

Welsh Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Prison provision in Wales](#), HC 742

Tuesday 27 November 2018

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Members present: David T.C. Davies (Chair); Guto Bebb; Ben Lake; Jack Lopresti; Liz Saville Roberts.

Questions 359 - 395

Witnesses

I: Evan Jones, Head of Community Services, and Junior Smart, Business Development Manager, St Giles Trust.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Evan Jones and Junior Smart.

Q359 **Chair:** I welcome Mr Evan Jones to the Select Committee today. He has come to give evidence to our inquiry into prisons and prisoners in Wales. Thank you very much indeed, Mr Jones, for coming along. We have a few fairly open questions. Other members are going to have certain specific interests. If you feel that there is some information that we are not asking you about and you want to bring it up, feel free to do so. We probably have an hour or so, so I might have to stop you if the questions or answers are getting too long; don't worry about that.

I will start off and ask if you could give us a bit more information about your work with prisoners in Wales?

Evan Jones: We are a medium-sized charity, originally started in London. We have been in Wales for about seven years now. We originally came into Cardiff Prison under some funding from the Waterloo Foundation and that put us in a position to bid when the Transforming Rehabilitation changes came up. That is the sort of part privatisation of probation that happened about four or five years ago. We got ourselves into the right bid, as it turned out. It was all a bit of a lottery, but we went with Working Links and they won the Wales contract. On the back of that, we have been in most of the Welsh prisons now and we got into Berwyn when it opened. The only one we are not in is Parc, but that is about to change. That was because it was a private prison and there were some complexities there—here is Junior, jolly good—but now we are in all the prisons bar Parc and we are likely to be in Parc in the next few months.

Q360 **Chair:** Great. Welcome, Mr Smart. Thank you very much. Don't worry, we are just asking specifically about the Welsh aspect of things.

Are there any problems that are more acute for Welsh prisoners than for prisoners based in England?

Evan Jones: Wales has had a different direction of travel for housing policy. There was priority need for prisoners. It came in about the same time as TR, so I think it was about four years ago the change happened. When we started working in Wales we could take somebody on the day of release to the local authority and they were obliged to house them. Wales moved from that priority need approach to a homelessness prevention model, which frankly we found not very effective. We are obliged to notify local authorities, I think it is about 50 days before release. We rarely get acknowledgements of those pieces of information we send through and, because it is not an obligation to house, it often feels to our staff like they are just wasting their time.

England has gone in the other direction. In England there was no priority need for prisoners at all and they have now adopted the homelessness



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prevention model that Wales started. Now the two models are really quite close but not exactly the same.

Q361 **Chair:** I thought Wales had priority for prisoners but had recently dropped it.

Evan Jones: Yes.

Q362 **Chair:** Do you deal with female prisoners as well as male prisoners? Obviously there are not any female prisons in Wales.

Evan Jones: We do not. The way the contracts work is it is where the prisoners are. Under the Welsh CRC contract that Working Links oversees, it commissions us to work in the men's prisons and Safer Wales to work in the women's prisons. That means that they work in England, so they are in Eastwood Park and Styal.

Q363 **Liz Saville Roberts:** Thank you for mentioning the Community Rehabilitation Companies and Working Links. Given that the consultation on probation is proposing bringing probation back into public control in Wales, how do you foresee that changing what you do with Through The Gate services?

Evan Jones: It is a worry for us as an organisation, as you can imagine. We hope at the very least that our staff will not be put out of jobs if there is a big change. The ideal arrangement for us would be to carry on subcontracting to the new body, whatever that may be, whether it is Wales NPS or a new Welsh CRC. We believe there will still be a need for the roles our staff carry out, because what we do is in prison-based resettlement work and I think there is an ongoing need for that.

Q364 **Chair:** Can I welcome Mr Smart? I know you have had problems—as we all do—with the buses here. Would you be able to tell us a little bit about your work on the SOS and SOS+ projects and how that helps, not necessarily in Wales, but just generally?

Junior Smart: Yes, huge apologies for arriving late. SOS is a completely ex-offender-led project. It uses trained ex-offenders, those who have lived the experience, to provide consistent, holistic, tailor-made support, not only to those who are caught up in gangs—and gangs is a broad umbrella term—but those caught up in what we call criminal lifestyle choices, negative lifestyle choices. We provide consistent intensive support in order to engage those young persons to help them get back into education, training and employment, enabling them to realise their aspirations and to break free of gangs and live prosocial lifestyle choices.

We do that through the use of trained ex-offenders. St Giles Trust has this fantastic model called the peer adviser programme. It has enabled the project to bring in ex-offenders and train them to an Information, Advice and Guidance level 3. As you know, the prison estate and those who are criminally informed have lower numeracy and literacy skills than the rest of the population. The process that occurs, which goes from



them being on one side of the table as a client, if you want to call it that, to the other side as a caseworker is quite intensive and it lasts for between six and eight months. They do the qualification. It is an evidence-led qualification as well, practice-led and basically once they have that qualification, hopefully, because we are a charity, if the opportunity presents itself, they can have a chance of getting full-time employment.

Q365 Chair: Roughly how many people do you think you have helped over the last few years since the project was set up? In the brief you sent us, it looked like you had very good figures on reoffending, much lower than in general. Can you quantify that a bit more?

Junior Smart: This year in London we have reached 14 London boroughs, but it is even bigger than that. We are on target this year to reach 800 young people, I believe. That has meant that we are at 40 full-time members of staff, those who have lived the experience, and we have around 15 volunteers. That is necessary because before workers go out to work with a potentially high-risk client, it is important that they are shadowing workers and they are supportive. Our management structure is really supportive and we have some amazing success with that.

In terms of a solution, I am really proud of the way SOS is, because we are basing it on the validity of having lived the experience and cultural competency. My background is not too dissimilar to the young people that we are trying to help; I made some huge mistakes and got sent down for 12 years. One of the aspects of the project that I had when I left custody—and I was afforded the role before I left custody—was who would have been able to reach me. It would have been someone who knew first-hand what the reality was. I knew what the dangers were. It was never like a police officer never came into my school and said, “Right, 65% of people get stabbed with their own weapon”, but my reality was completely different.

SOS+ was born out of the record numbers of serious youth violence we had on the streets of London in 2008. One of them was the younger brother of the client that I was working with. He was not murdered through gangs; he was murdered through school rivalry. His attacker happened to have been carrying a knife with him at the time when he saw a kid from a rival school and decided to use it. Working with that mum, the inconsolable tears—I can’t really put it to you. I think it is one of the sad things with this generation. I do not think it should become normal for a parent to bury their own child. She challenged me because her son was not murdered over gangs. She really praised the work that we were doing, but she was like, “Why aren’t you going into schools?”

Literally myself and Evan were able to put together the model for SOS+ within six weeks. It started off as a voluntary thing that members of the team would do, but now it is oversubscribed and we are called out by schools all over the country. Only earlier I was fielding a call from a school out in Hull that wants some school sessions delivered. Again we



use trained ex-offenders, those who have lived the experience, but we are not a scare straight programme. Our aim is to demystify and deglamorise and also impart real tools to the young people.

Chair: That is very interesting. Can I bring in some of the other members of the Committee? I think we will come back to some of that in a minute, if we may.

Q366 **Liz Saville Roberts:** If we could now turn to the issues facing young people. Evan, what do you think are the main issues facing young people in custody from Wales, be they in Wales or in England?

Evan Jones: With young people in custody, we are not working in Parc, which is the YOI for Wales, so we are not directly on this. We are tending to see the consequences in the community. Broadly speaking, what I would say with young people leaving custody is it is the lack of joined-up working. Custody is not a great outcome anyway. Wales has done brilliantly with reducing the number of under-18s in custody, far ahead of the reduction in England. Generally, we think it is a very bad outcome for young people to go to custody, but if they do have to go and it is unavoidable, what you need is really solid work on both sides of the gate.

When the SOS project started, what Junior did initially in the first year or two of the project was to work out of one young offender institute, bringing young people back to one borough in London. It is that continuity. Prison is a horrible place. Whatever you hear about PlayStations and holiday camps, it is not true. Nobody in prison wants to go back, so they are engageable in prison. If they come out and find that things are just as bad as they were when they left or worse, they are unlikely to engage positively, but if we can convince them that things can be different on release, we can make it work. I think that is what Junior has done so many times.

Q367 **Liz Saville Roberts:** What I would particularly like to ask both of you is what the effect is of placing young people far from home. There are far fewer in prison in Wales, but when we went to HMP Parc we saw many young people from south-east England placed there, that distant from home. What effect does that have?

Junior Smart: The whole impact of prison and incarceration has multiple effects on every aspect really, from the emotional upheaval to the number of clients I have seen in custody whose families are unable to reach them. I suppose another key thing now is that we have gangs in prison. That is another reason why people are being moved out into prison estates that are further away. As a blanket, I think it should be treated on a case-by-case basis.

From a practitioner level, it always surprises me that we still base things on the big questions. Practitioners tend to base things on the big questions, "Are you a member of a gang? Have you been criminally exploited?" and if they do not get the right answers there is not a problem. Actually, we have seen through the issues of people in prison



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that criminality has continued and the risk elements need to be managed. As a result, inmates are being placed further away from home. The impact of that may be that, first, they build new associates, which continues their criminality but, secondly, it destroys the family network. That is one of the bigger picture questions.

Evan Jones: There are cultural issues as well. A few years ago we used to work at HMP Ashfield near Bristol. At that point it had a very large Welsh contingent, which it does not now, because I think they are in Parc and there are fewer young people being imprisoned, but we found that group did suffer quite badly. They were in a reasonably unfamiliar environment. At that point youngsters from London were travelling much further than they are now, so you had a strong London contingent in Ashfield, quite a large Welsh contingent and, frankly, one was terrified of the other. I think you can work out which way around it was. It was not nice or pleasant for them and it was even worse than an imprisonment experience should be.

On your other general point about moving people around, we have done quite a lot of work with some of the children's homes in south Wales, where lots of kids from out of area were placed. We suspect that quite a lot of county lines operations have started as a result of placements in children's homes and secure units and other units. We have this strange thing going on where kids who will live on only six streets in London suddenly are out of place on the other side of the country. We think that is often how it comes about.

Q368 **Ben Lake:** To stay on that, you have already touched on the gang culture and how things have changed recently. Would you be able to give us a bit of a summary of how big a problem gang culture is at the moment?

Junior Smart: The reality around gangs is that we have seen so many changes happen over the last number of years. The county lines is a huge issue and it is a very scary issue. We have not even touched on the tip of the iceberg of the numbers that are involved. People always focus on the drugs aspects of county lines, but I think what we have seen quite a lot of lately has been sex trade, slavery and drugs. The whole issue of missing children is a big part of that. Whether that is underreported is a big issue for us, because we are coming across a lot of parents who are refusing to report their children missing purely because they have had previous social services sanctions so that rather than exacerbate the situation, they will not note that their child has been missing or report it. That means there are huge numbers there. Girls are talking to us about sexual exploitation and abuse. The gateway to the whole world is very petrifying and very scary.

I think one of the key things that society has missed and the judicial system has missed is the increase in technology, the rapid use of technology. The cutbacks against various services have not aided at all, so we have to realise that everything comes at a cost. For example, if



you look at the turn towards zero-hours contracts, parents are working for longer to achieve the same outcome. The upshot of that has been less parental presence.

The cutback to social services has meant that the thresholds have been raised. That means that more kids are going under the radar and they are not being reached—even to the cutback of youth services, which is a real pivotal thing for me. Recently I did some work out in a rural area and the youth club was oversubscribed. The night that I was there, there were over 120 kids all vying to be in this safe space and they all separated out. I honestly thought that that youth club or that youth centre would have been state-run, but in fact it was a charity. The big question for us is, in the absence of that, where would those 120 kids be? They would be on the streets; they would be in the shopping centre; they would be hanging around.

We know for a fact that where there is a high number of young people, the propensity for violence goes up tenfold. We have seen the use of pupil referral units. It is almost like an ipso facto thing now to just kick a young person out of school, but we know that, for example, they could be there under twilight hours a few hours a week. Again, they are surrounded by negative exposure levels. All of this has had a combinative effect on gangs and their reality. The young people have no problem accessing social media, but most of the statutory services do seem to have an issue with engaging young people on their own territory. We need to involve the young people in their solution, and we also need to help them change the narrative.

It is crazy, you can go online and see adverts, most of the time through the cookies that your computer installs as you log on to a site, but when was the last time you saw an advert talking about prosocial lifestyle or “Live knife-free” or “London Needs You Alive”? Those sort of things are not about and so the young people are being hit by these negative messages. They are focusing on the glamorisation of gangs. That is why it is up to teams such as SOS and St Giles to demystify and deglamorise that.

Evan Jones: Something I would pick up on here is that I think the gangs label can be useful and dangerous. It is really important to stress that even the gangs in London are not like the gangs I believe to be in the US. We do not have monoracial gangs and in most parts of the UK we do not have intergenerational gangs. The exception is Glasgow where you do, but you do not here. The gang world is very fluid. All the gangs are effectively equal opportunities employers—they will take anyone. That is more than you can say for the opportunities that kids are looking at, so you can see where the appeal is. But we get young people from outside the big cities buying into a myth around gangs. They think they are joining the Bloods and the Crips. They are not.



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These people are not their mates, these people want to exploit them and use them and make money out of them, but they are buying into it and social media is a very large part of that. We need to understand there is not such a thing as a cohesive gang in this country, but there are lots of informal structures of one sort or another that have built up around different sorts of criminality and behaviour. We need to get our heads around that.

The other point to make is that one of the effects of good policing in loads of areas outside London has been that it has created the opportunity for county lines, because local policemen are good at catching local criminals. It happened in Newport about four years ago, a really big bust, a bunch of big, burly local lads put away for seven or eight years. Newport did not have a particular county lines issue before that, but then you create a vacuum and suddenly, from having a quite unpleasant drugs market, you have a really unpleasant drugs market. It is a real conundrum for policing and policy, I think, because doing what is straightforward and easy for the police can have worse consequences.

Q369 Ben Lake: Are there differences in the types of operations or organisations that you might find in some of the cities as compared with more rural areas?

Evan Jones: Our impression is that the cities have been at this for longer. Space is tight. If you want to expand a drug-dealing operation and you are part of a London group, you will have to compete with another group that is as unpleasant as you are. That is one of the drivers for county lines, that you can go to Maidstone, Margate, Southampton and the local criminals there will be a bit scared of you, so it gives you expansion opportunities. I think it is just really that it has been going on for longer.

Junior Smart: I recently did some work out in Gwent and one of the things that we found that was quite unusual compared with the London counterpart is that the community was still speaking. The community had not been put into that oppressive state yet, which tends to happen. The community or people around will see it but they will present the police with a wall of silence and that is because they are scared of repercussions. Out in Gwent in Wales, the community was still feeding stuff back the police. I think that is because of the way that Wales is; you still have the police out there doing the community policing model and the community trust the police. My advice to them was, "Take advantage of this before those people move out of the area and then you are presented with that wall of silence".

It is also important to mention the numbers, because right now in London, where we have this serious issue with knife crime and the killings and only a handful of arrests have been made, something has to be said about the detection levels and the numbers of policing. When I did the same exercise up in Wales, what we found was that although they had more numbers on the ground, the detection level was quite low. For us,



what we are basically saying is then the odds are in the young people's favour to do what they are doing. If you only have an X, Y or Z detection level, the odds are in your favour if you are doing something illegal. That is something that has to be looked at as well.

Q370 Liz Saville Roberts: Evan, I would like to come back to something that you mentioned earlier on. What I have not done is thank you for coming in, both of you, and I am sorry you had problems getting in, Junior.

Junior Smart: No, that is fine.

Liz Saville Roberts: You mentioned, if I understood correctly, that Welsh offenders were being bullied possibly in some institutions by other groups of offenders. Could you tell us more about the nature of their experiences? We are from particular Welsh-speaking areas. Is there anything particular you could say about the experiences of the Welsh?

Evan Jones: At the time we were funded to work with the Londoners in Ashfield, so we were not working with the Welsh lads but we were conscious of what was happening. We saw that the Londoners were monopolising the social spaces, the high-status activities like the music studio and things like that. The Welsh lads were tending to just keep back, keep out of it and were looking very nervous, frankly. We did not pick up on any language issues there. I do not know the spread in Ashfield at that point, whether it was a predominantly south Welsh group or whether there was a north Welsh group. But we certainly got the sense that they were having an even worse time than anyone should be having in a YOI.

Q371 Ben Lake: You mentioned the differences you experienced between the detection rates in Wales and some parts of London. Are there any particular measures that strike out to you to say, "If we were to implement X, Y, Z, we would do a better job"?

Evan Jones: There always seems to be this tension between community policing and intelligence-led policing, that intelligence-led policing gets you more busts but then nobody sees the police. The fact that you still have that bit of feedback on the ground in Wales is a credit to there being community policemen and also the fact that the policemen are from that community. We have a massive problem in London that none of our police live in London. That is a massive problem and it is a route you do not want to go down, because they do feel disconnected from the majority of the people they are dealing with. That was all I wanted to say on that one.

Q372 Jack Lopresti: Could I ask Mr Smart about your PhD research? Can you tell us a bit about that? It sounds very interesting indeed. How are you getting on with it?

Junior Smart: It is about the ties that bind. I am really interested in the relationship between family members and the young people who are involved in gangs or criminal lifestyle choices. It has to be said that I am



still at the very early stages of this and it has been perseverance; this is a baptism of fire, but it has been really exciting. Things that have been interesting to me have been adverse childhood experiences especially and looking at the impact that it has, but also the language. I have been really lucky to be doing the work that I am doing with St Giles ever since my release from custody, so I am always about applying everything that I learn and seeing how that translates into reality. Even from when I was doing my degree, that has always informed my practice.

One of the bigger things has been that how we train professionals came about from me doing my degree. I became acutely aware that so many services are out there that do not know what they are doing. I do not mean that in a negative way, but there is a lack of evidence-based practice, UK-based evidence, because most of our evidence about gangs tends to come from America, which has its pluses but it has more faults than it has benefits. But they are not only not sure of what they are doing but why and they also could not articulate why certain things that they do work in certain situations and why others do not. For us, that has been one of the key parts.

In training professionals, what we have noticed is that just like what happens with domestic violence, when the teacher becomes aware and they get trained, you would expect the awareness levels to go up and more kids get flagged because they realise now that cases that they have closed should have remained open. The same thing is happening with county lines. If you look at everything in isolation—the parent who spots the train tickets in the son's room, along with that fine powder, which you would not have ever thought was crack cocaine, and also the community warden who spots the kid hanging around with the known associates—if that information is centralised, it is how I have said. You would immediately think, "Oh no, that kid is at risk of being drawn into county lines. That kid is at risk of being exploited". It shows that all the services need that training in order to become more aware and in order to stop more kids getting brought into county lines in the first place. It has informed every part of my work.

Q373 Jack Lopresti: How long have you given yourself to do it? It sounds like a mammoth task.

Junior Smart: Gosh, it is a mammoth task. I certainly want to get it completed in the next few years, but it has been eye-opening. The funny thing was that when I did my degree and my MA they were pretty straightforward, but with the PhD I am almost like a free radical, so I can study anything and that has led to me being drawn off in loads of different directions.

Q374 Jack Lopresti: But are your own experiences in your day-to-day work heavily influencing the research you are doing?

Junior Smart: Absolutely, and vice versa. Ironically, academia does not recognise the lived experience part of it, but I reckon the two worlds



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could join very well. That is evidenced by the level of success that we have through the projects. My team may not be a team full of academics but, my gosh, they have the cultural competency that the young people are facing. To connect those two worlds just gives you so much power and so much better outcomes.

Jack Lopresti: Fantastic. Good luck with that.

Junior Smart: Thank you very much.

Q375 **Chair:** Mr Smart, what would you say were, from your experience, the good things and the bad things about prison and custody? What would you recommend to policymakers and people working in the justice system to try to make it more effective?

Junior Smart: The ironic thing that always surprised me, even when I was a serving prisoner, was that we know what the factors of the pathways of offending are. You have seven pathways and nine pathways for females. That is the difference between a high prison population and a low prison population. If you imagine the gaps and you address those gaps, you will end up with a low prison population. What used to surprise me the most is that there are quick wins there that can be quickly and easily accessible but nobody does them.

For example, we know that employment reduces the likelihood of reoffending, yet we stay away from outcomes that would enable offenders to get employed because at the moment society still has the stigma around employing ex-offenders. It is almost like they must have the mark of Cain and everyone must know who they are, but in my mind I see a society where you could be served by an ex-offender anyway. If we can get rid of that stigma and potentially—

Chair: We were yesterday in a restaurant in Cardiff. It was very good as well.

Junior Smart: Yes. If they incentivise businesses, for example, by a reduction in the taxes or a reduction in the outgoings, more businesses would be incentivised to employ offenders. That removes the stigma, more offenders are employed and we save more money. We saw the same thing with the social impact point. You would save so much money later on by having employment. That certainly was a key thing for me. I think we need to have a healthy debate about the whole aim of prison. What is it there for? The rehabilitation of offenders as well as the punishment.

Q376 **Chair:** In Cardiff yesterday we saw what appeared to be good work going on in giving people skills: workshops, carpentry, the restaurant, cleaning, mechanics and so on. But one of the issues that was put to us was that a lot of people were not there long enough to benefit. I think what they are trying to do is break down the courses into little parts so it builds up to a qualification. Playing devil's advocate with both of you, I know you would probably say that custody is the last thing, but if you take somebody with



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no skills and give it six months or a year, couldn't you do more with people than if you just had them in for a couple of months?

Evan Jones: I think what we would say to that is do not bother with the couple of months, full stop. Yes, we see better outcomes from longer prison sentences; we cannot deny that. We see the sort of revolving door scenario of people who have been street-based drug users, that kind of thing. Those prison sentences seem completely negative. What little kind of cultural capital someone has built up in the few months they have been out—they might have secured a hostel bed, got a private rented flat, maybe even doing a bit of cash in hand work, but something is progressing positively—then they go back to prison for two months and they are not in there long enough to do anything meaningful.

We know prisons are not drug-free environments, so that is one of the things that a prisoner could achieve if it was drug-free. It does not because it is not. People sometimes switch their drug use while they are in prisons and go on to Spice, which is the most easily available drug in prison, and then go back to heroin or something else when they come out. They achieve so little on those short ones. I think you would probably agree with that, wouldn't you?

Junior Smart: Yes. For me, one of the striking things was if you look at SOS, it is the continuity of that. What you have is people were gaining great skills inside custody, but then they come out and it is a cliff edge. There is no continuity. When we were starting to do the work with SOS, it was engaging people up to six months before their release and six months after. That continuity of support is missing and so much information does not travel with that offender when they are getting released. They treat the offence as the cause when really it is the symptom. You cannot address that unless you address the underlying reasons why that person is offending in the first place.

Evan Jones: A general comment on workshops in prisons is that there is almost always far too little capacity. When you go on a prison visit, you will be shown around and you will see a lovely workshop, but if you asked, "What percentage of people are out of their cells right now doing something constructive?" you would get a shockingly low figure. The people who served you in the Clink restaurant were probably out of Prescoed Prison. I do not know if they mentioned that, but they really come out of Cardiff Prison and walk 100 yards to the restaurant.

Q377 **Chair:** We knew about Prescoed. We put that question to them and the answer was, "Most of them will have a job within a week but not necessarily doing the workshop they wanted". That was pretty much what we were told.

Evan Jones: All right. That is good.

Chair: You may have a different experience.



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Evan Jones: We are aware of most prisons having a lack of capacity in workshops. In Berwyn, I do not think the workshops are fully operational now and that is to do with different contracts. The industries contract was really slow off the ground. Also a lot of the stuff they do in prisons is in a bit of a time-warp. They give certificates in how to operate floor-polishing machines. The sad fact is you only get those certificates in prison, so the person who polishes these floors probably does not have a floor-cleaning machine certificate because you only get them in prisons. People leave with what they think are useful qualifications that may as well have "HMP" written over the top, which is really sad.

Q378 **Ben Lake:** Briefly on that gap in provision, once an individual leaves prison, bearing in mind county lines and what you have already said, I think you mentioned equal opportunity employers, the gangs. Is there any evidence so far that some of these organisations are targeting offenders as they leave prison?

Junior Smart: Gosh, yes. The reality is that people sophisticate the whole idea around grooming. It is very easy to groom any young person and you only have to go as far as an evaluation on county lines. You will see that 100% of the young kids that we are working with involved in county lines came from pupil referral units. Everyone in prison wants to find out; there is always a new way of doing things. You would literally recruit from local authority homes, and children's homes are another key recruitment ground. Some groups have said that they will hang around schools because the kids that they want to target are the ones that leave school last, because they probably have detention, and they are the ones that have been a bit scruffy and they are the ones with less parental presence. It is a lot more simple than people realise.

You only have to think about the issues that happen when someone leaves custody. For the kid who comes out of the gates, with all fairness, it is a small discharge grant and they are expected to just get on with it, go back to the same area with the same associates and less support. Who are they likely to call: the people who got released a few weeks earlier who are now posting stuff on social media about how much money they are making or are they likely to go, "No, let's do things the hard way. Let's go back and try to—"?

In my first experience where there was a kid who was being released, he was given the discharge grant and mum refused to meet him at the gate. I met him at the station and he had used some of his grant just to get in a cab to get down to the station and it was like, "Hang on a second, no, mate". I do not know if anyone has gone through the process of what happens when someone is released but it is challenge after challenge, setback after setback. For him, we were really fortunate we had the offices at St Giles and he could call up the HP, the homeless persons' unit, but he would have been held on a waiting list for about five to 15 minutes. If that was a pay-as-you-go phone, that would have just been, "Oh, if this thing is going to be long, I am going to go back to doing what



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I was doing before". We have to look at those gaps. If you want to make sure that fewer victims are created, that society is safer, you have to address those gaps. There are no quick fixes around it.

Evan Jones: There are some bits of the Transforming Rehabilitation work that we can be pleased about, but one of the things that has happened in there is language has been appropriated but not practice. Our teams are called Through the Gate teams but they are not. They are up to the gate teams. The work we are funded to do—this is the same in the English prisons—is to support people around their housing and resettlement while in prison. We would always argue that the best service is one that works both sides of the gates.

Q379 **Liz Saville Roberts:** You mentioned housing earlier on, that housing, health, learning and skills are devolved in Wales. How do you see St Giles's experience on the ground in Cardiff as being different from that in the other places where you support? Are there particular areas of good practice or areas that you think we should know about as a Committee when we come to writing up our inquiry?

Evan Jones: With the housing, I would say what is underdeveloped is access to the private rented sector. We all know that social housing is a diminishing asset. It is not diminishing as fast in Wales as it is in some other areas but it is still diminishing. The most rational and most likely outcome for a single man leaving prison would be private rented and I think we need better access to schemes for that. That is not an expensive thing to organise, so that would be one of my recommendations.

In health, I am not aware of any differences. We get good outcomes and we get bad outcomes. Prison-based health services tend to be pretty lousy everywhere, particularly mental health. Unless you can exhibit every symptom of a mental health condition according to the textbook, you are not getting anywhere. But we have not noticed that.

Around learning and skills, I think I have seen more integrated working in Wales and I have certainly seen some attempts to bring stuff through the gate. What Junior was saying did not happen, the information and skills people get in prisons were not being recognised outside. I know some work has been done on that in Wales, which is positive. There is the advantage in Wales that you can get people around a table quicker and get to an issue quicker. There is a little bit more belief in Wales that it is possible to fix things, which is always refreshing, because working in London, where we all gave up years ago, is a very different climate. Yes, not huge differences, but on the housing I think it is private rented.

This is just purely my finger in the air: I think it is the Welsh antipathy to the private sector. There is a cultural difference and in many ways I think it is brilliant that there is a lack of enthusiasm for the private sector in parts of Wales and more—

Q380 **Chair:** You have benefited from it a bit though.



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Evan Jones: We have, yes. No, in some ways, but I do see more confidence and more belief in the centralised solutions in Wales. I think the flipside of that is a reluctance perhaps to use the private sector sometimes. In other areas I have seen a real embracing of the private rented housing sector, which has all sorts of model issues attached to it—you are channelling public money into private enterprise and so on—but as a way of housing people coming out of prison and out of other institutions, it is one of the few things we have left.

Q381 **Liz Saville Roberts:** Is there any issue about the location? When somebody comes out of prison, if they are a long way from their home local authority, does that have an effect or not on how easy it is to interact with housing and also how easy it is to make sure they have a job to go to or not?

Evan Jones: Absolutely, yes. You think of who is in a prison and they are going to be people who live near that prison. Berwyn is a great example; we were commissioned there to work with the Welsh contingent. The English guys were meant to be moved back to resettlement prisons within England near their home address prior to release and that has not been happening. Our team has been helping with the resettlements of English guys over quite a large area. It is much harder because you do not have a relationship with that council, you do not have a relationship with the local providers, so it is always more work if it is a greater distance and if it is something you do not do regularly.

If you have to do it all the time, you get better at it, but the prisons sector always has strays. There will always be somebody who you just cannot understand: "How did you end up in this prison?" But at the moment with the resettlement prison model breaking down a bit, we have a bigger problem there because some prisons are not really meant to be providing resettlement for everybody who is in them. Berwyn is a classic example there.

Q382 **Liz Saville Roberts:** Are you seeing resettlement units being closed in prisons?

Evan Jones: We have not seen them being closed. There are some prisons that are designated as non-resettlement prisons. In that case they should not have a resettlement function because anyone who is in them should be moved to another prison prior to release. Again, this system sometimes does fall down.

I think at the moment Usk does not have a resettlement unit because it is a bit of a specialist unit. The theory was men from Usk who are predominantly sex offenders would be moved to Parc prior to release, because they have a sex offender unit and they would get their resettlement service that way. I think after April they are going to change that and there will be direct resettlement services from Usk, but there are some prisons where there are no resettlement services because nobody is meant to ever be released from those prisons.



Q383 Chair: Can I put a question to Mr Smart? It is going back to something you said earlier about the difficulty the police have in finding knives and things on people; I think you alluded to that, anyway. Although it is perhaps a bit off topic from justice, what do you think about the current stop and search regulations? Do you think that police should be stopping and searching a bit more or is that, in your opinion, causing too much angst within the community where those searches are going on?

Junior Smart: This is a bit of a mixed bag. When we are speaking to the young people at the moment, they are literally saying there is not enough reason for them not to carry. However, we know that previously where stop and search is not used with a level of intelligence it can cause more harm than good to the communities and more harm than good to the relationships between the police and the young people.

Looking at the great model of practice in Wales, where the community is speaking, ideally you would want every young person to feel that they could trust a police officer and that police officers would protect them, that they could go to them if there was an issue that they felt really scared about, but unfortunately that does not happen in London. I think that is largely intergenerational from all of the bad experiences. We see very similar examples when we have done work in Birmingham and Manchester—the community and police relationships are frayed.

What I would say is that we need to have intelligence-led policing on the stop and search. I do think it has its place and what I would like to see is more of an overlap. There are better ways of informing those issues. For example, we have seen heat maps where critical incidents have happened in the past. If it was overlaid with information from, for example, social media, we could target the areas and the schools and the young people that are watching the material or are likely to initiate reprisal attacks. That is another way of doing it. Definitely there are so many approaches to this, but something has to be done.

Q384 Chair: I think there was a suggestion—I have made it but I have heard it made by the Home Secretary, I think—that the Government may look at changing PACE so that police could take account of a previous criminal conviction. For example, if somebody had recently been convicted of carrying a knife, they might be more likely to be subject to stop and search for a period of one or two years afterwards. Would you see that as fair or unfair within the community?

Evan Jones: That does not sound unreasonable because that is what we would call intelligence-led. I think the thing we are desperate to avoid—and we do see—is the police officers who will stop a couple of lads because they look like likely lads and search them. The kids will not do anything wrong, they do not have any drugs on them, they do not have a knife on them, and then the policeman says, “We will get you next time”.

Chair: That is totally unacceptable, yes.



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Evan Jones: What we need is, “I am really sorry, guys”, and it has to be a positive thing.

Q385 **Chair:** At this point, I could declare an interest as a special constable for nine years and say if that happens it is totally unacceptable and an apology and a, “Sorry to bother you”, is a very good way of starting any conversation.

Evan Jones: Absolutely, yes. We do think there is a need for it, though, because the level of knife carrying has just gone through the roof nationally. I do not know if you looked at the Serious Violence Strategy stuff that came out. We have the killings in London, but almost every other part of the country seems to have increased knife carrying. With those knives being there, it is only a matter of time before they get used. This is our view on this. We do need to reduce numbers of the knives that are just there in any tense situation.

Q386 **Chair:** It is finding a way of doing it without upsetting the community who we are trying to protect, in a way, isn’t it?

Evan Jones: Another way of looking at it may be that if a knife sweep was done and a few streets were sealed off, which I have seen done—and I have seen it done well—every kid caught with a knife did not just get a threat or a possibility of prosecution, they also got a support package, if people went around to talk to their families, if a bunch of other stuff like that happened. Rather than seeing the knife as an intention to kill someone, you see it as a distress flare and target services on those young people who are found to be carrying knives. That could shift people’s perception about what it is all about, “We are not just stopping you because we think you are going to kill someone, we are stopping you because we are really worried”.

Q387 **Chair:** I deviated a little from the script there. Does anyone want to come in? Otherwise, an obvious question for perhaps both of you is: what sort of recommendations would you like to see from us that would help people in the system at the moment? I think Mr Smart made a very good point about employment, which I imagine we would all agree with. Are there other issues?

Evan Jones: The use of people with lived experience is a really big thing for us as an organisation. Some you were in Cardiff yesterday and you met some of our peer advisers, I think. Every year we are training 300 to 500 people with a level 3 qualification. Many of them are released in areas where we deliver services, so they come and volunteer for us and some then become our paid workers, but many are released into areas where we do not work, where there are not organisations that have a culture of employing people with previous convictions.

We think the more that we get out there the better. First, you are diverting people from potentially slipping back into crime because they are employed and, secondly, you are putting really credible people in front of people who are committing crime. We think that increases the



chances of getting through to them and engaging with them quickly. That would be one of our really strong recommendations. It will be a while before we have prison officers with pre-cons—that would be our real result—and police officers, but there are a lot of organisations where I think many more people could be employed.

Q388 Chair: Do you think that registering for Universal Credit in prison would be helpful?

Junior Smart: Gosh, yes. We have this terrible situation at the moment where they are saying that all of their claimants will not get their benefits in time for Christmas. They are almost setting up a whole load of families to start taking out loans and whatever else. I have been trying to get my head around this for quite some time, like what is the reality? Is it the fact that we can stomach that so many people in areas of deprivation are experiencing poverty? Can we stomach the fact that so many young people are dying on our streets and there is cause and reason behind it? It is a really big thing. To me, it is pretty much common sense to set that up.

I was able to sit for the interview at St Giles and I was able to do that about four or five months before my release. I can speak from the heart about having a job to go to. I came back into the same area with the same associates, but I had a job. It was not a back-room job and it was not in an environment where if a mobile phone went missing, everyone was going to be pointing at me as the ex-offender. I was given an opportunity and that to me was the most incredible thing ever coming out of custody to.

Q389 Chair: What did your former friends make of it? Dare I say it, but did they think you had perhaps sold out to the system or did they look up to you as somebody who had done something that they had not?

Junior Smart: It was a bit of both, but to me it did not matter because I had seen my friends for who they were and I had made very constructed, deliberate changes that I was not going to go back to that. That enabled me to live in the same area and not be bothered about them. I saw my life being on a completely different path. I was the kid that had dropped out of school without any GCSEs at all. I had retaken them in custody and I was coming out to a job and it was going to be working with young people. Some of the elders, because their kids were older, they wanted their children out. They were like, "Oh my gosh, kids are walking around with firearms now", so they were more on a thing of like, "Do it, but just save everyone that wants to be saved".

Q390 Liz Saville Roberts: I am really interested in what you are saying about how you make that change, because it must be so difficult for many young people to leave their friends behind. What is the critical sort of support that enables people to get from one point to another there?

Junior Smart: It is ironic. If we look at anything in life, be that saving or training, it more or less boils down to consistency. I was really fortunate.



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In prison I had a really good head of learning and skills and development who believed in me. You can take apart any prison estate, whatever you want, but it boils down to the quality of the staff that you have there. The same thing, you take away our workers and the project name does not mean anything. She really believed in me and she orchestrated an opportunity. The idea of me going out to St Giles was not going to happen, so she brought them into the prison. I literally went on the hard sell for about a good hour, then she advocated for me and the situation arose where I could sit the interview.

But she also made lots of other stuff happen, things that you would not believe. One of the things that I wanted to do was study in Open University in custody but they would not allow the books. There is no inter-prison book exchange; there is no way of recording. Those days they used to show the Open University programmes after a certain time and there is no way of recording. She did that and she also gave me the set-up where I could do the mock interviews. From the experiences I have seen now within custody, it has been a return to the race to the bottom. They are spending less money per prisoner per head and some of the best officers unfortunately have gone. But also they are banged up for longer and there is less of that time where you would be able to sit with somebody and they would really get to know and understand what your motivating factors were.

There were a lot of experiences as well that scared me in custody, if I am honest with you, and I had the benefit of people setting up counsellors to come in. What is ironic again is HMP staff talking about trauma-informed practice, but they do not think about the trauma that their staff may experience. I was going through my own personal trauma of being in an isolated environment, miles away from home, in prison, despite what my friends had told me about it being a holiday. I was faced with this really grim reality and also knowing that it was not going to be over in a few weeks but that I was going to have year on year on year of this.

Unfortunately, I think for the young people we work with, once they get over a certain period of time they have to acclimatise to that environment and that means making associations with people. I would rather that would be with somebody who had the intelligence and the cultural competency, if you will, that can help them navigate that, as opposed to the people that they would associate with on their wings who are going to just be filling their heads with, "There are other ways of making more money and there are better ways of doing it". Do you see what I mean?

Evan Jones: What we see is that there has to be an inner motivation to change but, as I said, there often is. Most people, particularly those who have fallen into custody, do not want to stay there, do not want to go back, but then you have to build on that. You have to be able to provide practical help, you have to be able to provide role modelling, you sometimes have to be very quick on your feet, because young people's motivation is not always consistent—it comes and goes. If you miss it and



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you do not provide the right package at the right time, you do not get very far.

As Junior described, what matters so much is somebody who appears to care. It is often seen as the sort of luxury end of any public service, but that is the bit that makes the difference. As Junior said as well, we have lost a lot of good prison officers. The way the prison officer staff group has been treated, a lot of the longer-serving officers have been encouraged to leave. As the charity in the prison, we found some of them to be quite awkward so-and-so's, but it turns out they were awkward so-and-so's who knew how to run a prison. These were often the ex-forces guys and things like that who are very good at organising a prison.

What we have now is a lot of much younger prison officers who are lasting two weeks on the landing and quitting. The result of those staff shortages is that the prisoners are just kept in the cells. All those positive opportunities cannot happen because they are literally not getting to the library or to a workshop. We have services in prisons that do not have any customers because there are not enough prison officers to move people around the wings.

Q391 Chair: This is an obvious question: how big a problem is safety in prisons for young people? I think I know the answer to that. We have picked up that it is more dangerous in places like Feltham than in Cardiff or Swansea. Overall, what approaches could be implemented to support prisoners who are at the risk of either bullying or self-harm?

Junior Smart: It is a big question. I still go in and see a number of clients who are in custody. To be honest with you, the whole prison environment now is very scary for me. I have heard alarms go off, I mean for minutes. My understanding was it would be like lock the building down, get everyone behind their doors. I thought it was just they were testing the alarm; it was the actual alarm. I put my head around the corner and there was a young girl in the corner, so the inmate was in control. He had her backed up against the wall. That is absolutely insane. What kind of situation do we have where the inmates are in more control than the officers? It cannot be safe if you do not have the officers. They need to have that level of autonomy and being able to control. A young girl, my gosh, if she was not wearing a uniform, I would be like, "She is really young to be in this kind of situation". Personally, I reported back straightaway that for me it was very unsafe.

I know there has been a reduction in bullying across the board, but the way it is going now seems like a tick-box exercise. It is like, "Are you a member of a gang? No, you are not. Have you been involved in county lines? No, you are not". You know what I mean; they are expecting the young people to say yes. Again, this is where cultural competency comes into it. If you know the other side of it, you would know that you would never speak to an officer, even if you are getting beaten up every day, because if you speak to an officer you are going to be deemed to be a grass and then you are likely to be victimised wherever you go.



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I really wish they would do something about shutting down the mobile phones. I have seen so many videos, even one very recently, where a guy was getting beaten up in his cell in a prison and at least three of the other guys on that video had mobile phones. The prison was not stopping them from intimidating witnesses, carrying on with whatever operations they were doing. It was not changing anything for them. It would be nonsensical to put someone in custody to save society, to reduce the likelihood of harm to the rest of society, if in fact that person in custody is still doing that. That is a massive problem.

Evan Jones: On the phone thing, obviously there should not be phones in there anywhere, but there are. If it was possible to block them, that would be money well spent.

Q392 **Chair:** We asked about that yesterday, didn't we? I got the feeling it was not quite as technologically easy as I have read in the papers.

Evan Jones: Yes. I am not an expert either. I go into some buildings and I cannot get a signal, but—

Chair: Yes, that is true.

Liz Saville Roberts: You cannot if you are in the middle of a city, so potentially if you block one mobile phone signal, you would probably block a lot of other things as well.

Evan Jones: You are surrounded, aren't you? The other thing is the effect of Spice has been very noticeable. Drugs have been getting into prisons for years, but we used to be dealing with cannabis and opiates and the effect of those drugs on people is usually not to make them into punch-drunk, crazy, aggressive individuals, whereas Spice seems to have that effect sometimes. Spice is so concentrated and obviously there is not very great quality control wherever it is made. I regularly get calls from my prison-based staff saying, "D Wing is shut because there is a new batch of Spice". They will literally know that a new batch of Spice has come on to that wing and everyone is off their faces and the officers are barely able to control the wing and it is just locked down.

That is a huge problem. When you think about the people who are not involved in drug-taking on that wing, for them it is a complete disaster; whatever they wanted to do in education or anything is not going to happen now.

Junior Smart: Another thing to mention is that we were doing some work in a prison and there were inmates getting vast sums of money sent in. That is a rich source of intelligence, because obviously it would have to get paid in by somebody and from some sort of bank account. Then what the head of that prison said was, "I don't want you to help me get rid of gangs, just help me control them" but that is the cause of how the gangs have been able to continue. If you are getting sent £800 day, even if you can only spend £30 of it, it is a massive missed intelligence



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opportunity by the policing estate. You just map that stuff back and find out where the money is coming from and who.

One last thing I thought that was important to mention, one of the good things I thought that worked really well and continues to work really well, is exclusive landings. People who want to keep their heads down and not get involved, where it is enhanced, tend to help moderate and control themselves. They do not want drama on that wing or that landing because if there is then everyone could be in trouble for it. I honestly think that not enough was done in utilising positive peers on the rest of the estate. One of the things that we know with the prisoner listener scheme is the reduction in prison suicides by having those with lived experience being used. You will see great successes with St Giles and their peer adviser models that operate in prisons, but in fact you see it through most peer-on-peer models that are used in custody.

Q393 Chair: Isn't it a problem, though, if you take all the sensible ones off and put them together on their own landing, that is great for them—?

Evan Jones: But the other parts of the prison become harder to manage with no positive role models.

Chair: Yes, it is a difficult one, isn't it?

Q394 Liz Saville Roberts: The Prison Officers' Association is very keen on the further rolling out of pepper spray, PAVA, which I think is going to go into the 10 priority prisons. What do you feel about that?

Junior Smart: My opinion is I do feel sorry for the officers and their experiences. My big question is: are these officers going to be properly trained and properly resourced and is it not a shortcut to just basically dealing with the fact that there are less of them on the wing? They had this thing where they were talking in America about rolling out teachers with firearms. Then you think about the trainee teachers—it is them versus the classroom. You have these really young officers who are in the job for the right reasons, hopefully, but this is going to become an ipso facto thing. The real answer would be to give them more numbers, give them more resources and then they have more strength when they stick together that way, as opposed to just using a tool of resistance.

Q395 Liz Saville Roberts: Have either of you had any contact with Unlocked Graduates, which is to train people as graduates to become prison officers?

Evan Jones: I think I have had a couple of contacts, yes. I have heard reasonably positive comments about it. Everyone compares those types of programmes to Teach First, which has an incredibly high attrition rate, and I think there is a police version as well. What was it called? We were involved in that one.

Junior Smart: Police Now.



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Evan Jones: Police Now, yes, which again was the same kind of thing of trying to bring a slightly different group in.

Liz Saville Roberts: There are only 15 on it so far.

Evan Jones: Yes, I have just heard some general positive stuff but nothing particularly solid.

Chair: I think that has drawn us to an end. I thought that was a fascinating discussion and I would really like to thank you both very much indeed for coming. I think we have all learned a lot from that, so thank you very much.