

Prisoners need greater awareness of voluntary services, says research

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New research from the Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC) highlights the need to make prisoners more aware of voluntary organisations that could help them towards resettlement. The report shows that despite the relatively high number of third sector organisations working within prisons, many are not known by prisoners.

TSRC researchers from the University of Southampton conducted a survey across eight prisons nationally to investigate prisoners' experiences of third sector organisations (TSOs). The number of TSOs that each prison claimed was active in their establishment ranged from 15 to 31. However, on average, [respondents](#) reported having heard of just four.

Engagement with third sector organisations was also low, with only 5 per cent of prisoners having engaged with at least one. Where prisoners had heard of an organisation, but not engaged with them, the main reasons given were that they knew nothing about them or did not feel they could help.

The researchers looked specifically at prisoners' [experiences](#) of organisations operating within seven different areas or 'pathways' of resettlement. They found that TSOs working on drug and alcohol issues had the most consistent representation and use within prisons.

Within other pathways there was a [discrepancy](#) between the representation of organisations and awareness of these by prisoners.

While each prison had a number of organisations which provided housing, for example only 20 – 25 per cent of respondents were aware of these and nearly 10 per cent of respondents identified accommodation as a key area where supply did not fit demand. Similar problems were noted within employment, education and training, and finance and debt.

Certain groups of [offenders](#) were also more likely to engage with different services. Women respondents and those from non-British Black, Asian and mixed ethnic (BAME) backgrounds reported significantly less engagement with housing TSOs despite equal levels of awareness. Young adult and juvenile respondents reported less awareness and involvement with accommodation TSOs. This is backed up by previous TSRC research, which illustrated under-representation of housing organisations offering services to women offenders, young offenders and offenders from BAME backgrounds.

In open-ended questions, 25 per cent of respondents said that more organisations are needed to provide employment, training and work placements for prisoners in the community. This was especially the case among young adult and juvenile offenders, as well as in open prisons where the number of TSOs operating in this area was low.

Dina Gojkovic, TSRC researcher at the University of Southampton, says: "Our ongoing research within the criminal justice system has highlighted a proven need for the work of TSOs and the benefits they can provide. While our survey did not measure engagement with statutory services, the identified need for more of some services shows that prisoners are not necessarily getting these from elsewhere. It certainly seems that improving the communication between TSOs and [prisoners](#) could help more people to benefit from them."

Provided by University of Southampton

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