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w i s e g r o u p



*routes* out of prison 

EVALUATION OF  
ROUTES OUT OF PRISON  
Summary Report

This report was produced by the Criminal Justice Social Work Development Centre for Scotland, University of Edinburgh, and was approved by the Routes out of Prison Steering Group on 15 September 2011.

The Wise Group is grateful for the funding that has been provided throughout both phases of RooP from the Scottish Government, the Big Lottery Fund, the European Social Fund and Glasgow City Council.

In addition, the Wise Group would like to thank the partners in the delivery of the RooP service, the Scottish Prison Service, Apex Scotland, Families Outside, Sodexo and Serco.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Routes out of Prison Project (RooP) is a peer support project which provides a confidential support service to prisoners returning to Glasgow, Lanarkshire, North Strathclyde and South West Scotland Community Justice Authority (CJA) areas after serving a sentence of between three months and four years. RooP offers its clients peer support to link them to services in the community.

RooP was established by the Wise Group, Families Outside and the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) in August 2006, and received two years of funding from the Scottish Government to deliver the service in three prisons and four Community CJA areas. In 2008 Apex Scotland joined the Partnership and the Project secured further funding from the Big Lottery Fund and is now (2011) operational in seven prisons. The Scottish Government and Big Lottery Fund provided **funding for an evaluation of the service, and both 'phase one' and 'phase two'** were carried out by the Criminal Justice Social Work Development Centre for Scotland. The key findings from phase two will be presented here, with reference being made to phase one where relevant.

### Key Findings

- The 'bridging' model of through the gate support developed by RooP in phase one (August 2006 to December 2008) has been scaled up and successfully extended from the original three prisons to seven with similar positive results.
- The ability of the Life Coach to 'walk the journey' with the client, by meeting at the gate, accompanying them to appointments and explaining the purpose and processes of other services is the aspect of RooP most highly valued by others working with this client group. Two interviewees from other agencies in the community noted that without the support of their Life Coach, the client may not access the service at all.
- Over the course of the phase two evaluation (January 2009 to December 2010) the RooP **Prison Life Coaches 'signed up'** 3,612 prisoners to the service, which may be higher than the total number of individual clients as **some individuals may have 'signed up' to RooP on more than one occasion. Of these 3,612 'sign ups', 1,557 (43%)** went on to engage with the service in the community. The majority of clients are male (93%) and the largest group of males and females are aged between 21 and 30 years (46% and 41% respectively). Nearly two thirds are serving sentences between six and 24 months and for most this is not their first time in prison; 40% have served between two and four prison sentences and over a third have between five and ten previous sentences.
- The most common support needs identified by RooP clients relate to addictions, homelessness and unemployment; 70% reported being out of work for 12 months and 56% for over two years.

- **Nearly a fifth of engaging clients (19%, n=293) achieved a 'hard', or employment, training or education related outcome, with 5% of RooP clients securing employment.**
- Between August 2010 and January 2011, RooP helped 81 homeless clients find accommodation, supported 88 clients in accessing health or addiction services, helped 123 clients access the financial benefits they are entitled to and assisted 17 clients in beginning to tackle their debts.
- In the year 2008-09 RooP Family Support Co-ordinators (FSCs) were referred, and engaged with, 92 families. This rose to 116 referrals and 95 engagements (82%) in the year 2009-10, with direct or indirect support being provided to 132 adults and 103 children. The support provided is flexible, and can include a range of issues such as housing, domestic violence, caring responsibilities and accessing benefits, education, training and employment. Family Support Co-ordinator clients who were interviewed as part of the evaluation (n=3) were all very positive about the service they had received, explaining that while the imprisonment of a loved one had been very difficult for them, working with the FSC had helped them both practically and emotionally.
- Data collected on the SPS database (PR2) was used to analyse return to custody rates for clients who engaged at least once in the community and those who did not engage at all; 40% of the former returned to prison compared with 44% of the latter.
- Life Coaches reported that the operation of the RooP Project has been consolidated over the course of phase two and its operational practices have become clearer. Interviewees observed that while RooP had become **more 'professional' in its organisational expectations and practice**, this **'professionalism' does not seem to have limited the Life Coaches' capacity to offer effective peer support.**
- Peer support was highlighted by all key stakeholders including prisoners as a key strength of the RooP Project and the work of all the Life Coaches from all backgrounds was commended. Peer support has also brought organisational challenges in providing appropriate types and levels of supervision for a non-traditional workforce.
- A challenge for RooP is how to work with clients who have a range of **complex needs and who may take some time to become 'job ready', but are still engaging well with the Project.** Successfully working with such clients is likely to require a multi-faceted and complex pathway of support. **The Project's own capacity to support this client group has been increased with the appointment one full time and one half time dedicated Family Support Co-ordinators and the introduction of a personal development course that is run by the Wise Group and accessible to RooP clients.**
- **Both phases one and two evaluations found RooP's links with other services to be variable, suggesting the Project may benefit from building stronger connections with other services, and perhaps promoting RooP more widely in the areas in which it is operational.**

- All interviewees, including CJA Chief Officers and Prison Governors, hoped that RooP will secure the funding required not only to continue the service, but also to expand across Scotland.

## Discussion

1. The Routes out of Prison Project (RooP) offers advice and assistance to prisoners returning to the community after serving a sentence of between three months and four years. As RooP is a peer support project many of **RooP's 16 Life Coaches have personal experience of offending or addictions. The Project offers clients a 'through the gate' support service whereby** community based Life Coaches endeavour to meet with the client at least twice in the prison before they are released, to establish a working relationship and an outline plan of action.
2. It is well established in the wider literature that prisoners serving short-term sentences are a particularly vulnerable and hard to reach group, experiencing multiple, complex and often overlapping needs. These individuals may require support and assistance with a range of issues such as housing, addictions, mental and physical health, family relationships, education, literacy, numeracy and employability and employment.
3. **Following the client's release the Community Life Coach will link them to appropriate services, accompany them to appointments, advocate on their behalf and provide practical assistance, emotional support, praise and encouragement. In this sense, RooP provides a 'bridging model' of support from the prison to the community and to other community services. Once the client has 'successfully' addressed their issues and the Life Coach feels they are 'job ready' the client is passed to one of RooP's Employment Consultants, who will help them find employment, training or education.**
4. Over the 24 months between January 2009 and December 2010 RooP has **'signed up' a total of 3,612 clients, 1,557 (43%) of whom engaged with the service in the community. Nearly a fifth of these engaging clients (19%) achieved a 'hard', or employment, training or education outcome, with 5% of RooP clients securing employment.**
5. **The way in which the Project records "soft' outcomes', or links with other community agencies, has changed over time and has moved from the number of engagements with other agencies in a year (1,047 between January and December 2009) to the number of clients who were successfully linked in with other agencies (579 or 73% of engaging clients from January to December 2010).**
6. More interestingly, from August 2010 a tool was devised to record how clients had benefited from the links made to other services by their Life Coach. Between August and December 2010, RooP helped 81 homeless clients find accommodation, supported 88 clients in accessing health or addiction services, helped 123 clients access the financial benefits they are entitled to and assisted 17 clients in beginning to tackle their debts.
7. Taken together this outcome and engagement data supports the conclusion **drawn in phase one that the 'through the gates' peer support model is a**

useful way of engaging with large numbers of this often hard-to-reach **client group**. The **'soft' outcome data** collected from August 2010 provides a clear illustration of how engaging with RooP can have a positive impact on the lives of its clients, and how the bridging model can help them to access the services they require to resettle into the community.

8. Phase two of the evaluation also sought to gather some measure of the longer term outcomes for RooP clients through an analysis of return to custody rates, using data collected on the SPS database PR2. Return to custody rates were calculated for clients who had engaged with the service at least once in the community and those who did not engage at all, with 40% of the former returning to custody during the period of the evaluation compared to 44% of the latter. While this 4% difference is not statistically significant it is within government expectations as the **Scottish Government's own target is to reduce reconviction rates by 2%**, and gives cause for cautious optimism that RooP can have a positive impact on the resettlement of short-term prisoners and help some move away from offending.
9. Project staff (n=22) reported that the day-to-day running of RooP has become smoother over time with improvements in communication and clearer procedures and structures to the Project. This was generally viewed as a positive development; however there may still be further progress to **be made as over half of the operational staff felt each of the Project's four teams operated differently, or that they did not know how other teams worked** (9 of 17 interviewees who discussed this).
10. Virtually all interviewees from the RooP Partnership, other community agencies, the CJAs and former clients were very positive about the peer support offered by RooP, and the work of all the Life Coaches from all backgrounds was commended. Interviewees felt that the peer support element of the Project gave RooP credibility with clients, encouraged engagement with the service and motivated clients to make positive changes to their lives.
11. **Support and supervision for this 'non-traditional' staff group** continues to be an issue, with 26 respondents noting that concerns regarding the appropriate type and levels of supervision have still to be resolved. This is perhaps unsurprising given the multiple and complex needs of this client group and the potential vulnerability of Life Coaches. As one Life Coach noted, working with these clients can be like **'looking in a mirror'**. It is therefore important they receive sufficient support to be able to establish clear boundaries with clients and make appropriate referrals.
12. Phase two interviews supported the earlier finding that the RooP model is a successful way of engaging with and supporting short-term prisoners. The ability of Life Coaches to meet their clients at the gate on the day of liberation was identified as a particular strength by other community agencies and CJA Chief Officers (n=2). However where this bridge takes clients in terms of services is less guaranteed, as the needs of clients cannot always be met by the existing RooP Partnership and links with agencies in the community remain variable.

13. These findings suggest RooP would benefit from being part of clearer, **diverse 'pathway to resettlement' for clients, with increased opportunities** to access the wide range of provision and supports they might require. Some interviewees (n=3), particularly CJA Chief Officers, were of the view that RooP places too much importance on moving clients into training and employment, which they felt may discourage clients who are not ready for employment from accessing the service. This view may simply reflect perceptions of the Wise Group as an employment focussed agency, or may stem from a lack of knowledge of the role of the Life Coaches in helping clients connect with the services they require. Progress may be made in both areas by continuing to develop stronger links with other services and by promoting the bridging element of RooP more widely. Part of this could **be revising RooP's current definitions of 'hard' and 'soft' outcomes, to reflect the value of the work done by Life Coaches.**
14. There is a clear role for the Community Justice Authorities and Community Planning Partnerships in assisting RooP access multi-faceted pathways to the services their clients require, as they are best placed to promote and co-ordinate collaboration between community agencies. While partnership working between community agencies is an important part of providing the best possible voluntary assistance for this client group, service provision may vary across Scotland with implications for RooP, as it may affect the **supports the Project's clients can access, particularly in the current funding climate.**
15. There are further areas of developments that could be undertaken by the RooP Partnership, for example exploring ways of better sharing knowledge, experience and expertise between the Partners. In relation to client skill development, a lack of internal training courses were highlighted by RooP staff as a limitation of the Project, particularly as Employment Consultants reported that cuts are making it increasingly challenging to access training **for RooP's clients.** However, the secondment of two dedicated Family Support Co-ordinators could be seen as a step towards a more holistic general throughcare approach, as this development brings a wider focus to the Project. This development was well received by both clients and interviewees from across the RooP Partnership (n=21), with one client explaining that she had really benefited from having someone there **'just for her'.**
16. Given the multiple and complex needs of many of the clients who work with RooP, it is inevitable that some will continue to struggle to engage or to make positive changes to their lives even if RooP was part of a comprehensive pathway of service provision. Services will only be successful in moving a client away from offending when they are genuinely ready to change and, as some former clients observed (n=2), this **'readiness to change' can only come from them as individuals.**
17. When asked about the future of the Project, all the respondents interviewed indicated that they would like to see the Project not only continue, but access a more secure funding source that would allow the RooP approach to expand across Scotland.

18. Overall, the evidence is that RooP is seen as providing a valuable service by a range of key stakeholders, including clients, CJAs and other community agencies. This view is supported by phases one and two of the evaluation **which has found the peer support, 'through the gates' model to be useful at engaging with an often hard to reach client group on a large scale.** Further, the return to custody data gives cause for cautious optimism that RooP may be able to help its clients move towards desistance from crime and away from offending. At the same time the evaluation has identified a number of areas for development that will allow the Project to better evidence its impact in the future, and may lead to improved outcomes for clients.

## Recommendations

### The Bridging Model

- **RooP should build on its success in reaching a wide range of short-term prisoners across the prison estate by looking at ways of increasing engagement in the community.** Part of this will require collecting better information on the reasons clients might fail to engage in the community and more detailed information on the type and length of engagement.
- **The 'meeting at the gate' aspect of the Project has been found to be particularly successful and should be used where possible and agreed to by the client.** RooP should build on its successful meeting at the gate model as it helps clients to access the supports they require upon liberation, assisting them in avoiding potential 'distractions' such as drugs, alcohol or their peer group. Where possible this should be combined with a pre-arranged appointment with a community agency, as this allows clients to immediately begin to address their barriers to resettlement, and interviewees from other community agencies explained that it is helpful for Life Coaches to attend meetings to support their clients.
- **The RooP Partnership should consider developing more formal relationships with other services, and perhaps take steps to explore with other community agencies the circumstances where more formalised agreements may be beneficial.** Both phases one and two of the evaluation found the relationships between RooP and other community agencies to be generally informal, with some reporting that they only work with one Life Coach. As many of RooP's clients have multiple and complex needs, the ultimate success of any bridging model is likely to depend on there being an established and multi-faceted 'pathway of support' to the services that clients need to successfully resettle into the community.
- **The RooP Partnership should consolidate and consider developing more internal, structured personal development and employability courses for its clients. This could fulfil potential to develop RooP's own capacity to support and sustain vulnerable clients who have accessed the supports they require, but are not yet job ready.** Employment Consultants noted that this 'middle point' of the RooP model can be problematic. Over the course of the evaluation the Wise Group

introduced an internal personal development course which is accessible to RooP clients, and its popularity suggests that more courses of this type would be a useful resource for the Project.

- **The RooP Partnership should review what can be done to promote and maintain good communication with the CJAs and other relevant bodies such as the CPPs, and links with community agencies should also focus on raising awareness of RooP's work and on demonstrating impact.** While there was a great deal of enthusiasm for the Project, the majority of interviewees from the prisons and other community agencies also commented that they would like to receive more feedback on the outcomes achieved. Maintaining an ongoing dialogue with CJAs in the areas that RooP is already operational may also provide a platform to explore the feasibility of the RooP model being utilised to provide throughcare for any prisoners who request voluntary assistance under the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2003, with other CJAs and key stakeholders, given the evidence that RooP is able to engage with a large proportion of this population.
- **The role of the Family Support Co-ordinators should be promoted more widely.** Very few community agencies who participated in the evaluation were aware of the services provided by the Family Support Co-ordinators.

### Working with Vulnerable clients

- **RooP is able to reach clients with a range of multiple and complex needs and the potential of the Life Coaches to help these clients access an appropriate range of services should be maximised.** Many interviewees were very positive about RooP's peer support approach, but some felt that the current service model could be improved to better meet the needs of the most vulnerable or chaotic clients. Two possible models of practice for working with such clients were identified by RooP staff and other agencies interviewed as part of the evaluation. The re-instatement of the Emotional Support Team that was part of the earlier life of RooP, and forging stronger links with services that offer more intensive support that can work to stabilise the client, and then refer them back to RooP or the Wise Group when they are ready for training or employment.

### Peer Support and Life Coach Role

- **Peer support has been found to be key to RooP's ability to engage with and support this vulnerable client group. The Project should continue to recruit Life Coaches with a range of shared experiences from different backgrounds and the current proportion of peer workers (70% of Life Coaches) should be maintained.** Clients, other agencies and other key other stakeholders have all reported that the peer support model encourages clients to engage with the Project and makes Life Coaches more approachable and easier to communicate with. However interviewees also emphasised the value of the work done by Life Coaches without an offending history, and this mixed staff group not only allows Life Coaches to learn from each other but also gives Life Coaches the space to

shift their identity from 'ex-offender' to 'support worker' as they move further away from their previous lifestyle.

- **The role of the Prison Life Coach is important to RooP's success.** The Prison Life Coach must be able to recruit clients, serve as the interface between RooP and the prison and work in relative isolation. It is likely that this post is best suited to more experienced Life Coaches.
- **The best professional support systems for Life Coaches and other operational staff should be explored further.** A large number of interviewees felt that the issues raised throughout phase one and two evaluations about the support and supervision provided to operational staff had not been resolved. The current structures should be reviewed, as improvements will not only benefit operational staff but may also establish a constructive dialogue between operational staff and RooP Management that would allow the experiences of operational staff to support good practice. Approaches to identifying, developing and sharing best practice between Teams, such as holding more full staff meetings or carrying out 'case studies' of particularly successful, or challenging pieces of work should also be explored.
- **The RooP Partnership should explore how they can best assist Life Coaches develop within RooP and also move on from the Project.** The majority of the RooP Management Team hoped that the Life Coaches would be able to use RooP as a 'stepping stone' into other positions, either within the Wise Group or elsewhere, however there is not as yet a formal mechanism in place to assist Life Coaches who may wish to move on. While some Life Coaches have benefited from some informal opportunities to gain additional experience, such as 'acting up' as Team Leader to cover annual leave, the Partnership should consider how best to develop a 'staff development pathway' for Life Coaches who may wish to pursue other opportunities.

## **RooP Partnership**

- **The sharing of expertise between the RooP Partners has been found to be beneficial to the delivery and development of the Project, and should be encouraged.** The evaluation found examples of the value of sharing expertise between the Partners, but representatives from the Partnership also reported a desire to have a greater input to the planning and delivery of RooP. This would allow the Project to draw from a greater breadth of knowledge and experience, and ways to facilitate this should be considered.
- **The Project has established very good relationships with the prisons and the RooP Partnership should reflect on how these can be best utilised to support the delivery of the Project and how they can be replicated with other agencies.** Interviewees from both SPS and private prisons reported very good relationships with the Project, and these should be utilised to promote and develop good practice. For example, if there are steps that can be taken to increase the contact Community Life Coaches have with clients held in Barlinnie prior to their

release, as this may impact on engagement in the community . Consideration should also be given to how these strong relationships can be replicated with community agencies as RooP's links with other services based in the community were found to be more variable.

### **Evidencing Impact and Data Collection**

- **The Project's data collection systems should be improved to best evidence RooP's impact.** RooP would benefit from having a single database containing all the relevant demographic, engagement and outcome data for each client, as opposed to the multiple databases/spreadsheets currently used. This would allow a much more detailed analysis of factors affecting engagement and outcomes than is currently possible. The Project should also **review data that is routinely collected on the database and consider investing in a new or upgraded database**, as currently a range of important information is only collected in the client's file.
- **RooP should review its definitions of hard and soft outcomes and explore ways of recording distance travelled and self-report re-offending data to better evidence the work of the Project.** RooP currently records employment and training outcomes as 'hard' outcomes and linking clients in with other services as 'soft' outcomes. This conflicts with the generally accepted definition of a soft outcome as something that benefits the individual but is not tangible and easily quantifiable; for example increased self-esteem would be a soft outcome. It is recommended that the Project's definition of 'hard' outcomes be revised to capture all easily quantifiable outcomes, whether they be related to employment and employability, for example accessing training, or whether they are achieved through Life Coaches supporting clients with other difficulties, for example accessing housing or addictions supports.
- **RooP should also explore how best to access data held by other agencies that might evidence the Project's impact and effectiveness.** A dialogue with agencies such as the Scottish Government and the SPS that act as 'gate keepers' to data on return to custody/reoffending would be useful in establishing how RooP can access data that may help evidence the Project's impact.