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**Creativity, self-exploration and change: creative-arts based activities and transformational identity
desistance narratives**

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Abstract: This exploratory article is based on interviews and focus groups with prisoners reflecting on the benefits of engaging in creative arts-based activities. Desistance theorists emphasise the importance of judgments based on individual personal impressions, feelings and opinions in offenders' co-production and ownership of their desistance narratives. The data presented here are used to illustrate the positive changes in offenders' subjective understandings and to highlight the appropriateness of using more nuanced research designs to provide evidence of effectiveness of engagement with arts-based projects.

Keywords: creative cultural arts-based activities; desistance; offenders; prison-based projects

This article begins by linking the central themes embedded in the desistance literature to the potential impacts of engagement in creative arts-based activities for prisoners. Qualitative data are used to highlight how participation in these activities can operate as a vehicle for realising the subjective and reflective capacities essential for the process of eliciting genuine engagement with prisoners' own desistance journeys. The article goes on to highlight that it is in the sphere of contributing to the desistance subjective changes and identity transformation narrative journey, not attribution to reducing reoffending rates, that creative arts-based activities' most significant impacts can be utilised. In alignment with the tradition of the desistance paradigm, the article concludes that arts-based outcomes are most effectively evidenced through nuanced, ethnographic qualitative data collection methodologies which include offenders as assets in both the desistance process and in evaluation methodology design.

The Desistance Literature

There are three broad theoretical perspectives in the desistance literature. These argue that offenders exit an offending lifestyle because: offenders grow up and out of crime (maturational reform or ontogenic theories, for example, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990)); offenders' social relationships evolve and become more positive (social bonds, social capital or sociogenic theories, for example, Sampson and Laub (1993)); offenders' personal stories or narrative experience subjective changes and as a result they identify and adopt an alternative non-offending identity (subjective changes and identity transformation theories, for example, Maruna (2001)). However, it is increasingly accepted that the desistance process – the journey from primary desistance (a crime-free gap) to secondary desistance (a changed personal identity) – involves a complex interaction between all three of these dimensions (see McNeill and Weaver 2010, p.18).

It is also important to highlight that, from the desistance perspective, it is the offender who is put at the heart of this process, as a counter point to the risk/needs evidence-based model getting us:

away from a preoccupation to correct and/or fix offenders in our way for their own benefit, and to a more complete appreciation of the forces and influences that might help offenders find and follow their own way out of desisting. (Porporino 2010, pp.63–4)

This 'paradigm shift' (McNeill 2012), occurring at the heart of the criminal justice intervention discourse, asserts that the focus is on approaching offenders as assets and 'developing programmes that don't aim to change offenders but rather aim simply to help them explore – to look at their lives through some new lenses' (Porporino 2010, p.78). From this position, one can argue that interventions with an offence focus may therefore have little value in promoting desistance; rather, the desistance literature recommends that we should seek to avoid identifying individuals with behaviours we would rather they left behind (see [McNeill and Maruna 2007](#)). In this way, it is not the actual programme which is seen to work from the desistance paradigm, but an approach which engages the offender in the act of choosing between the realistic possibility of making it work, or not,

that is proving important (see, Duguid and Pawson 1998; McNeill 2012). The desistance paradigm 'suggests that we might be better off if we allowed offenders to guide us instead' (Porporino 2010, p.80). Indeed, one might propose that from this perspective, offenders should logically be involved in developing the tools with which to capture their own developments regarding accessing their desistance journeys.

Ultimately, however, whether attempting to build personal maturity, renegotiate relationships or constructing or reconstructing personal narratives, offenders require a set of skills, for example, communicative, emotional and reflective capacities, to assist their engagement with the desistance process. These skills are essential for this 'vital episode in enabling the agent to contemplate moving beyond entrenched routines that have adhered from the past' (Vaughan 2007, p.395). The desistance literature's focus on offenders' maturity, relationship formation and self-narrative all involve the arts of expression, reflectivity, empathy and imagination. Therefore, providing offenders with opportunities to explore, practice and activate these subjective skills is important.

Subjective Changes and Identity Transformation

Shadd Maruna (2001) identified that in order to desist from crime, ex-offenders need opportunities to develop a coherent, pro-social identity for themselves. Maruna's sample of desisters were distinguished from the non-desisters, as the successful desisters' narratives contained:

- high levels of self efficacy, meaning they saw themselves in control of their futures
- a clear sense of purpose and meaning in their lives
- evidence that they had found a way to 'make sense' out of their past
- evidence that they often wanted to use their experiences to help others. (p.8)

In other words, those in possession of desistance narratives demonstrated a level of reflectivity, emotional intelligence, connectedness to others, empathy and hope for the future. It seems reasonable to work on the assumption that possession of this skill set might be rare within the

offending cohort, given the profile of social exclusion and traumatic past of many in the prison population (see, for example, Social Exclusion Unit 2002; Corston Report 2007).

This raises questions regarding the offender cohort's access to opportunities, such as accessing creative arts-based activities, with which to enhance their own capacities to find and/or develop the reflective, imaginative and expressive skills required to explore different ways of relating to themselves (their own past, present and future) and to others (McCourt 2005). Indeed, the 'period of reflection and reassessment of what is important' (McNeill *et al.* 2012, p.6) is identified as a common feature of the initial process of desistance. Therefore, reflecting on one's own life history – reassessing where one is now and where one wants to be – involves this subjective narrative, a conversation with, and examination of, the *self* that carries 'the potential of influencing future action' (Friestad 2012, p.473). In short, it is hard for anyone unpractised in these subjective skills, to think about one's own feelings or imagine the feelings of others (Adshead 2002), or reflect on the impact of these feelings and actions on others (McKendry 2006; Pryor 2001). However, the efficacy of these opportunities made available by participation in cultural creative arts-based activities are difficult to demonstrate in such a way as to be deemed valid in quantitative, recidivism-focused criminal justice policy evaluation.

Evaluation and Effectiveness

The difficult debate surrounding developing models and theories which can explain the effects of creative arts-based interventions is in response to the government's approach of using quantitative approaches to assessing the measure of effectiveness as binary impacts on reducing reoffending rates. It is generally acknowledged that participation in creative arts-based projects are unlikely to be attributed to lead to desistance by themselves, and that their contribution to desistance take indirect forms (see, for example, Hughes, Miles and McLewin 2005; Miles and Clark 2006), the interest in the links between participation in the arts and the potential for desistance is increasing (see McNeill *et al.* 2011; Tett *et al.* 2012; NOMS 2013). Currently in the UK alone, there is a

considerable amount of activity in this area to assess the specific values of participation with arts interventions (see Arts Alliance News 2014; Arts and Humanities Research Council 2013; Koestler Trust Arts Mentoring Gateway 2014). There are, however, still some outstanding significant debates regarding the appropriateness of the measures to be used to demonstrate the effectiveness of participation in these projects.

This debate had the potential of becoming more nuanced when NOMS published its data requirements for intermediate outcomes of arts projects. However, on closer reading, these demands still require data demonstrating 'direct or indirect association' with reductions in reoffending (NOMS 2013, p.2).

Ultimately, the emphasis on randomised control groups, validity of causal inferences, large samples and the current dismissal of qualitative evidence with regard to small samples and a lack of generalisability of findings, does not sit comfortably with evaluating opportunities and conditions for change processes which enable people to think differently about life course, self-narrative and realisable opportunities for change. However, even if these kinds of data could be produced, we would be at risk of putting these demands for unrealistic and inappropriate types of evidence, over the core, creative arts-based practice aim of bringing about a positive effect in the participant (Parkes and Bilby 2010, cited in Bilby, Caulfield and Ridley 2013, p.5). In short, such interventions will be less effective if their purpose is primarily to gather questionable evidence, rather than support the offender.

To put this in the subjective changes and identity transformation desistance literature language, evaluators are being asked for objective evidence to demonstrate subjective changes. This rather begs the methodological (as well as practical) question – whether it is possible that quantitative data can effectively capture subjective effects on participants? Shadd Maruna, in a 2012 speech, underlined this issue, as he lent his support for this call for a paradigm shift in evaluative approaches to demonstrating contributions to desistance:

In many ways, arts as well as self-help and volunteer work, does not fit into that medical model framework. It is the person who has to engage with arts, so imposing this medical type model framework and imposing it on the arts won't work. In order to understand those changes, the desistance model may go some way towards helping develop this model.

(Maruna 2012b)

Ultimately, we argue that by exploring the subjective change and identity in desistance discourse, we may add weight to the view that the positivist quantitative medical model of data collection is inappropriate in this context. The data presented here show that the offenders themselves value arts activities as they seek to realise their own desistance pathways. The insistence on quantitative evaluation, therefore, has the potential effect of further disenfranchising those we seek to reintegrate and may prove counterproductive with regard to supporting offenders to engage in their own desistance journey. It must be recognised that desistance is a co-productive process, not an imposition and, therefore, the opinions of the offenders must be incorporated into any evaluative design.

Methodology

In the following, we have collated evaluation data regarding the experiences of more than 100 offender-participants in custody. These participants have engaged with: a video-production project (Wilkinson and O'Keeffe 2007); a radio production project (Wilkinson and Davidson 2008, 2009, 2010a); and a range of creative writing- and reading-based projects in custody (Wilkinson and Davidson 2010b; O'Keeffe and Albertson 2012a, 2012b, 2013). The data collection tools were designed to collect prisoner reflections on the specific evaluation aims of assessing the impact of the project and identifying facilitators in, and barriers to, project delivery. These data were analysed using a thematic analysis technique based around the specific themes raised by the offender-participants. These evaluation fieldwork data were generated both from one-to-one interviews and focus group activities. While it is acknowledged that there are distinct parallels between themes

identified in each project-specific case data cited above, which inform the background and substance of this analysis, the specific excerpts presented here are drawn from two specific, representative and recent project evaluations.

The project evaluations from which data are drawn are sourced from prisoners engaging in two Writers in Prison Foundation Special Project evaluations, both conducted within the last five years. This fieldwork involved conducting a focus group with six offenders in custody in May 2011, who had engaged in a twelve-week critical reading group project. These data are labelled: SC11 focus group. One-to-one interviews were undertaken with seven prisoners engaging with a three-year creative writing and mentoring programme in prison in May 2011, and again in February 2013. These data are labelled: MP, followed by two digits representing the year conducted and a two-digit participant number.

A Strength-based Approach

It was reported by evaluation respondents that the creative arts practitioners approached them as people who had the potential to be creative, rather than prisoners who had committed offences.

This strengths-based (rather than deficit-based) approach acknowledges that 'people have the capacity to develop different patterns of identification' (Gadd and Farrall 2004, p.147; Rumgay 2004).

This approach was described by evaluation participants as eliciting a qualitatively different, more genuine engagement from them, described eloquently by one long-term prisoner:

It's different from Offending Behaviour Courses, because this is not a course, it is a moral discussion. The Offender Behaviour Courses, you get to know what you need to say to get them to tick the box, whereas here, you have to be honest and genuine, you can't hide here. (offender focus group, SC11)

We do not suggest offending behaviour courses be replaced by arts-based activities; we suggest it is important to have a diversity of activities on offer: activities which may illicit different modes of engagement. There is debate in the desistance literature regarding whether personal change is unconscious or instrumental – as happening by accident or by choice. However, as Vaughan (2007) highlights, both ideas 'ignore the human capability to reflect on whether an objective is compatible

with our own moral understanding of ourselves and our relationships with others' (p.398). Indeed, it was observed by one offender in the sample that it was during participation in a creative arts-based activity, that what he had practised in sessions transmuted into being used instrumentally by employing his new-found skills of expression and reflection in other contexts:

I did the Emotional Module here in treatment and pretty much flunked it first time around. Well, I didn't say anything – so not surprising. So I did it again since [completing the Creative Writing project] and I just wouldn't shut up – so I passed it with flying colours. I participated and fed into things all the time. (offender interview, MP1304)

During creative arts-based project participation the individual is, at very least, engaging in 'conversations' about an object (be it a novel, song, speech or play) and thereby practising critical thinking in a self-absorbing task independent of their status, situation, offence or location. Initially they may be unaware of the processes they are learning to master. As the quote above illustrates, the participant identified his own development of skills and was delighted by how far he had come. At very least, the individual enjoys engaging, it fills their time, they socialise with others on tasks that are not prison-focused; at best they may, at some future point, utilise the skills they have learnt during participation. With these skills they may transform their life journey. Such a process cannot be mandated.

Evidence of Emotional Learning

All of the creative arts-based programme participants involved in the evaluation activities reported learning to express themselves more effectively during their participation. Communication is at the heart of all human interaction and as 'desistance can be seen as being attempted where conversation transmutes into a narrative reconciling past, present and future' (Vaughan 2007, p.390), it is only with good communication skills – vocal, verbal, textual, visual imagery, or performance-based – that a person can begin to engage in the analysis of their own self and life. The mode of expression is of secondary importance, it is the expression and the reflectivity that creative practitioners aim to provide which is of primary importance. Communication about lives, histories

and feelings is an essential starting point from which 'new meanings can emerge' (Rose, Loewenthal and Greenwood 2005, p.44).

It is communication which links reflectivity and the development of the potential desire to change. These expressive skills, once mastered in this context, were reported by respondents as being increasingly useful in assisting the communication of their own narratives, as they moved, at their own pace, towards the effective expression required for engagement with their own life stories:

I used to get very angry because I couldn't say things about how I felt. So now the writing helps. I get the feelings out. Maybe one day I will be able to say things, but for now writing is much better than just exploding and fighting everyone near me. (offender interview, MP1102)

I used to lock in my experiences – not talk about it ... Bottling up how you feel does not help. Write about it – it relieves things – it makes them more manageable somehow. (offender focus group, SC11)

Communication, by definition, cannot occur in isolation; it requires space, participants and context. For those, such as these offender-participants, not familiar with communicating and reflecting on the self, engagement with creative arts-based activities can prove enabling. Emotional learning increases knowledge about oneself and the 'act of analysis inevitably alters the experience and the learning that flows from it' (Rose, Loewenthal and Greenwood 2005, p.444). Therefore, narrative takes on importance as the 'vehicle through which selfhood is created and recreated' (Friestad 2012, p.475). As one offender who had attended the reading group-based activity put it:

I have gained more insight and knowledge here than anywhere else. I've learnt more about me than with any Psychologist. (offender focus group, SC11)

This highlights the perception of the context in which creative arts-based activities are developed as a safe place where reflection can be entered into. Creative arts-based activities were reported by their participants as providing safe and non-judgmental spaces in prison to begin unfolding and maintaining and retaining ownership of a narrative of their own. Engaging in creative arts-based activities generally involves a response to something – a play, poem or an idea for developing a

radio-script, or a picture. This involves communication, usually in the form of a discussion. Offender discussion can often safely be cast in the third person (for example, a discussion of a fictional character's actions in a book or play). Often, even the way in which the discussion is phrased, the use of language of a kind with which they are unfamiliar, can lead to offenders' personal growth.

In this way, arts-based activities provide a 'kind and comparatively gentle way of facing whatever is there to be faced. You can trust it to pace itself to your needs and wants rather than to anyone else's ... It can be private until you decide to share it' (Bolton 1999, p.12, cited in Wright and Cheung Chung 2001, p.278). By ensuring that offenders retain a sense of ownership as they become more connected with themselves and others through their creativity (Pennebaker and Seagal 1999), creative arts-based projects work to foster a sense of personal achievement. Such projects provide spaces in which offenders feel safe in attempting to create a sense of personal meaning and purpose in their lives. Thus creative arts-based programmes provide opportunities for personal insight and potential for hope that things can, and will, change.

The very process of telling personal stories is a 'learning process about oneself ... a process that results in new learning and meaning, which is precursor to the recognition that change is a potential outcome' (Rose, Loewenthal and Greenwood 2005, p.442). One participant saw right to the heart of what he had gained from engagement in a writing project:

Within writing, I have learnt to express emotion and also feel emotions through poetry. It has helped [me] express my feelings, and my emotional understanding is better. (offender focus group, SC11)

Arts Practitioners: The Effect of a Different Relational Experience

As demonstrated above, creative arts-based practitioners and projects begin wherever the offender *is* in their personal journey (Nugent and Loucks 2011), and focus on the creative potential of a person. An approach prisoner's acknowledged was refreshing:

[The arts practitioner] is a character, he's different, he never makes me feel pressured – doesn't focus on or set deadlines, but he plays to our strengths, while also bolstering our weaknesses. [The arts practitioner] is so enthusiastic – it just rubs off on us. In this place you can get staff who think they are amateur psychologists – whereas with [Creative Writing]

staff – there is no hidden agenda, so we are less suspicious of them. (offender interview, MP1302)

It's very different that they are not in white shirts. They are not [prison] staff – we'd all respond very differently with them if they did. No! I wouldn't like that at all. (offender interview, MP1304)

The approach of the arts practitioners accords with Weaver's (2009) analysis that 'communicating with individuals requires recognition of the individual as a full citizen of society with equal rights and benefits, as a self-determining agent capable of a normative outlook' (p.22). Creative practitioners delivering their projects engaged with participants as equals with interests outside of the prison regime:

They just talk sometimes too, about stuff, you know; books they've read, films, other people, music, the world out there. That's so important in a place like this. (offender interview, MP1101)

These types of observations highlight that opportunities for relationships encouraging self-expression are indicative of opportunities where it is 'citizens not professionals' within prison arts-based group communities which function as agents of integration (Maruna 2006, p.10; McNeill *et al.* 2012). Indeed, as Uggen notes, participation and identification with positive characters involves 'trying on the roles of productive citizen, responsible citizen and active citizen [which] provides, at minimum, an imaginative rehearsal for their assumption on release' (Uggen, Manza and Behrens 2004, p.262). Indeed, during engagement in many of these projects, offenders described how they have taken on, or were at least trying out, new identities in the prison environment. For example:

I've moved on because of this, I'm so much more confident now that I even have started a Wednesday film and games night, with my friend [Name]. We contributed some of our DVDs and Computer Games and sit around playing them with the others on the wing each Wednesday night. I'm also a PCC representative now, so I speak up for prisoners in the staff meetings now. That feels good, [I] would have been too scared before. (offender interview, MP1303)

In this way, engagement in creative arts-based activities can provide opportunities for offenders to take on more prosocial self-concepts and identities, indicative of desistance signalling as offenders actualising the 'helper principle' (Burnett and Maruna 2006; Maruna 2012a) where, motivated by their positive experiences, they take on rewarding work that is supportive of others around them.

Growth in Empathy and Awareness of the Other

If it is accepted that identity, relationships, attachments and meanings are important in desistance narratives, it must be acknowledged that reflective processes are required to assist with subjective level changes and the potential for transformational identities to form. As Hartley and Turvey (2013) explain, this is the virtue of engagement in arts-based activities, as 'it is when you do not know what you are supposed to think, that the work starts happening' (p.34). The offender's critical engagement with a text, a painting, performance or constructing a scene, provides an opportunity where agents can be introduced to being reflective, as 'acting back on themselves in the light of some kind of process of reflection on the situation before them' (Vaughan 2007, p.393). Further, this mode of introduction to reflectivity ensures that participants can engage in opportunities to try to make sense of their lives in terms of attaining some kind of coherence, which are both sensible and meaningful to them (Maruna and Copes 2005).

Empowered by their reading, offenders reported an increase in their understanding and respect for others, and, indeed, described how they soon moved on to 'reflect on your own life too. You can't help it really' (offender focus group, SC11). In this way, reflectivity of the self and empathy with others are interlinked in the creative, imaginative processes offered during participation in arts-based activities. This is a process many participants demonstrated being very conscious of, as noted by one participant:

I think working creatively also gives you a way into, well sort of, getting empathy for other people; so it's like writing creatively gives us a way to understand people and practice empathy ..., so my character is feeling this. Imagining what the character might be feeling; you have to reach inside and outside of yourself to do that. (offender interview, SC1102)

In the group setting, it is these kinds of critical conversations which may initiate both empathy and reflectivity as 'part of one's collaborative struggle to understand, and so construct, the world and one's position in it' (Howarth 2002, p.159).

Participants in the evaluation workshop described their weekly two-hour sessions as the highlight of their week. The group sessions were perceived as a space and place 'where there are no

constraints, over and above being polite, not swearing or talking over anyone else' (offender focus group, SC11). These men described feeling empowered by the opportunity to learn to read and think critically. As one participant noted:

before I just used to read and not think about it. [Now I ask myself] Do I believe it? What was the author trying to get over? What's not being said? I use that [approach] all the time now – even reading the paper. I can decide for myself now, I am aware. (offender focus group, SC11)

Another participant described how the initial discussions regarding the books, speeches and short stories they were reading grew into something more over the period of involvement in the project:

I find it difficult to express emotion, but here, it felt safe to do that, a place of safety. A place where we can be open about how it feels to be men, honestly and openly. We all progressed through the sessions together and expressed freely. It was very empowering to discuss things so openly and we all had to get to a place we could be vulnerable to each other to be honest. (offender focus group, SC11)

The significance of this is that it is the offenders *themselves* who are doing this in-depth interpretive work in a peer group setting. As one participant explained:

I've learnt to approach things from a different perspective, a different person's perspective. I have more respect for human life now – the reading has let me into other peoples' lives and they may be different than me, hold different things as being more important than me, but I understand that now. (offender focus group, SC11)

In prison there may be few opportunities to connect emotionally with other people. This despite the fact that it is accepted it is this kind of connectivity that provides an opportunity 'which expands the sense of agency and inner resources of its members' (Kilgore 2011, p.158). All these are important elements in the often long process of offenders claiming a desistance narrative for themselves and placing it in the context of the community within which they currently operate.

Discussion

The qualitative data presented in this article highlight the participant-identified benefits of the creative arts-based cultural engagement approach. These data resulted from the qualitative approach taken in the evaluation design and have been used to illustrate the appropriateness of applying a qualitative-contribution approach as opposed to a quantitative approach focused on a

binary measure of reducing reoffending measurement to this kind of data. These data suggest that there is a link between the subjective skills and insights which offenders report receiving from their engagement in creative arts-based activities and the prerequisite emotional skills required for desistance narratives. The observation bears out the subjective changes and identity transformation theorists' positions.

In terms of the desistance literature, the data presented here demonstrate that, through increasing the capacities of offenders to express themselves, these activities contributed to the developing of offenders' personal and social strengths and resources (Maruna and Le Bel 2003). These activities have been shown to provide opportunities for prisoners as agents to explore their own resources in terms of individual identity and diversity (Weaver and McNeil 2010) and assist them to locate hope and motivation in a personal discourse which makes sense to them and which they own (Farrall and Calverley 2006). Participation in creative arts-based activities has also been shown to provide judgment-free spaces for offenders to recognise their interconnectedness with others without external pressure to comply (Burnett and McNeill 2005; McNeill 2006).

Notwithstanding evidence of qualitative effectiveness of engagement in creative arts-based activities, these data show that the potential for subjective changes essential in the desistance literature are essentially unquantifiable. This is because 'large scale studies used to make generalisations about typical cases are of limited value when one is aiming to make sense of phenomena that are partly biographically contingent' (Gadd and Farrall 2004, p.131). In short, effectiveness is not uniquely to be identified with statistical significance.

While affording offenders the opportunity to engage with developing their skill set, which has been argued to assist in developing subjective changes in their identity, participation in creative arts-based activities may be necessary, but not sufficient, for desistance-based transformational identities to emerge. Offenders also require more structural or reintegrative support and opportunities with which to continue to support their desistance (such as employment and

accommodation). Notwithstanding, these enrichment activities provide offenders with different spaces, places and access to skilled practitioners who begin interacting with the creative person rather than their past offence. Creative arts-based programmes offer a genuinely strengths-based approach to character development from which subjective changes and transformational identities may spring in desire and commitment, which are both realistically grounded and can be imagined and actualised by the offender.

Opportunities for offenders to observe and practise reflective subjective-linked functions, express emotions and engaging in moral conversations in a safe and non-judgmental place within prison are, sadly, rare. However, given the increasing general interest in the benefits of participation in arts and culture, it is clear that, in the experience of 'creative writers and from the scientists of self-disclosure, another valuable vehicle for self-exploration and change is developing' (Wright and Cheung Chung 2001, p.288).

Engaging with the arts and engaging with desistance narratives are both about relationships: with one's own self and with others. Engagement is about understanding, valuing and accepting individuality and connectedness, and the life-affirming nexus which links them. These elements are not easily translated into the language of quantitative measures of effectiveness; this is not to deny their efficacy. The key tenets of the desistance literature, illuminated by the qualitative evidence presented here, highlight that it is in the sphere of contributing to the desistance subjective changes and identity transformation narrative journey, not attribution to reducing reoffending rates, that creative arts-based activities' most significant impacts can be utilised. In alignment with the tradition of the desistance paradigm, arts-based outcomes are most effectively evidenced through nuanced, ethnographic qualitative data collection methodologies which include offenders as assets in the desistance process. Offenders are, after all, experts in their own lives.

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