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Published version

ALBERTSON, Katherine and O'KEEFFE, Caroline (2016). The challenges of outcome measurement for arts practitioners in the criminal justice sector. *The Howard Journal Of Criminal Justice*, 55 (4), 496-513.

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THE CHALLENGES OF OUTCOME MEASUREMENT FOR ARTS PRACTITIONERS IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SECTOR

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Abstract

Arts activities have long been used to help rehabilitate offenders and there is anecdotal evidence to support their transformative power, yet providers have struggled to provide 'hard evidence' of their effectiveness. The UK Government has introduced Payment by Results as a principle component of its public sector reforms. Thus arts projects within criminal justice are now required to engage with an outcomes-based commissioning process. This paper uses an evaluation of the Writers in Prison Foundation to explore the challenges and possibilities presented by this political landscape and to suggest approaches to outcome measurement which will help arts practitioners to survive and flourish.

Arts-based projects; offenders; outcome measurement; payment by results

Creative and Artistic Endeavours in Prisons - Benefits and Barriers

There is a long established programme of arts-based projects working with offenders in prison and in the community. These include projects in the areas of: drama, dance, music, film, radio, and writing (see McLewin 2011 for a detailed and comprehensive summary). Some projects have had the objective of assisting with the resettlement process (Harkins *et al.* 2011) and specifically assisting with the transition into education, training and employment (Nugent and Loucks 2011), others have had a looser brief, aiming to enable prisoners to express themselves and make a change in their life (Wilson *et al.* 2009; Caulfield 2015) or to promote self-improvement (Van Maaen 2010). A wide range of benefits of engaging in arts based projects has been reported for offenders and those at risk

of offending. Some of the reported impacts relate to hard outcomes such as rates of transfer into education, training and employment (Miles and Strauss 2011) and also encouraging literacy development amongst traditionally reluctant learners (Hurry et al. 2014). More often, soft outcomes such as increased self-esteem, improved social skills, enhanced relationships, taking increased responsibility for offending behaviour and positive changes in self-perception (see for example, Hughes 2005; Arts Alliance 2010; Fletcher and Dalgleish 2012; Cursley and Maruna 2015). Despite the numerous reported benefits of engaging with the arts for offenders, introducing arts based projects into custodial settings is a notoriously difficult proposition. Some of the barriers to effective delivery of such projects can be practical, for example, lack of access to resources, lack of suitable physical space to accommodate project work, bureaucratic prison processes (Nugent and Loucks 2011) but may also be ideological. Often, the criminal justice system itself can be apathetic and suspicious when it comes to the contribution the arts can make. As a result, arts activities in prisons are sometimes marginalised and are often poorly and inconsistently funded, resulting in them being small-scale, opportunistic and short-lived (Miles and Clarke 2006). In addition, public and victim sensitivity issues abound. The idea of offenders taking part in creative arts projects involving music, writing or contemporary dance sits uncomfortably for many and can negatively influence policy and practice (Parkes and Bilby 2010; Scottish Prison Service, 2015).

Evidencing the Impact of the Arts

There has always been anecdotal evidence to support the transformative power of the arts, particularly in prison and yet providers have traditionally struggled to provide 'hard evidence' of their effectiveness (Miles and Clarke 2006; Hughes 2005). The validity of studies which have aimed to demonstrate the impact of arts interventions has sometimes been compromised by a failure to develop models and theories which can explain effects in specific contexts and also by a lack of both stakeholder and beneficiary motivation to be engaged in impact measurement activity (Daykin *et al.* 2011). The rise in the prison population, high reconviction rates, the sharp increase in costs within

criminal justice in recent years alongside significant budget cuts have resulted in significant shifts in the sector's terrain, in terms of management, accountability and effectiveness. Ultimately, these drivers have influenced the Government's policy framework towards an evidence-based approach to assess reducing re-offending performance, which adopts a largely positivist standpoint and prioritises quantitative measures (see Home Office 2010 for further details). Furthermore, under the Transforming Rehabilitation reforms, the UK Government has introduced Payment by Results (PbR) across public services (Cabinet Office 2011; MoJ 2013). The MoJ committed itself to rolling out PbR to all providers by 2015 and it was envisaged that, in this new approach to commissioning, there would be a greater diversity of providers from the public, private and voluntary sectors thus creating an increasingly competitive provider marketplace. The introduction of PbR into the criminal justice arena has provoked widespread critical debate, particularly around its potential for reducing re-offending. The unrealistically short timescales within which reoffending needs to be demonstrated in PbR schemes; a failure to acknowledge the 'zig zag' nature desistence and a resultant negative impact on 'on the ground' offender management have been highlighted as key concerns (see for example Rayment 2012; Fox and Albertson 2011; Webster 2016).

Whatever the perceived merits and shortcomings of a PbR approach, within this policy context the need for arts projects to demonstrate their ability to affect substantive change for offenders is ever more pressing. Consequently, the emergence of an outcome focussed agenda has developed which has several strands of activity. Key work areas have been around: systemising the knowledge base of arts projects working with offenders (Hughes 2005; Miles 2004; McLewin 2011); enhancing the ability of arts project to effectively measure performance and demonstrate impact (Ellis and Gregory 2011; Charities Evaluation Services, various resources at <http://www.ces-vol.org.uk>); assessing the feasibility of building an economic case for the arts in criminal justice (Reeves 2002; Johnson, *et al.* 2011;). These strands of activity represent a concerted effort on the part of arts in criminal justice to assess the assortment of performance indicators that could be used

to assess the value of creative arts based activities. This position is underlined in the Arts Alliance Evidence Library document that highlights the significant rise in the number of arts activities commissioned and increasing involvement of academic institutions in evaluating projects (Arts Alliance 2011). Alongside this activity however, arts practitioners and academics have challenged the usefulness of those measures of success favoured by the Home Office and the MoJ, arguing that the current rules of evidence will need rethinking to enable arts projects in criminal justice to prove their true value (Miles and Clarke 2006; Parkes 2011). Within this context, it has been argued that 'soft' or intermediate outcomes which create conditions that are favourable for desistance are more appropriate indicators of performance for arts based interventions than 'hard' outcomes such as finding employment or stopping offending. Findings from desistance from crime research (Maruna 2001; LeBel *et al.* 2008; Farrall and Calverley 2005; Farrall *et al.* 2011) suggest that a complex combination of factors are critical in the change process that leads to desistance. These include internal cognitive processes, for example, how people interpret their life situation (Liebrich 1993), the extent to which offenders accept or reject the 'offender identity' (Aresti *et al.* 2010) and levels of self-motivation (Maguire and Raynor 2006; Day 2013) as well as external structural factors, for example, finding employment (Sampson and Laub 1993), having somewhere to live (Rawlinson 2012) or changing friendship groups (Haynie *et al.* 2014)

Similarly, the desistance model of change and rehabilitation which has credibility with the MoJ (see Maruna 2010) acknowledges the development of both human and social capital as important in the desistance journey and identifies a range of elements necessary for desistance including: the role of family and relationships; hope and motivation; having something to give; having a place within a social group; not having a criminal identity; being believed in (cited in Arts Alliance 2011). It appears from the emerging body of evidence that arts projects in the criminal justice system can help to foster favourable conditions for these change processes to occur which can lead towards desistance from crime, as eloquently summarised by McNeill *et al.* (2011) below:

"Arts-based interventions offer more than 'just' the development of the skills of offenders; they may enable them to at least begin to think differently about themselves, their families, their relationships with their peers, and their relationships to the prison regime and the opportunities it offers. More generally, they may help prisoners to 'imagine' different possible futures, different social networks, different identities and different lifestyles. In and of themselves, arts-based interventions are unlikely to deliver the concrete, realisable sentence and resettlement plans which many prisoners will need to tackle the full range of needs, issues and challenges that they face; but they may help to foster and to reinforce motivation for and commitment to the change processes that these formal interventions and processes exist to support. They may also play a part in bringing positive social contacts and networks into the prison-based process" (McNeill *et al.* 2011, p.9-10)

Thus there appears to be significant dis-connect between the singular focus on reducing re-offending within the Governmental agenda of PbR and the ethos and values of arts-based interventions in criminal justice. There exists a particular challenge therefore for arts based interventions to develop effective and appropriate measures for capturing impact in order to demonstrate their value to potential funders and to position themselves favourably in an increasingly competitive marketplace, whilst simultaneously remaining true to their core values.

The Writers in Prison Foundation (WIPF) Evaluation

The Writers in Prison Foundation (formerly Writers in Prison Network) was appointed by the Arts Council in April 1998 to administer the Writers in Residence in Prison Scheme. This scheme was set up in 1992 by the Arts Council of England and the Home Office and places writers and creative artists into prisons across the UK to deliver creative writing, drama, video, music, oral storytelling, journalism, creative reading and publishing programmes. In administering the Scheme, WIPF supports up to 20 Writers in Residence (WiRs) at any one time across the custodial estate. In 2010 the Hallam Centre for Community Justice at Sheffield Hallam University was commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the Writers in Prison Foundation (WIPF). The evaluation was primarily qualitative in approach and aimed to inform and support the future development of WIPF by identifying the barriers and facilitators to effective delivery of the programme and assessing the impact of the programme on prisoners, writers and prison staff. Methods of data collection for the

evaluation included: a documentary review and analysis of management data; focus groups with a cohort of five new WiRs at four different time points during the first 12 month of their residency; observations of four WIPF conferences over a 12 month period; four interviews with WIPF core staff; completion of monthly diaries from five WiRs in the first year of their residency and four WiRs in years 2-5 of their residency; a questionnaire completed by 13 prison staff, seeking their views on the impact of WiRs in their prison; a 'post residency' outputs questionnaire completed by 14 WiRs who had completed their residency, to ascertain their outputs over the evaluation year; offender progress observation diaries completed by six WiRs in either the second or third year of their residency to reflect on the impact of their work on offenders. It should be borne in mind that the complete evaluation findings are presented elsewhereⁱ and the findings presented in this paper are merely illustrative of those in the final evaluation report.

What emerged from the evaluation was a complex picture of the *limitations* but also the potential *opportunities* for successful outcome measurement in arts based projects working with offenders. It is important to acknowledge the fundamental impediments to outcome measurement which exist for many small organisations such as WIPF (at both an organisational and operational level) along with the reasons why outcome measurement may not be a priority for such organisations. However, it is abundantly clear from the WIPF evaluation that the work of their WiRs has significant benefits for offenders which could usefully be captured in a myriad of different ways.

Thus the remainder of the paper is focussed around 3 key questions:

- What gets in the way of outcome measurement?
- What impacts could usefully be measured?
- How can this be done?

What Gets in the Way of Outcome Measurement? - Funding Cuts and Custodial Challenges

The WIPF evaluation revealed a complex, multi-functional organisation operating across the prison estate yet with a very small staff team. Managing a large number of residencies is a huge undertaking for the core staff group, involving a variety of tasks, ranging from both initiating and supporting progression of the residencies, to engaging with the wider arts industry and promoting their work to external stakeholders and funders. During the evaluation period the WIPF's main source of income was withdrawn as a consequence of the budget cuts by the then Coalition Government. WIPF were by no means alone in this predicament. In March 2011, 638 organisations who applied for funding from Arts Council England (ACE) had their applications rejected; with 206 of these (like WIPF) being formerly regularly funded organisations. This was a consequence of ACE receiving a 29.6% cut in its grant-in-aid from the Government (Higgins 2011). The embedding of effective measurement within organisations is dependent upon a range of factors which require significant financial input including having appropriately skilled staff in place and the provision of effective and ongoing staff training. Given the financial constraints within which many arts based organisations currently operate, it is unsurprising that many organisations are reported as spending less than 1% of their total budget on outcome measurement (Ogain *et al.* 2012). In addition, small charities such as WIPF are much less likely than larger organisations to have existing outcome measurements embedded in their practice. Yet, these smaller organisations are coming under increasing pressure to justify the contribution they make (to prisoners, to prisons, to society) whilst simultaneously struggling against the financial and technical barriers they also currently face. For WIPF such pressures were compounded by the fact that their main staff group was the WiRs who are first and foremost creative artists, thus unlikely to have experience or skills relating to outcome measurement! This results in a paradoxical situation where it is increasingly important for small arts organisations, to be able to demonstrate the value and impact of their work to funders, whilst they often lack the time and resources to commit to embedding outcome measurement within their

organisation. Thus, it comes as no surprise that almost half of all charities with an income below £100,000 do not measure impact at all (Ogain *et al.* 2012).

Some of the characteristics of both generic prison populations and also individual prisoners (as revealed through the WIPF evaluation) may also mitigate against successful outcome measurement. Some prisons in which residencies were undertaken had a high throughput of prisoners and transient populations, resulting in arts practitioners reporting inconsistent class sizes and attendances. This situation would make it difficult to undertake any form of on-going, consistent measure of progress for participating prisoners. In addition, prisons are complex systems, home to people with highly complex emotional needs who were often reported as being uncooperative and difficult. This situation could prove challenging both for the aim of engaging prisoners in outcome measurement activities, and for the arts-practitioner being in a position where they have neither the time nor energy to engage themselves whilst working with this clientele. For example, during the early part of residencies, maintaining prisoner engagement and motivation was highlighted as a key challenge:

"Finding the demoralising attitude from some lads makes me question what I'm achieving"
(Writer 2, 1st 3 months of Residency)

"No idea quite where to start...introducing myself to men who were largely indifferent to my presence..." (Writer 4, 1st quarter of Residency)

This illustrates the improbability of motivating clients who are particularly disengaged to become involved with outcome measurement activity. Also at the extreme end of the custodial spectrum, those prisons which house particular offenders (e.g. those with serious personality disorders) may pose particular challenges for impact measurements as they may lack the self-awareness to reflect on progress made, therefore making an accurate measurement of progress very difficult.

As well as the challenging client group, prison bureaucracy and relationships with prison staff proved difficult to negotiate. WiRs reported having to '*jump through hoops to get anything done*' and also feeling unconnected to the wider prison and almost invisible to some prison staff who were at best indifferent and at worst openly hostile:

"He [Writer's Line Manager] moved house and couldn't come in for two weeks, no one even noticed" (Writer 1, WIPF conference)

"I went into the Mess every day for two weeks and no one spoke to me" (Writer 3, final quarter of Residency).

What Impacts Can Usefully Be Measured?

This paper has begun to tease out certain factors which may militate against the implementation of effective outcome measurement systems in arts-based organisations in custodial settings. The following section aims to demonstrate, using examples from the WIPF evaluation, the kinds of outcomes which arts based organisations working with offenders may wish to consider capturing in order to demonstrate their ability to facilitate change. A range of impacts have been identified both at an individual and organisational level.

Organisational Outcomes

The residencies provided a total of 25,690.55 hours of purposeful activity for their host prisons during the period October 2011 to September 2012. Purposeful activity targets are very important and form one of the four healthy prison testsⁱⁱ set by HM Inspectorate of Prisonsⁱⁱⁱ. They contributed on average 2140 hours per month and worked with an average of 864 prisoners per month. In addition to these easily quantifiable measures, WiRs provide the host prison with a unique and innovative product which has a number of benefits which are perhaps less tangible. For example, prison staff highlighted the way in which WiRs have increased the appeal of reading and writing for even those hard to reach prisoners with minimal previous engagement:

"The way that [WiR] has sought to work with different areas of the prison, including the gym, and has made reading and writing appear more relevant, exciting and interesting in every setting" (GCSE English and Functional Skills tutor, Prison Staff).

This also appears to have increased prisoners' appetite for engaging with more traditional prison education, which in turn has had a positive impact on prison teaching staff:

"The Writer led short writing events which inspired my GCSE classes and raised their work to a much higher standard. The Writer has also given me lots of ideas for stimulating writing and has drummed up support for my courses on the wings" (GCSE English and Functional Skills tutor, Prison Staff)

"[WiR] input and enthusiasm which rubs off on the prisoners, and hence makes our role as teachers easier" (Senior Curriculum Team Leader, Prison Staff).

Prison staff also reported improvements in the behaviour of some prisoners, particularly the most disruptive and challenging individuals and those involved in gang cultures. There was also evidence to suggest that having a WiR in a prison can enhance relationships between prisoners and staff, uniting them in an unforeseen way and enabling common ground between the two groups. For example, in some prisons staff and prisoners have worked together in promoting the work of WiRs to senior staff in order to ensure continued funding and this development of a united front has created a feel good factor. In addition engaging with prisoners via the WiR has enabled prison staff an opportunity to speak with them in meaningful way, to find out more about what makes them 'tick':

"It also allowed me to have another common ground from which to start up conversations with prisoners whom I had no relationship with. It has been helpful and I exchanged stories and ideas with both other members of staff and prisoners alike" (Prison officer, Prison Staff).

It appears that the presence of a WiR opens up the possibility of a more open, and real communication between the two groups, thus making a positive contribution to the Prison Service Decency Agenda. This is a particularly valuable function of the WiR bearing in mind the relationship between prisoners and officers is crucial to both prison management and the rehabilitation of the offender (Liebling 2007). WiRs were also sometimes able to have a positive impact upon the

external view of the prison (for example in one prison, a reading group with vulnerable readers was included in their Ofsted report, in another the WiR was asked to contribute to the HMP Inspection report).

Individual Outcomes for Participants

Numerous benefits for prisoners of engaging with a WiR were identified over the course of the evaluation. At the most fundamental level, WiRs were able to successfully engage prisoners with learning. They provided prisoners with sufficiently stimulating subject matter to attract and maintain their attention, in a way that traditional classes do not:

"I regularly see occasions when the Writer in Residence has the power to captivate and involve the prisoners in subject matter that they may scoff at if delivered by somebody with less skill" (Unidentified, Prison Staff).

As a result of this, prisoners developed newly positive feelings about learning and increased understanding of its value:

"He [a prisoner] told me he'd never really understood WHY it's important to do well in school until he met me – now he says he wished he'd tried harder so he could get an interesting job. I mentioned his progress to the Education Governor and he said he'd noticed too!" (Writer 7).

The evaluation identified a number of ways in which the work of WIPF assists offenders in the generation of both human and social capital^{iv}, both of which have been identified as key factors in desistance from crime (Farrall 2002; Liebling and Maruna 2005; McNeill and Whyte 2007; Maruna 2010; McNeill *et al*, 2012). Through engagement in WIPF activity, prisoners are building their human capital by gaining concrete reading, writing and computer skills. In addition to this 'concrete' skills development participants have developed vital 'soft' skills, particularly in listening, communication, team working and in the giving and accepting of constructive criticism. Enhancement of social capital (Matarasso, 1997) for participants has also been observed, for example where prisoners have become motivated to engage more fully with learning opportunities in the wider prison:

"I have seen several of these prisoners transformed in terms of increased confidence and eagerness to attend literacy classes as a result" (GCSE English and Functional Skills tutor, Prison Staff).

And crucially being motivated to re-engage with family members, through writing was observed:

"It helped me explain what I wanted to say to my family. Before I just never knew what to say" (Special Project, Participant 3)

"I sent the essay to my family and it has improved my relationship with them no end" (Special Project, Participant 7).

Family breakdown as a result of a prison sentence is a major stumbling block to successful resettlement and developing positive relationships is vital to making progress (Arts Alliance 2011). The work of WIPF provided opportunities for prisoners to communicate with their families through creative writing and poetry and performances. Again this is an important contributor to the potential for desistance (Laub *et al.* 1998). As well as enhancing intimate relationships, working with the WiR has enabled participants to be engaged with the world beyond the prison walls. For example, discussions of current affairs took place in WiR sessions, offering a sense of connection with wider society. This points to enhancement of social capital and also bodes well for the resettlement process:

"Lads writing about their experiences of contact with the government and on the principles of the big society. 'Deep stuff!'. Stories of benefit cheats, wrongful arrest, MP's expenses and phone hacking. It goes someway to proving that lads here have an eye on the outside world beyond family, football scores and orders from Argos!" (Writer 2, 3rd quarter of Residency)

How Can This Be Done?: Developing a Progressive Framework for Measuring the Impact of Arts

Based Interventions in Criminal Justice

The previous section has highlighted the considerable impact of WIPF's work as demonstrated through evaluation work. Whilst some of this impact is easily quantifiable, more often it is less tangible though nonetheless important. The following section suggests how WiPF and other arts projects operating within similar constraints as WIPF may approach the thorny and somewhat daunting issue of outcome measurement in order to maximise success.

Unearthing Hidden Assets

Arts based projects working with offenders have very limited funds to invest in outcome measurement activity (or perhaps more often, no funds at all). In addition staff may have limited experience and skills in this area. In WIPF for example, Writers in Residence are often freelance creative writers and artists who are very highly skilled in their own field but may never have been exposed to a world where 'results' need to be assessed. Thus it will be necessary for Managers of these agencies to adopt an innovative approach to outcome measurement which maximises the scant resources available. Outcome measurement needs to be considered at the earliest possible stage, preferably prior to the start of project delivery. When applying for funding for projects, arts practitioners should seek out those funders who allocate additional funds for outcome measurement and/or evaluation work by an external party. If funders do not specify that they offer this, practitioners should consider asking for specific funds or indeed seek funds from another source. It may be useful to consider whether the prison would be prepared to invest in developing outcome measurement, particularly if the results of the work may contribute to the Key Performance Targets of establishments.

In terms of enhancing expertise, projects may wish to ensure that they have a steering group which includes a representative with direct knowledge and understanding of measuring impact and performance. In addition there is a wide range of high quality materials currently available to guide managers and practitioners through the outcome measurement process (see for example, Arts Alliance 2011; MacKeith and Graham 2007; Parkinson and Wadia 2010; Harrington Young 2010; Wadia and Parkinson 2011; Longstaff 2008; Dewson *et al.* 2000). These publications are easily accessible online, easily understandable and are completely free and therefore represent an excellent starting point for all projects wishing to develop expertise and implement outcome measurement systems in their own projects. Where appropriate and dependent upon what is being measured, projects may draw upon existing tools to measure the progress of their clients, which

have proven reliability and validity (e.g. the General Perceived Self-Efficacy Scale, University of Rhode Island Change Assessment, Rosenberg Self Esteem scale, Crime Pics II^v, also see Harrington Young (2010) for a useful summary of resources to support the recording of outcomes).

As already discussed, the tools employed would not need to provide direct evidence of reduced reoffending, but evidence of those soft outcomes which may be an important part of the desistance journey. Where possible a practitioner could have designated responsibility for scoping out possible approaches to outcome measurement based on the guidance available. In some cases it may be possible for prisoners who are engaged with arts projects to have a role in outcome measurement tasks (e.g. designing tools, recruiting participants to complete questionnaires and attend focus groups, data inputting). Not only will this give them the chance to learn new skills which may be useful during the resettlement process but will also give them a strong sense of ownership of outcome measurement activity.

Realising Practitioner 'Buy in' for Outcome Measurement

As highlighted by the WIPF evaluation, arts practitioners working in prisons have difficult and demanding roles. Expecting them to be involved in outcome measurement activities places an additional demand on individuals who may already feel stretched to the limit. It may feel unfamiliar and threatening for the creative work they undertake with prisoners to be scrutinised and assessed. Therefore a dramatic cultural shift may be necessary for ensuring their endorsement for and co-operation with such activities. It is vital that practitioners understand *why* outcome measurement is important, *how* it may benefit them and also the prisoners with whom they work. In particular it may be useful to highlight how impact measurement may: support and enhance their work with prisoners by identifying those areas where they are/are not making progress and tailor work accordingly; provide a motivating and empowering tool for participants by enabling them to see the progress they are making; demonstrate the value of the project to potential funders thus enhancing

their job security in the longer term; provide a basis for service development and improvement. It is also important to provide clarity on what their role will be (e.g. completing questionnaires with their service users; keeping a log of the types of work undertaken and amount of time spent with prisoners; consistent recording of any outputs achieved) and also how long such activities will take. It appears from the WIPF evaluation that prison staff are more likely to view the work of arts practitioners in a favourable light if there is direct evidence of a positive impact for the prison (this may particularly be the case if the work is contributing to a prison meeting their Key Performance Indicators). This may therefore enhance relationships between prison staff and arts practitioners and reduce the isolation of practitioners with custodial settings. Practitioners should be made aware of these potential benefits. The final potential gain for practitioners to be made aware of is that their views are likely to be sought, listened to and acted upon during outcome measurement activity (particularly where external evaluation work is conducted).

Objective Setting and Performance Indicator Development

It is of crucial importance that arts based projects know exactly which project outcomes they want to achieve and (hopefully) demonstrate through outcome measurement. They need, therefore, to develop objectives for their work which are SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time bound). These objectives should be developed in collaboration with all key stakeholders (this may include prison staff and prisoners themselves) in order to ensure that all stakeholders have a vested interest in whether or not those objectives are being met. It is also helpful for the objectives of prison based arts projects to be aligned with the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of the prison. This is likely to enhance the value of the residency in the eyes of prison staff thus facilitate more positive relationships. Project objectives need not be prescriptive, but can be flexible in order to take into account the freedom of thought required for a successful creative process to occur.^{vi}

When developing objectives, consideration should also be given to how the creative work undertaken with prisoners can contribute to the desistance agenda (e.g. developing and maintaining

hope and motivation, acquiring social and human capital, fostering personal and social strengths and resources – see Henley (2012) for a useful discussion on the potential of arts based project to inspire desistance).

Once a coherent set of objectives has been agreed, a set of performance indicators should be developed, against which the objectives can be measured at different time points. These performance indicators should: be able to be measured against a baseline (where appropriate); be realistic and achievable; be reflective of the lived experience of delivering this type of intervention within a prison setting; be developed in collaboration with arts practitioners and also offenders to ensure authenticity; be developed in consultation with prison staff, to access intelligence on positive impacts which they observe (e.g. a reduction in an individual's self-harming, reports of disturbances, increases in offenders accessing education, more positive relationships between prisoners and staff). Such consultation will also ensure that performance indicators capture those specific ways in which a residency can contribute to the prison's Key Performance Indicators. It will also be important to capture innovative practice and those unpredicted outcomes which are often a feature of the work of arts based practitioners working with offenders. Similarly, performance indicators need to be aligned with stakeholder priorities (e.g. prison service and potential funders) whilst simultaneously remaining true to the creative process and ensuring that the individual prisoner (*rather than the individual's offending*) is at the heart of their work. Indeed in order to reflect the diversity and uniqueness of those prisoners participating in arts based projects, it may be necessary to adopt a 'pick and mix' approach to choosing the most appropriate indicators of success for each client.

Cultivating an Effective and Empowering Data Collection Strategy

Following on from the development of performance indicators, a clear data collection strategy needs to be developed to provide solid evidence of impact. It is likely that many projects are already required by their funders to collect a certain amount of monitoring data to demonstrate progress,

outputs and outcomes. Therefore, in developing their outcome measurement strategy, projects should make the most of the data they already collect in order to minimise any duplication.

A range of different data could be collected, depending upon the objectives which have been set and also the setting. For example, in those prisons which have a reasonably stable population and throughput, tools which enable quantifiable measures of change (i.e. at the start and end of engagement with the project) could be employed. In those prisons with more transient populations, 'one off' measurement could be employed, for example feedback activities at the end of sessions.

Where appropriate and dependent upon what is being measured, this may draw upon existing tools (mentioned above) which have proven reliability and validity. In order to capture a whole range of outcomes (both organisational and individual) projects may want to consider conducting interviews or focus groups with project and prison staff and wider stakeholders, if appropriate. A questionnaire may also be used to access views from a larger number of people. All data should be collected in a way which enables exporting for statistical analysis and this can be built into the design stage of projects. Arts based projects should attempt to develop outcome measurement tools which can enhance rather than decrease motivation and empowerment of prisoners. Those which offer a visual representation of progress such as outcomes stars, radar and spider diagrams (Harrington Young 2010) are particularly encouraged. Practitioners may also want to develop creative and innovative methods of data collection (for example those which incorporate creative writing, drawing, photography and digital media) which may harness the creative skills of prisoners. Once data collection systems are in place, projects will need to consider how all monitoring and performance measurement data from all residences can be 'pooled' centrally and easily accessed when required.

Discussion

This paper has used WIPF as a case study to highlight the challenges of outcome measurement for arts based projects in the criminal justice sector and these will undoubtedly have resonance for many creative arts based projects being delivered in prisons today. We have also explored the types

of impact which such projects may seek to capture in order to demonstrate their value to potential funders. Finally, we have offered a framework to support projects in thinking about the kind of approach to outcome measurement which they may choose to adopt.

The introduction of outcome measurement activity (which represents a new way of thinking and a potential increase in workload) is unlikely to be applauded by arts practitioners who are working against a backdrop of challenging circumstances and a bleak economic outlook for the arts in general. However, it was striking to the authors during the WIPF evaluation period that *in spite of* the monumental challenges frequently faced by arts practitioners, WIPF and many organisations were continuing to deliver exciting and innovative work in prisons which offered the potential for affecting real change among their client group. We would encourage arts practitioners to harness some of their considerable energy to develop a new agenda for outcome measurement which seeks to celebrate rather than stifle creative processes. If practitioners draw on the wide range of free resources currently available; attract outcome measurement expertise into their organisation via their steering group; develop performance indicators which are aligned with the desistance agenda and, perhaps most importantly, develop empowering methodologies which are appropriate for their client group, outcome measurement need be neither costly nor daunting. Furthermore, by bestowing outcome measurement with the attention it requires in the current political climate, the potential benefits for arts projects are considerable. Not only will projects be more likely to attract funding for their work but they will also develop intelligence on the progress of their clients which will enable more effective action planning and tailored support. This will provide a basis for service development and improvement in the longer term.

This is not a one way street however. In order to provide a facilitating environment for arts-practitioners to engage with outcome measurement, commissioners, funders, and academic evaluators need to maintain an open attitude to what counts as 'evidence' of success and to

acknowledge the shortcomings of their own approaches. For example, it is unlikely that arts-based interventions will lend themselves to randomised controlled trials, the so called 'gold standard' for evaluation. Issues around attribution are likely to be problematic as substantive change in offending behaviour is rarely achieved from a single intervention but is often the combination of interventions, sequenced to support the case management process, which enables change to be embedded in a person's future lifestyle. When shaping evaluation strategies it is important not to over-promise on the outcomes and seek to place the work of a single project in the context of other interventions to which the prisoner will be subject to ensure a fit is found between different intervention strategies. The achievement of a range of intermediate outcomes will, cumulatively, help produce change on the end outcome of reducing re-offending. Commissioners and funders of evaluation work need to be mindful of these complexities if they are going to enable the arts in criminal justice to reveal their true worth.

Finally, we would encourage arts practitioners to engage in open and honest discussion with statutory criminal justice agencies (i.e. NOMs, MoJ) regarding their acceptable 'standards of proof' for the impact of arts-based interventions. There are very many practitioners who have a long and impressive history in delivering services to offenders and thus are well placed to position themselves as innovators and campaigners in ensuring an approach to outcome measurement which is commensurate with the goals and values of arts-based services for offenders. In adopting such a pro-active and positive approach, impact measurement need not be railed against but embraced as an opportunity to show to others what those in the business of delivering arts-based programmes to offenders already know- it works!

Notes

ⁱ See Writers in Prison Foundation website: <http://writersinprison.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/WIPN-Evaluation-Final.pdf> (accessed 22th February 2013).

ⁱⁱ The other three tests are Safety; Respect and Resettlement

ⁱⁱⁱ Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons Criteria for assessing the treatment of prisoners and conditions in prisons, Version 4, 2012. Accessed at <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/about/hmipris/adult-expectations-2012.pdf> 28th June 2012

^{iv} Human capital may be seen as the acquisition of skills and knowledge, social capital may be seen as access to those social networks which are necessary for the acquisition of human capital

^v <http://www.crime-pics.co.uk/cpicsmanual>. (accessed 3rd April 2013).

^{vi} For example, the flexible approach to developing residency objectives which is adopted by WIPF is essential as new ideas develop organically as the residencies progress and also the prison or prison population may radically change over a period of time requiring a rewrite of the brief.

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