

CRIMVOL: The International Criminal Justice Voluntary Sector Research Network

Sixth CRIMVOL virtual working paper
session: *13th May 2021*

Paper Presenters:

- ❖ Dr Rowan Mackenzie (Founder and Artistic Director of *Shakespeare UnBard*, UK).
- ❖ Liesbeth Naessens (University of Antwerp and Odisee University College Brussels).

Event Chair: Dr Gill Buck (University of Chester, UK)



CRIMVOL
CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCH

Dr Melissa Pepper, University of Greenwich, UK
@melissa_pepper

About CRIMVOL: The International Criminal Justice Voluntary Sector Research Network.

[CRIMVOL](#) is an international, multidisciplinary criminal justice voluntary sector research network for academics, practitioners, and policymakers. The network fills an important gap in scholarship and infrastructure: the criminal justice voluntary sector is more topical than ever before, but has not received academic attention commensurate with its importance anywhere in the world. The network is chaired by [Dr Philippa Tomczak](#) (Senior Research Fellow, University of Nottingham, Author of *The Penal Voluntary Sector*) and [Dr Gill Buck](#) (Senior Lecturer in Social Work at the University of Chester). CRIMVOL was established with the generous support of the British Academy (Rising Star Engagement Award) and the Socio-Legal Studies Association (Seminar Competition). A core focus is the development of [specialist early career researchers](#) and scholar-activist work.

Sixth CRIMVOL working paper session, 13 May 2021.

On Thursday 13 May 2021, the International Criminal Justice Voluntary Sector Research Network (CRIMVOL) hosted its sixth working paper session, welcoming and showcasing the work of two new network members – Dr Rowan Mackenzie and Liesbeth Naessens. The event marked almost a year in this stimulating series of presentations from scholars researching the roles that volunteers and the voluntary sector play in delivering criminal justice services. While there is no substitute for a chat over a conference coffee cup, the online nature of these events has made it easier for our international network of scholars to meet regularly, bringing together people, papers, and ideas from across the globe. With researchers ‘Zooming’ in from different parts of the UK, Denmark, Belgium, and Jerusalem, our most recent session was no exception to this.

Paper 1: Dr Rowan Mackenzie. 'True hope is swift and flies with swallow's wings': Shakespeare UnBard during the Pandemic.

[Dr Rowan Mackenzie](#), Founder and Artistic Director of *Shakespeare UnBard*, delivered the first paper of the session. *Shakespeare UnBard* is a project that seeks to bring Shakespeare to marginalised communities, including those in prison. Rowan has founded a successful theatre company – the Gallowfield Players – in HMP Gartree, co-owned with 14 men serving life sentences. The company have performed adaptations of Macbeth, Julius Caesar, and

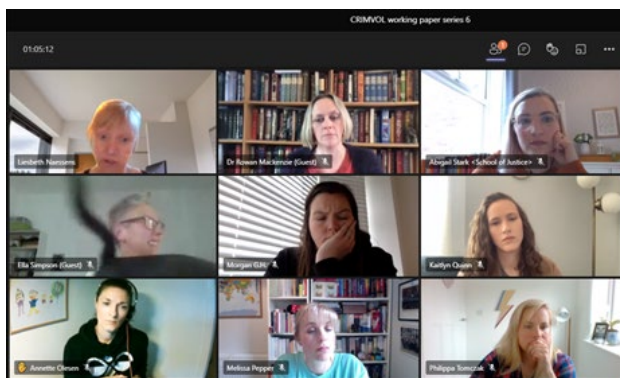


CRIMVOL members listen to Dr Rowan Mackenzie's paper

the Merchant of Venice, drawing out themes from the plays that are familiar to many of those involved, including stigmatisation and the effects of imprisonment on family members. After being contacted by staff at HMP Stafford who were interested in the project, Rowan developed *Emergency Shakespeare*, again using the cultural capital of Shakespeare as a vehicle to address and unpack issues that impact on the lives of those affected by imprisonment.

Rowan has continued to deliver the programme during the Covid-19 pandemic, maintaining connections with theatre company members through weekly creativity packs posted to the prison. Packs are developed at three levels to suit different literacy abilities, and engage individuals in Shakespeare through drawings, emojis, cartoons, word searches, developing text messages or letters, and creative writing projects. Feedback from those receiving the packs has been positive with some talking to their children and other family members about their creative work during phone/video calls, photocopying activity packs to send home, or sharing their experiences with cell mates. Rowan has also turned her attentions to opportunities post-release, setting up *Beyond the Walls*, a theatre company for people with convictions or experience of the criminal justice system. It is hoped that the company will form part of the post-release support network that is shown to be vital to those leaving prison.

Paper 1: Liesbeth Naessens. Collaboration between professionals and volunteers in supporting people leaving prison.



Liesbeth Naessens presents to members (and Ella Simpson's cat!)

The second paper of the session was from [Liesbeth Naessens](#), a researcher at the University of Antwerp and a social work teacher at Odisee University College in Brussels. Liesbeth presented results from a study exploring the role of (paid) professionals and volunteers involved in a befriending buddy project which supports people following release from

prison. Findings from the study point to the importance of relationships between professionals and volunteers in providing high-quality services to clients. Volunteers often relied on paid professionals for their practical input – specific knowledge of legal systems, partner agencies, and resources that clients can access, and their expert ‘leverage’ to progress cases – but also personal advice and coaching to navigate the often complex and emotive issues that clients present. Professionals were also instrumental in supporting some volunteers and clients to better understand and communicate expectations with each other, helping to identify and respond to client need in the most effective way.

Liesbeth's paper posed questions around the 'complementarity' of volunteers within criminal justice settings, and the often 'blurry', ill-defined nature of professional and volunteer tasks and responsibilities. The issue of boundaries between paid and unpaid members of the criminal justice 'workforce' is a recurring theme throughout many CRIMVOL scholars' studies, and Liesbeth's paper highlighted the process of negotiation often required to navigate this. While the contribution of volunteers was welcomed – both the time they gave and the skills and experience they brought – the complementarity of professionals and volunteers in Liesbeth's study presented limitations, with professional support recognised as an important feature of volunteer and client wellbeing.

The papers delivered at this session showcased two very different projects; however, highlighted common themes – the value of services delivered by volunteers in criminal justice settings, and the opportunities that collaboration with paid professionals and/or statutory agencies can bring.

The next CRIMVOL working paper session will take place on the 9th September 2021 with a paper from [Annette Olesen](#) (Associate Professor, Department of Sociology and Social Work, Aalborg University, Denmark): *Informal collaboration between the voluntary sector and the Danish Prison and Probation Service.*