’ research (and good voluntary sector work) and how academics and practitioners can best work together to ensure that such research is shared far and wide. Many presenters identified *gaps* in research and spoke about the demand for voluntary sector programmes to be ‘evidence-based’. For example, Dr. Iain Britton stated that research around volunteers in policing is a notably underdeveloped field with a limited active researcher base, few publications, and little translation of evidence into practice. While the [Citizens in Policing](#) programme and the Institute for Public Safety, Crime and Justice is working to build a stronger evidence base and research network, there is still much work to be done to improve data collection and to engage police leaders, practitioners, and volunteers in supporting effective evaluation and research dissemination.

Accessibility of academic research was an issue raised during discussions between academics and practitioners at the conference. Often practitioners are not aware of the research that is available and therefore miss out on important evidence that might support the work they are doing, or the work they want to do. It is also often the case that research is not accessible due to expensive journal subscriptions that keep academic work behind a paywall. It seems that practitioners may also find academics themselves to be inaccessible, in that academics often fail to relay their findings back to the community or do so in such opaque language as to render the knowledge unusable. Overall, there is a need for academics to consider how they can make their research useful to practitioners and policymakers to better inform the programmes and services offered by voluntary sector organisations working within the criminal justice system.

In response to the evidence-based mantra of the state, which some of the conference participants viewed as obstructionist, there were calls for more creative approaches to research within the voluntary sector. There is a desire for research alliances that ask different questions and have the confidence to move away from the usual methodologies. Some suggested more critical and engaged qualitative methods such as community-based/participatory action research, and other research approaches that allow for much stronger collaboration between academics, practitioners, and service users (who might participate as peer researchers).

Innovation and collaboration on research projects is very important for the voluntary sector, especially for organisations like Circles who do not always experience public support for the work that they do with persons convicted of sexual offences. Collecting narratives from volunteers and programme participants, conducting economic assessments, and compiling program outcome statistics all help to ensure ongoing support from funders. Research can also be used to inform the public discourse about desistance and re-entry and to keep positive and productive conversations going in the community so that people are more aware of the benefits of supporting more restorative and transformative justice initiatives. Even the use of social media ([#NoMoreVictims³](#)) can be quite helpful in spreading the word about these evidence-based responses to real-world criminal justice issues.

³ ‘No More Victims’ is the mandate of Circles of Support and Accountability (Circles) and the hashtag is used on social media to bring awareness to the contribution of Circles to public safety.

Making and Maintaining Connections

The purpose of the conference and the establishment of a research network was to bring together academics, practitioners, and policymakers in order to develop a greater understanding of the role of the voluntary sector within the criminal justice system and encourage ongoing collaboration between academics and practitioners in this area. The conference was the first step in this process and the success of the conference will be seen in the connections made and maintained into the future. From the perspective of both the academics and practitioners at the conference, fostering and developing collaboration through research is important, though it was emphasised that research should be *with* the voluntary sector rather than *for* or *on* the voluntary sector.

Challenges to such a collaborative process were highlighted by both the academics and the practitioners, with both suggesting ways in which they can be resolved. It emerged during the discussions that for many practitioners there is a sense that research is something which is inaccessible (as highlighted in the [previous section](#) of this report). It was also noted that there can often be a mismatch between what the voluntary sector want and expect, and what researchers can achieve, with many of those working in the voluntary sector wary of research conducted on their organisations. There can also be a mismatch between what the voluntary sector can do and what researchers would like. To bridge this gap, a set of tasks were identified for researchers: to identify where the research is; assess its quality; translate and summarise it, and finally; disseminate it.

Those who work in a voluntary capacity within the criminal justice system have a vast array of knowledge and expertise, and this needs to be tapped into to ensure that any research agenda is feasible, realistic, and will give the information that is required by both the voluntary sector and the academy. Thus, the need to ensure that research is conducted *with* the voluntary rather than *on* the voluntary sector was stressed by participants at the conference. Many voluntary organisations are also hampered by their funding requirements and demands on their personnel and resources. This is a significant challenge for those working within the voluntary sector and must also be taken into consideration when researchers request their assistance to conduct research. Thus, the need for a partnership approach between the voluntary sector and the academy was stressed.

Such a partnership approach will involve building trust between the voluntary organisation and the researcher. Research is not a negative thing and can assist the voluntary organisation, for instance by highlighting their unique selling point and the role they play within the criminal justice system. This will involve the researcher delving into what it is that the voluntary organisation is delivering, how it is being delivered, and identifying good practice and how to continue it. This may lead to results that the voluntary organisation does not like, but it is necessary if the research is to be effective and helpful. Particularly from the perspective of those who benefit from the work of the voluntary sector, as the ultimate goal of academics, practitioners, and policymakers is to reduce offending, to encourage desistance, and to support re-entry.

A number of academics and practitioners were united in the need for a more direct engagement with processes of change. There were calls for the two groups to work together to find strategies of activism and resistance, and a claim that there is an ethical obligation to use research to resist. At its most moderate this discussion focused on the need to recognise the existence of multiple audiences and to find ways to disseminate our views among them. It was suggested that it may not be necessary to take on the

whole task, but rather to find other organisations who are willing and eager to share our work with their networks. Traditional audiences, however, may resist such strategies of resistance, which gave rise to key questions about how organisations wanting to conduct radical research while in the pay of the criminal justice sector might navigate the terrain. Challenges, however, should not be an obstacle to such ambitions and it was claimed, this work should happen.

The concord towards a more radical agenda was neither unproblematic nor unanimously agreed. One delegate reminded us that 'any assumption that we might agree is flawed', which led to a final engagement with the raw conflicts that come from struggling with the enemies within. Questions were raised as to how we might create investigations into the field that unites us when we have not created agreement among ourselves. The conflict was acknowledged and the question asked; 'how do we work through it?'. It may be that this discussion marked the beginning of a resolution.

Isabel McCue MBE from Theatre Nemo in Glasgow spoke with great dignity when she told the conference delegates her story and why she and her family established Theatre Nemo. After a long period of mental illness, drug addiction, and periods of imprisonment Isobel's son took his own life. Isobel had tried repeatedly to get the help her son needed, but with no success. As a result of this very difficult experience and a desire to ensure that no one else should be left without the mental health services they need and no other family should be left to deal with a loved one suffering from a mental health illness in a vacuum, with no support or assistance, Theatre Nemo was born. Isobel's story brought the reality of why voluntary organisations exist within the criminal justice system and why it is so important to nurture the connections between academics, practitioners, and policymakers, if people like Isobel's son are to receive the help and support they need.

3. Next Steps: Setting the Research Agenda

The Voluntary Sector in Criminal Justice conference marks the first step in a process which aims to illuminate the role of the criminal justice voluntary sector and in doing so, to foster ongoing collaboration between academics and practitioners in this area. Future progress will result from:

- (1) **Open Dialogue:** The common ground and conflicts exposed at the conference will form the foundation of future discussion driven by a commitment by all parties to create and capitalise upon increased knowledge of the criminal justice voluntary sector and its role in driving change forward for the benefit of service users.
- (2) **A Research Network:** The connections needed to develop a vital matrix of practitioners and academics spanning sectors, disciplines, and nation states are now in place. We will use this interdependence of ideas and experience to cultivate research and practice and to disseminate it widely.
- (3) **Conducting Research *With* the Voluntary Sector:** The importance of working collaboratively and recognising diverse knowledge sets and needs within the penal voluntary sector will be central to the future work we do.
- (4) **Developing Theoretical and Methodological Tools:** We share a commitment to taking risks in research and incorporating creative and innovative tools that can best capture the experiences, processes, and outcomes of the work conducted by voluntary organisations working in criminal justice.
- (5) **Thinking About Ethics:** A critical approach is vital to shedding light on the role and organisation of the criminal justice voluntary sector. As we examine the issues surrounding the continuum of complicity for those working in the sector, negotiating competing demands for countering coercion with compassion to converting compassion into coercion, we will engage with and raise awareness of the influences exerted by external forces and the myriad ways in which those forces may be resisted.

Moving forward, the Voluntary Sector in Criminal Justice Research Network now has its sights set on a second conference to be hosted at the British Academy in January 2018. This event will build on the agenda raised in June 2017 and will offer early career researchers a platform to present, develop, and publish their own cutting-edge research. The conference will showcase the diverse and non-traditional expertise of these academics, combined with their rigorous research training and determination to really 'make a difference' on the ground. Topics for discussion will include:

- Comparative studies of voluntary sector involvement in penal systems internationally, shining a light on gaps in knowledge and exploring the dilemmas faced by voluntary organisations working along a continuum of complicity.
- The possibilities and perils of peer mentoring in the UK context.
- The value of lived experience, ethnography, and activist academics in creating lasting change in areas including intimate violence, police volunteering, and criminal record administration and expungement.

Apart from this second conference the Network⁴ will also develop a public website, present at the forthcoming 2017 American Society of Criminology Conference in Philadelphia, and contribute to a special issue of an academic journal.

⁴ Anyone interested in learning more about, or joining, the Voluntary Sector in Criminal Justice Research Network can contact Dr. Philippa Tomczak at p.j.tomczak@sheffield.ac.uk.

Conclusion

The two-day *Voluntary Sector in Criminal Justice: Setting the Research Agenda* conference at the University of Sheffield was a fantastic opportunity to bring together many researchers, practitioners, and policymakers who work in, with, and for the penal voluntary sector. The international representation at the conference allowed for good comparison of best practices and reflection on gaps in research and programming within the sector. All delegates contributed to discussions in a kind and considerate manner, creating an ideal atmosphere for collaboration.

While each of the conference presentations and roundtables were unique in their content, the bigger themes that made their way through each of the panels were:

- Many people spoke to the pressures that come with trying to do voluntary work in a penal institution, and others suggested coping skills that can be used not only for the purpose of self-care but also to challenge and change the often toxic prison culture.
- We heard a lot about the impact of privatisation/marketisation on the penal voluntary sector and instances of complicity and resistance to the neoliberal political environment.
- As connections to the community become increasingly important for prisoners, a lot of organizations work to foster creative and performative spaces behind prison walls that allow for a stronger focus on the strengths and potential of individuals.
- Research must be conducted *with* the voluntary sector, rather than *on* the voluntary sector. This calls for greater collaboration between academics, policymakers and practitioners when conducting research and consideration of the power dynamics that can operate.
- In order to highlight the good work being done by the voluntary sector in criminal justice we need to conduct good (and innovative) research and then make that research accessible, in and beyond the academy so that best practices can be shared, replicated, and properly funded.
- Finally, making and maintaining connections between academics, practitioners, and policymakers is of utmost importance if we are to establish a meaningful research agenda with implications for practice.

The conference, and this report, is most certainly the start of the work that needs to be done to enhance research on (and, more importantly, *with*) the penal voluntary sector and we are excited by the potential that our diverse and international group holds for future research, innovation, and advocacy.



The
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**THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR IN
CRIMINAL JUSTICE: SETTING THE
RESEARCH AGENDA**

Programme

5th-6th June 2017

Day One – Monday 5th June 2017.

Time and venue	Activity	
9:30-12:30 Room BG03	Early Career Researcher Meeting	
	Round table hosted by Dr Philippa Tomczak (<i>University of Sheffield</i>), Dr David Thompson (<i>University of Sheffield</i>), Prof Sir Anthony Bottoms, (<i>University of Cambridge & University of Sheffield</i>) and Prof Joanna Shapland, (<i>University of Sheffield</i>).	
12:15-12:30 Moot Court Foyer	Main Conference Registration	
12:30-13:15 Moot Court Foyer	Lunch	
13:15-13:30 Moot Court	Welcome to the Workshop	
13:30-15:00 Moot Court	Session One	
	Dr Emma Hughes, (<i>California State University</i>), The States We're In: Reflections on voluntary sector engagement in US prisons	
	Professor Martine Herzog-Evans (<i>University of Reims</i>), French Probation: Involuntary privatisation	
	Sally Taylor, (<i>Koestler Trust</i>) - Practitioner, Arts support for prisoners	
15:00-15:15 Moot Court Foyer	Refreshments	
15:15-16:45 Moot Court/BG03	Session Two A (Moot Court)	Session Two B (BG03)
	Dr Adam White (<i>University of Sheffield</i>), Public Ethos in the Pluralised Criminal Justice System	Dr Mary Corcoran, (<i>University of Keele</i>), Dr Kelly Prince, (<i>University of Keele</i>), Mike Maguire (<i>University of South Wales</i>) and Kate Williams, (<i>Aberystwyth University</i>), The penal voluntary sector in England and Wales: adaption (and resilience) in a turbulent era
	Dr Iain Britton (<i>Institute for Public Safety, Crime and Justice</i>), Researching volunteering in policing: Some early learning from the national 'Citizens in Policing' research programme	
Isabel McCue, (<i>Theatre Nemo</i>) – <i>Practitioner</i> , Creative holistic support in criminal justice		
16:45-17:00 Moot Court Foyer	Refreshments	

17:00-17:45 Moot Court	Session Three
	Is there a gap between academic and practitioner research needs? (Research needs discussion session in small groups facilitated by Dr Philippa Tomczak (<i>University of Sheffield</i>), Dr David Thompson (<i>University of Sheffield</i>))
19:15 The University Arms	Workshop Dinner
	All those who have registered for the dinner please join us for dinner.

Day Two – Tuesday 6th June 2017.

Time and Venue	Activity
9:30-11:00 Moot Court	Session Four
	Prof Michael Hallett, (<i>University of North Florida</i>), Bad Faith: Charity, Privatisation, and Religious Volunteerism in American Corrections
	Professor Tobi Jacobi, (<i>Colorado State University</i>), Volunteer training and self-care in a US jail writing programme
	Grace Wyld, (<i>New Philanthropy Capital</i>), Maximising the voluntary sector’s involvement in criminal justice reform in 2017
11:00-11:15 Moot Court Foyer	Refreshments
11:15-12:15 Moot Court	Session Five
	What role <i>should</i> the voluntary sector play in criminal justice? Roundtable discussion session facilitated by Dr Philippa Tomczak (<i>University of Sheffield</i>). Participants include Anita Dockley, (<i>Research Director, The Howard League for Penal Reform</i>) and Nathan Dick, (<i>Head of Policy and Communications at Clink</i>).
12:15-13:00 Moot Court Foyer	Lunch
13:00-14:30 Moot Court	Session 6
	Dr Sarah Armstrong, (<i>University of Glasgow</i>), Universities and Prisons Engagement: the new frontier of penal voluntary organisations?
	Dr Rob MacMillan, (<i>University of Birmingham</i>), The voluntary sector in criminal justice – a fields-based account
	Tammy Banks, (<i>Circles</i>) - Sexual abuse, a community intervention: How Circles currently operate
14:30-15:15 Moot Court	Practitioner Meeting
	This meeting hosted by Dr Philippa Tomczak (<i>University of Sheffield</i>), Dr David Thompson (<i>University of Sheffield</i>) is for all practitioners. Refreshments will be provided.