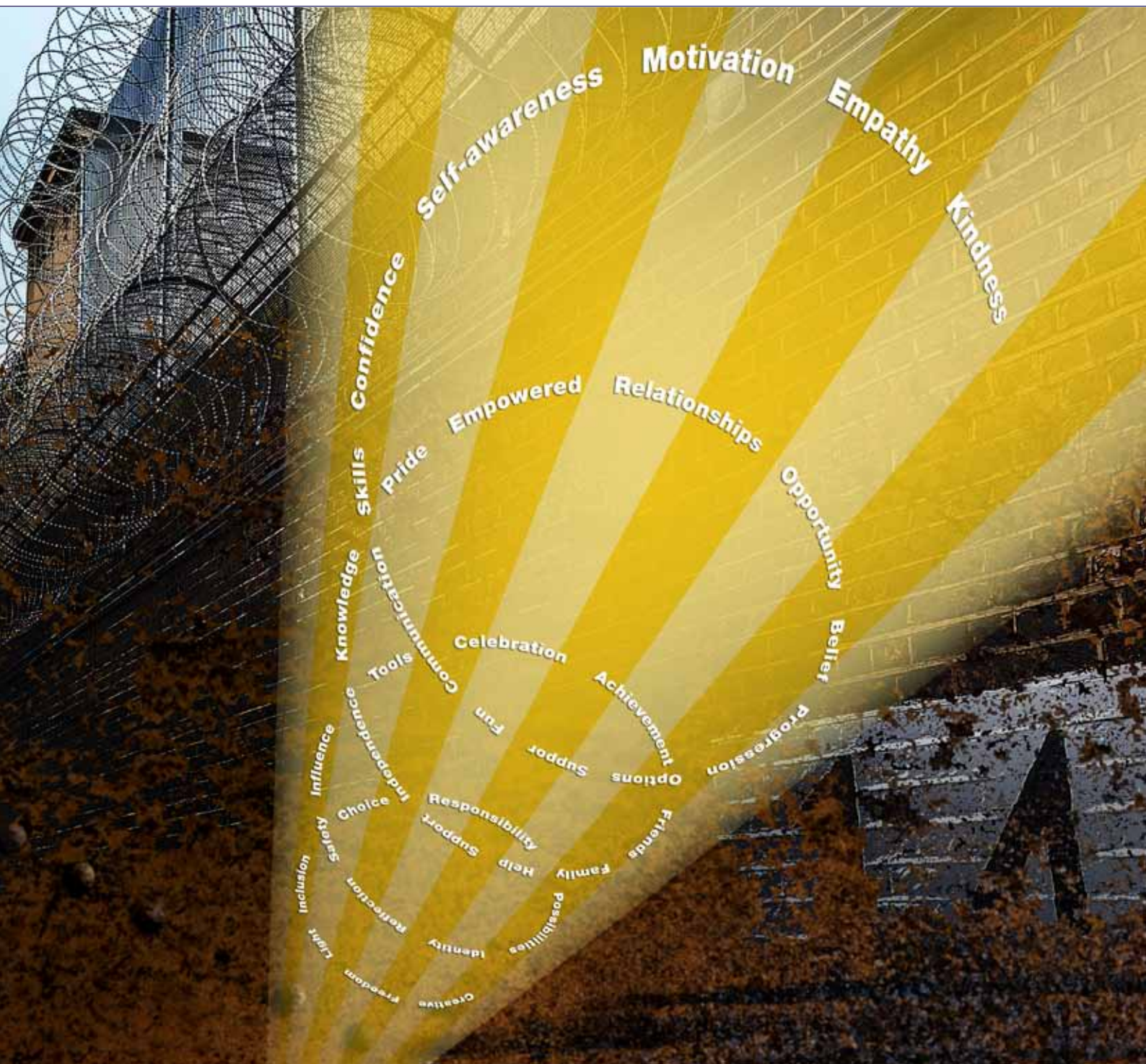




# What is prison education for?

A theory of change exploring the value of learning in prison



# Prisoner Learning Alliance (PLA)

**Chair: Alexandra Marks · Secretariat: Nina Champion**

In 2012 Prisoners' Education Trust established the Prisoner Learning Alliance (PLA) and provides the Chair and Secretariat to the group. The aim of the PLA is 'to provide expertise and strategic vision to inform future priorities, policies and practices relating to prison education, learning and skills'.

The PLA meet on a quarterly basis. Along with PLA members, meetings have been attended by senior officials from the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, Ministry of Justice, Skills Funding Agency, Youth Justice Board, National Offender Management Service and Ofsted.

Learner voice underpins the work of the PLA and therefore at every meeting and ex-prisoner or prisoner on ROTL discusses their experiences. One meeting a year is held in a prison or YOI to hear directly from current learners and staff. The PLA hosts other events including roundtables, focus groups and an annual conference to gain insight from practitioners, teachers, providers, learners and other stakeholders.

## Current PLA membership:

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<b>Andrew Wilkie</b>	Director of Radio · <b>Prison Radio Association</b>
<b>Angela Cairns</b>	Chief Executive · <b>Shannon Trust</b>
<b>Charlotte Weinberg</b>	Executive Director · <b>Safe Ground</b>
<b>Cheryl Knaggs</b>	Project Manager · <b>Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP)</b>
<b>Cristina Fernandez</b>	Head of Recovery Support · <b>RAPt (Rehabilitation for Addicted Prisoners Trust)</b>
<b>Catherine Sezen</b>	Curriculum Senior Policy Manager · <b>Association of Colleges</b>
<b>Diana Sutton</b>	Director · <b>The Bell Foundation</b>
<b>Dr. Jane Hurry</b>	Co-Director · <b>Centre for Education in the Criminal Justice System (CECJS)</b>
<b>John Attard</b>	National Policy Officer · <b>Prison Governors Association</b>
<b>Juliet Hope</b>	Founder and CEO · <b>StartUp</b>
<b>Jessica Plant</b>	NCJ Arts Alliance Manager · <b>Clinks</b>
<b>Kate Paradine</b>	Director · <b>Women in Prison</b>
<b>Maria McNicholl</b>	Head of Prisons, Senior Management Team · <b>St. Giles Trust</b>
<b>Mark Blake</b>	Project Development Officer · <b>Black Training and Enterprise Group</b>
<b>Max Tucker</b>	Assistant Programme Manager · <b>User Voice</b>
<b>Melanie Jameson</b>	Founder · <b>Dyslexia Consultancy Malvern</b>
<b>Michala Robertson</b>	Assistant Director · <b>Widening Access and Success Service, Open University</b>
<b>Olivia Dorricott</b>	Director of Leadership, Governance and Management · <b>Education and Training Foundation</b>
<b>Robert Mills</b>	Sector Specialist: Offender Learning · <b>OCR (Oxford, Cambridge &amp; RSA Examinations)</b>
<b>Rod Clark</b>	Chief Executive · <b>Prisoners' Education Trust</b>
<b>Sarah Turvey</b>	Co-Founder and Co-Director · <b>Prison Reading Groups</b>
<b>Susan Easton</b>	Head of Digital Learning · <b>Learning &amp; Work Institute (formerly NIACE)</b>
<b>Tracey Hammond</b>	Communication and Engagement Director · <b>KeyRing</b>

## PLA timeline

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<b>2012</b>	Prisoners' Education Trust establish the PLA
<b>December 2013</b>	Publish 'Smart Rehabilitation' report setting out three key principles for prison education: outcome-focused, joined-up and value-driven
<b>2014</b>	Inaugural PLA conference at Open University
<b>May 2015</b>	Publish policy briefing 'The Future of Prison Education Contracts: Delivering Better Outcomes'
<b>June 2015</b>	Meet Secretary of State for Justice and prisons minister
<b>July 2015</b>	Host Justice Secretary to give first prisons speech focusing on education
<b>September 2015</b>	PLA members PET and ETF invited to sit on Coates Review panel
<b>September 2015</b>	PLA conference at Leeds Beckett University including inaugural PLA awards and launch of Theory of Change project with New Philanthropy Capital
<b>November 2015</b>	PLA submit evidence to the Coates Review

# Foreword

This document aims to stimulate debate and conversation about the purpose and value of prison education, how we can more strategically evaluate the benefits and how we can improve provision.

When I first brought together the PLA in November 2012, the new OLASS 4 education contract had just come into operation. PLA members and others in the sector found themselves asking the question 'What is prison education for?' A letter published in Inside Time newspaper from a prison teacher argued:



*Prisoners are asked to undergo the most difficult of all human processes, the process of change, often in a deeply unsupportive environment...– who am I, where am I going? ..This is not to devalue literacy or numeracy but to elevate self-discovery as the overarching goal in education. In all education ideally and certainly within jails...*

**Paul, October 2012**

When the PLA published 'Smart Rehabilitation', our blueprint for prison education, we called for it to be more 'outcome-focused' and highlighted the wide ranging benefits of prison education, including, but going beyond, employability. And at our inaugural PLA conference at the Open University in 2014, we heard from Professor Fergus McNeill, one of the leading proponents of desistance theory. He drew attention to the range factors important in a desistance journey, including social bonds, identities and narratives and the positive effects education in prison can have. For example: connections forged between teachers and fellow students develops understanding of relationships; broadening of experience, empathy and thinking skills can support maturing of outlook; and learning also offers a positive identity to replace that of 'offender' with 'student'. At the conference, Clive Martin, formerly of Clinks, posed this challenge:



*What is prison education all about? One Government department should develop one theory of change and implement it. If they were to shift the obsession with employability, which isn't currently realistic for most ex-offenders, to one of desistance then it would succeed.*

We rose to the challenge and joined forces with James Noble at New Philanthropy Capital to devise a theory of change for prison education. This document comes at a time when prison education is top of the Government's agenda and when prison Governors are set to get greater autonomy and freedom over education budgets, commissioning and delivery, along with increased accountability for longer term outcomes. I hope this Theory of Change will be a timely reminder of the wide ranging value of education for those in custody. It is meant to stimulate conversation about the purpose and value of prison education, for example:

## Researchers:

- Do the strands of the Theory of Change reflect the academic literature you are aware of?
- How can you use this framework to evaluate learning in prison and build the evidence base?

## Teachers and practitioners:

- Do the strands of the Theory of Change reflect what you see as the benefits of education?
- What evidence do you have for the benefits of prison education in your establishment?
- What more could be done, in both content and delivery, to improve the beneficial impact?

## Learners:

- What have been the benefits of prison education for you?
- What needs to change to improve the beneficial impact of learning in prison?

## Senior Managers/Governors:

- What is your vision for prison education– what outcomes do you want to achieve?
- How could education help achieve other targets and priorities for the prison?

## Policy makers and inspectors:

- How can you support research to establish what works, for whom and how?
- What does the Theory of Change mean for prison accountability and inspection frameworks?

*I look forward to receiving your feedback.*

**Nina Champion** · PLA Secretariat [nina@prisonerseducation.org.uk](mailto:nina@prisonerseducation.org.uk)

# Executive Summary

This document aims to stimulate debate and conversation about the purpose and value of prison education, how we can more strategically evaluate the benefits and how we can improve provision.

We have consulted prison teachers, carried out focus groups with former prisoner learners and have reviewed some of the key literature regarding prison education and desistance. The output of a theory of change process is a diagram setting out a hypothesis of how we think prison education 'works'. We think there are five broad themes around the benefits of education:



Collectively, we think these lead to longer-term outcomes including:

- development of the whole-person
- a prison culture that promotes rehabilitation
- participation in society
- making a positive contribution
- sustained employment or self employment

The thinking is that each outcome potentially contributes to the desistance process and improvements across all the NOMS pathways [accommodation, finance, family, employment, health, substance misuse and attitudes, thinking and behaviour] and therefore to reduced reoffending.

We hope Governors and education providers use these ideas to formulate a vision, strategy and delivery model for education across the whole of their prison to make the most of its wide ranging benefits. We also hope this Theory of Change will serve as a hook for academics and those commissioning research in this area to test the strands of the theory to build the evidence base of 'what works, for whom and how' in achieving the outcomes we all want to see.

***Education in prison should give individuals the skills they need to unlock their potential, gain employment, and become assets to their communities. It is one of the pillars of effective rehabilitation. Education should build social capital and improve the well-being of prisoners during their sentences.***

**Dame Sally Coates,  
Unlocking Potential: A review of education in prison, May 2016**

# What is a 'Theory of Change?'

*A theory of change is a tool to help you describe a project's pathway from the need you are trying to address, to the changes you want to make and what you plan to do. It is often represented in a diagram or chart, but a full theory of change process involves more than this. It should help you consider and articulate the assumptions that lie behind your reasoning and address the question of why you think your activities will lead to the outcomes you want. The output of a theory of change process is a diagram setting out a hypothesis of how a project is intended to work, which in turn provides a template for evaluation and data collection.*

Improving your evidence. Developing a theory of change.  
Clinks and New Philanthropy Capital. March 2014

## Distilling and summarising the main arguments

This document presents a theory of change framework for prisoner education. To prepare this NPC has reviewed key documents on prisoner education and the outputs from the theory of change consultation conducted by PET. Across all this material we have seen a wide range of arguments for the benefits of prisoner education - expressed differently for different people in different places. This document is an attempt to distil and summarise the main arguments.

## A simplification of a complex picture

The process of drawing out the arguments for prisoner education is inevitably an abstraction and simplification. We could not hope to represent the complexity of prisoners' lives, backgrounds and personal journeys in this short document. Rather what we aim to do is highlight the general situation of prisoners and broad arguments for education, because we think this will be useful for the sector to have consensus on.

## Language

As far as possible we have sought to express the arguments in formal language that is appropriate for evaluation, but also faithful to the ethos, language and practice of prisoner education.

**Five broad themes:** We think there are five broad themes around the benefits of education:

- 1. Prison culture: (pages 8-9)** The effect of education on the prison environment and culture.
- 2. Wellbeing: (pages 10-11)** The effect learning can have on improving health and wellbeing.
- 3. Human capital: (pages 12-16)** We have split this under two headings: Motivation to Change and Moving Forward, to reflect the way that education can: a) start people on a journey to personal change and b) help them to continue that journey.
- 4. Social capital: (pages 17-21)** We have split this under two headings: Belonging and Community and Active Engagement to reflect the role education can play in: a) improving people's ability to relate to others and b) empowering them to actively participate in and positively contribute to society and their family.
- 5. Knowledge, skills and employability: (pages 22-23)** The more recognised role that education plays in helping people to develop the skills they need to improve their lives and move towards employment or self-employment.

The thinking is that each outcome potentially contributes to the desistance process and improvements across all the NOMS pathways [accommodation, finance, family, employment, health, substance misuse and attitudes, thinking and behaviour] and therefore to reduced reoffending.

## Context, change process and outcome

Under each theme there are a number of distinct arguments. To describe these we have used the language of 'context, change process and outcome' – terminology drawn from the 'Realist Evaluation' approach. It is important to understand what we mean by these terms:

**“Context”** refers to the situation that prisoners may find themselves in. It can relate to aspects of prisoners’ individual capacities, interpersonal relationships, institutional setting, and the wider infrastructural system they are in. *Importantly, we are not saying that all prisoners are like this or experience these things.* Rather “context” describes the tendencies and general patterns in prisoners’ situations. Furthermore, in describing “context” we have worked hard to avoid the ‘deficit model’ - although that is unavoidable in places.

**“Change process”** attempts to capture how education works for prisoners. It refers to the underlying social or psychological drivers that ‘cause’ prisoners’ reasoning to change. In formal evaluation this idea is referred to as a ‘generative mechanism’.

**“Outcome”** is the change that we want to help people to get to. In desistance theory outcomes happen incrementally; small improvements gradually lead to more substantial longer-term change. The focus of this theory of change is on the shorter-term change, which we assume will contribute to longer-term change.

### Causality and interrelationships

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All the change processes and outcomes in theory of change could potentially support one another. For example, greater confidence drawn from the achievement of tasks may make people more willing to collaborate with others. We have taken the view that it is not possible or useful to represent all these interrelationships.

This reflects our understanding of causality in desistance: there is not one thing that needs to happen to help someone move away from crime, nor is there one single journey. Rather it is about building capacities in individuals and a positive momentum that can help people improve their lives. We have sought to represent this journey in the overall theory of change rather than amongst the more specific arguments.

The order in which we present the arguments does not imply any sequence to the education process. E.g. we don’t think human capital necessarily occurs before social capital.

### Risks of this approach

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There is a danger in presenting the theory of change in this way that it looks too ‘neat’, linear or simplistic. This interpretation is the opposite of what is intended. Rather what we are saying is that the value of education is so nuanced and complicated that the only way to summarise it faithfully is at a general level; in which the arguments are set out broadly and which gives scope for application in range of different circumstances and services.

There is also the danger that it looks as if education is ‘done to people’. This too is the opposite of what is intended. The idea of the change process is highly participatory, it is about the resources that education develops in people to enable them to change their lives:



***Education is about empowering the individual.  
Empowering us to change ourselves. Wanting  
to do that for ourselves***

**Focus group attendee**

### Benefits of this approach

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We hope that distilling and summarising the main arguments in this way will:

- Make the overall argument for prisoner education clearer and stronger.
- Help us organise the existing empirical research around education in prisons.
- Identify the arguments where the evidence is not as strong and where further research is needed.
- Enable practitioners to use the concepts to develop their own theories of change for specific programmes.

**James Noble** · New Philanthropy Capital

# Methodology

## Stage One: Practitioner Wordle

At a PLA conference in September 2015, we asked over 100 teachers and practitioners to describe five benefits of learning in prison. The answers were turned into a wordle so the size of the words reflects the frequency with which they were mentioned:



## Stage Two: Learner response to wordle

At the conference we then asked five former prisoner learners to reflect on the practitioner wordle and identify the benefits which resonated with them the most. They picked out: awareness, self-belief and identity:



*Awareness is most important – awareness of what’s possible.*

Nathan

*Identity – prison reinforces the offender identity and that things need to be done to you to fix you up. Education gave me options in my own mind, the chance to form a different identity: student, scholar, citizen, employee. Education reinforces that new identity. Identity is important because it influences behaviour and actions.*

Stephen

They also had some other ideas when asked to reflect on what words were missing:

**I experienced kindness. Kindness is an important starting point.**  
 Nathan

.....

**Education gave me empathy. Before I didn't care about anyone else or about myself. I thought I was broken. I care about people now and I care about myself. Other's kindness helped me gain empathy.**  
 Patrick

.....

**Education is about empowering the individual. Empowering us to change ourselves. Wanting to do that for ourselves. Most of prison is about taking away responsibility, education you do for yourself and therefore it empowers you.**  
 Karen

.....

**Family is missing – education can give you the ability to connect again with family.**  
 Karen

**Stage Three: Collage-making focus groups**

Four focus groups were held in October and November 2015 including 16 former prisoner learners. In the focus groups participants were asked to create a collage of words and/or images to describe their learning journey and benefits of education for their life.

Participants worked on their own collage, but surrounded by other focus group members as part of a social atmosphere with access to a range of newspapers, magazines, felt tip pens, glue and scissors. Participants created individual collages. They were then interviewed in private about why they had chosen the words and images they had selected. Two participants could not make the focus group and so produced the collages individually and then recorded themselves describing why they had chosen the images and words in their collage. All the interviews were transcribed and submitted to New Philanthropy Capital to inform the formation of the Theory of Change.

The 'collage as inquiry' (Butler-Kisber, 2010) methodology was inspired by a report by Revolving Doors Agency 'A Good Life: Exploring what matters to people facing multiple and complex needs' (2015). As with that report, this approach was adopted to encourage free-thinking among participants to 'get under the skin' of what education really meant to them and help them reflect in a meaningful way about how it had impacted their lives.

**Visual inquiry approaches, such as collage making and concept mapping, are a means for formulating ideas and articulating relationships among these to understand phenomena in their formative stages, work through emergent concepts or help represent them to others. Collage making and concept mapping, in particular, are useful ways for listening visually. (Neilsen, 2002)**  
 Butler-Kisber and Poldma, The Power of Visual Approaches in qualitative inquiry (2010)

This approach worked well for our purpose, as the words and images selected triggered deeper reflections and metaphors for the experience of education. For example:

**I chose [the picture of] the rocket because education gives you a flying start, it's like a chain reaction set off.**





The layout of the collage, how they had placed the images and words, was part of the meaning for some participants:

*I've got a guy in the middle looking up. That's meant to represent me. He's got his arms crossed. I was quite rigid before. I decided to take education in prison to better my life. I've got a picture of a sky scrapper. Coz that's what it was like having to climb from the bottom.*

Even the colours had meaning:

*The top is colourful and the bottom is dark, the top represents my journey into education and recovery, freedom, my life has been colourful since I've been released. It's been colourful, varied and bright. Education was the start of my journey into a new life.*

When discussing the words chosen, it encouraged reflection about the different meaning words can have:

*Comfort – it's a good thing and a bad thing.. like a nest or net, someone to catch you when you fall, then they're going to push you out of your comfort zone to make sure you do it, they help build you up.. push you to have new experiences.*



### Limitations

The methods described above resulted in a small scale exploratory study with a specific group of participants and what education means to prisoner learners will vary between individuals. It is not intended to be a 'scientific' study, however it was triangulated with some key desistance and prison education literature (See Bibliography).

As mentioned, this theory of change is an attempt to set out a hypothesis of how prison education is intended to work, which in turn provides a template for evaluation and data collection. We hope the model will serve as a hook for academics and those commissioning research in this area to test the strands of the theory to build the evidence base of what works, for whom and how in achieving the outcomes we all want to see.

While this was a small scale exploratory study with a specific group of participants, and the value and benefits of education will vary between individuals, our findings present a powerful picture of the wider types of outcomes that should be considered, and we hope it provides 'food for thought' for the sector.

### Stage four: Initial Theory of change and PLA member feedback

Using the literature, wordle, learner feedback, collages and interview transcripts James Noble from New Philanthropy Capital devised an initial iteration of the theory of change. This was presented and discussed in depth at a PLA meeting. A second draft was designed by NPC and discussed by a further PLA meeting and small group of PLA members.

### Stage Five: Concept mapping

PLA members were keen to produce an additional image that presented an over arching theory of change for prison education in a non-linear way. PLA members worked in small groups to come up with visual representations combining both the individual journey as well as the impact of and on the wider prison culture and context. David Allen at Wolf Design translated these drawings and ideas into the image on the front of this report using some of the images and metaphors from the collages.

# 1. Theme one: Prison culture

Professor McNeill of the Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research has highlighted the importance of understanding the context of the prison environment itself as damaging;

Dr. Cormac Behan, speaking at the European Prison Education Association conference in 2015, asked whether the term prison education is an oxymoron:

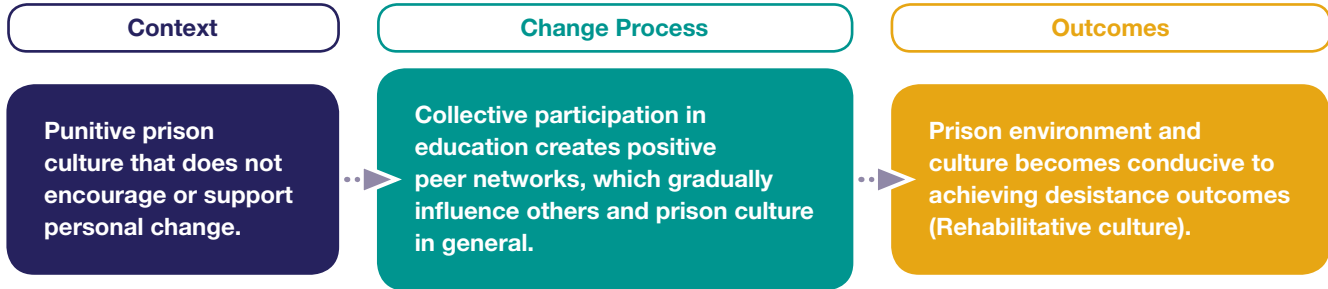
- *the prison environment brings the prisoner into association with others with an offending background;*
  - *prison tends to make it difficult to maintain social and family bonds;*
  - *prison tends to put an individual's life 'on hold' rather than encouraging a process of maturation;*
  - *and the identities and narratives of prison reinforce a prisoner's criminal identity (the term offender, a prison number, narrative of risk).*
- McNeill et al. (2012) How and why people stop offending: discovering desistance

**Prison is about denying power and control, whereas education is about enabling people to become agents in their own transformation.**  
**Dr. Behan**

Dr. Behan argued that it was crucial to understand the general prison context and environment which can be described as confined, coercive and overcrowded, where human dignity is undermined and prisoners spend long periods of time locked up, unable to engage as a social being:

**The pervasive prison discourse focuses on the past, the crime, suspicion, hierarchy, control, routine, rules and is inward looking. However education has the opportunity to develop a new discourse focusing on the present and future, strengths, trust, co-operation, flexibility, informality, personal growth, potential and is outward looking.**  
**Dr. Behan**

Interestingly, the Council of Europe recommendations in 1989 for prison education state that 'education helps to humanise prisons and improve the conditions of detention'.



During the focus groups many learners alluded to the specific context of education 'in prison' and its often negative, machismo culture:

**You don't want to go into a classroom and be told off in front of the bigger guys on your wing. It's a jail environment.**

.....

**In prison doing education means you can be bullied for being a geek. You are seen as weak. You are targeted. I was scared.**

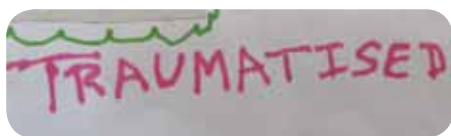
.....

**If you get something wrong in class they would take the piss – it had repercussions.**

.....

**Most people in prison are against the system, but the only way out is through education, otherwise it is a vicious circle if you fight against the system.**

Some also made the connection that the prison culture could exacerbate negative experiences prior to coming into prison or from childhood:



However the focus group collages also highlighted the ability of education to change that culture by creating positive networks of learners promoting education and supporting others. Learners, peer mentors and staff gradually influence others and the prison culture through a 'ripple effect'.

*By celebrating success, you let people see. It has a ripple effect of inspiring others.*

.....

*I help others now, try to get them on courses. Helping them helps me. One person said I want to be like you, I've never had that before.*

.....

*In education I got praise for the first time. I decided that I was going to be a shepherd and not a sheep. I'd just say to the others who called me a geek - I'm not coming back to prison!*

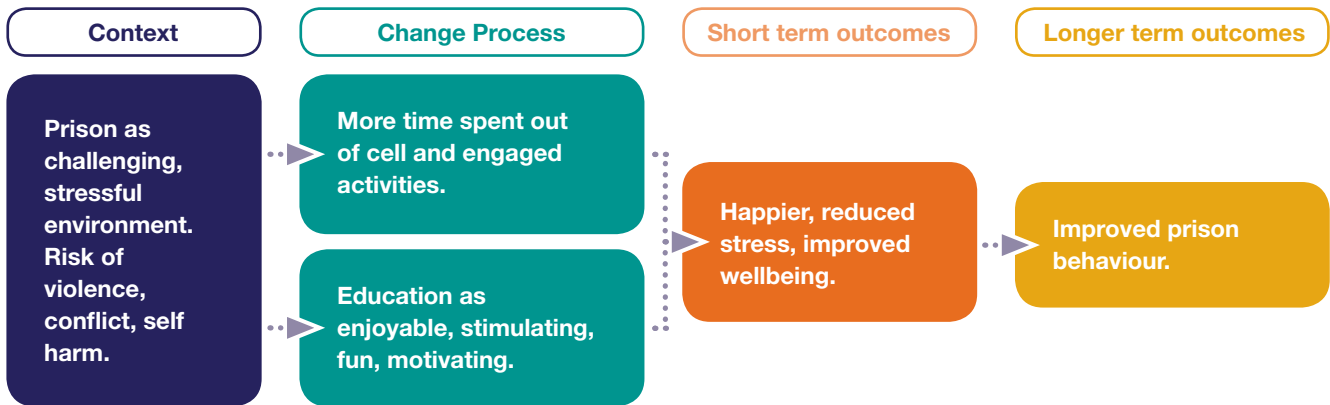
.....

*I went back into prison recently to speak to other prisoners; I want to be an example to others.*



The overarching image on the front of the report shows the 'light' of education pushing out the darker, negative prison culture as the positive ripple effect gathers momentum in both individual learners and their networks.

## 2. Theme Two: WELLbeing



**“**

*If people are not engaged then they are more likely to get involved in negative behaviours, fights, getting high or self harming.*

.....

*Being on the wing and doing nothing, you feel kind of depressed.*

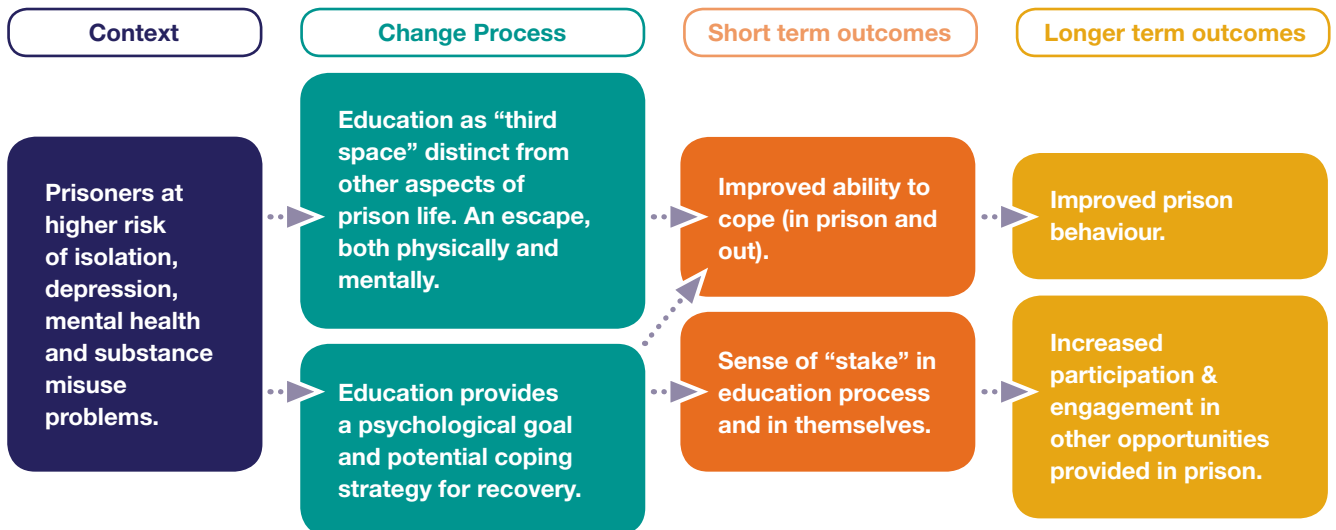
.....

*I was angry, I was not happy, I had nothing to focus on, but with education I felt complete. The anger was gone.*

.....

*Even though I was stuck in prison, it was like my mind was free. I like the image of the bent prison bars – even how strong they are and prison is supposed to keep you in, there is nothing anyone can do to stop you achieving better by bending the bars and setting your mind free.*

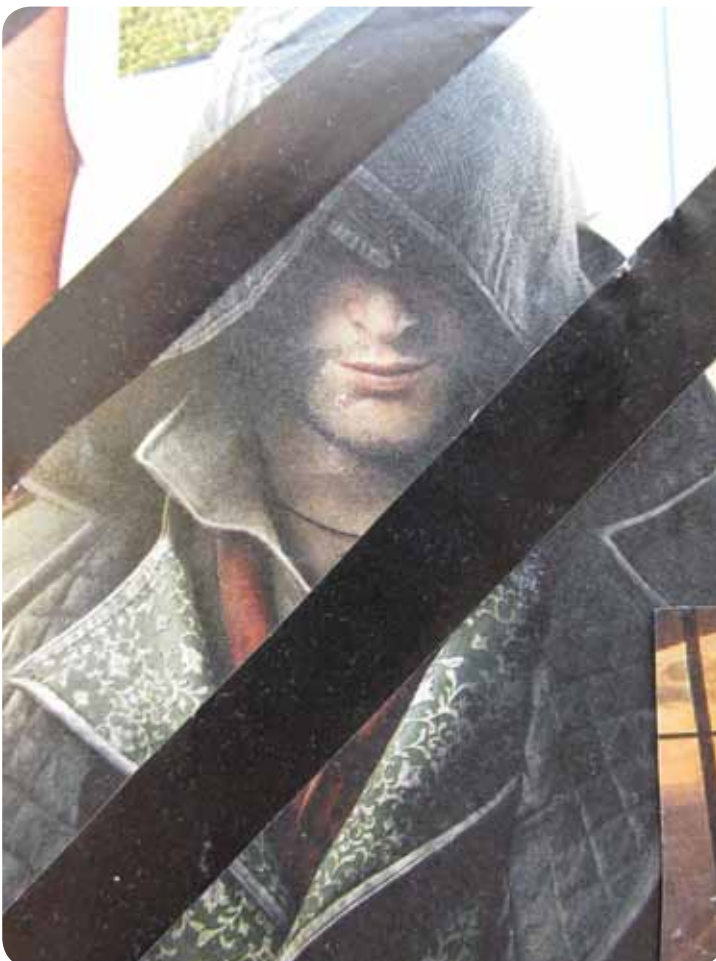




*The image of the bars and hooded figure represent prison, but education was about changing my life, so I have put pictures of nature, sky and sea .. all beautiful things.*

*In my spare time I enjoy photography. It's a positive addiction compared to my previous negative addictions.*

*The top [of the collage] is colourful, the bottom is dark, the top represents my journey into education and recovery.*



### 3. Theme Three: Human Capital

We have split this under two headings: **Motivation to Change** and **Moving Forward**, to reflect the way that education can: a) start people on a journey to personal change and b) help them to continue that journey.

*...a period of reflection and reassessment of what is important to the individual would appear to be a common feature of the initial process of desistance. Of course, this is insufficient in itself; what is also needed is the exposure to some opportunity to change, and the individual spotting this change as offering a potential 'way out' and then acting upon it.*

McNeill et al. (2012) How and why people stop offending: discovering desistance

The focus groups revealed the role education in prison can play in allowing for what McNeill above calls a 'period of reflection and reassessment', but crucially also an 'opportunity for change' and a 'potential way out'.

#### Human Capital: Motivation to change

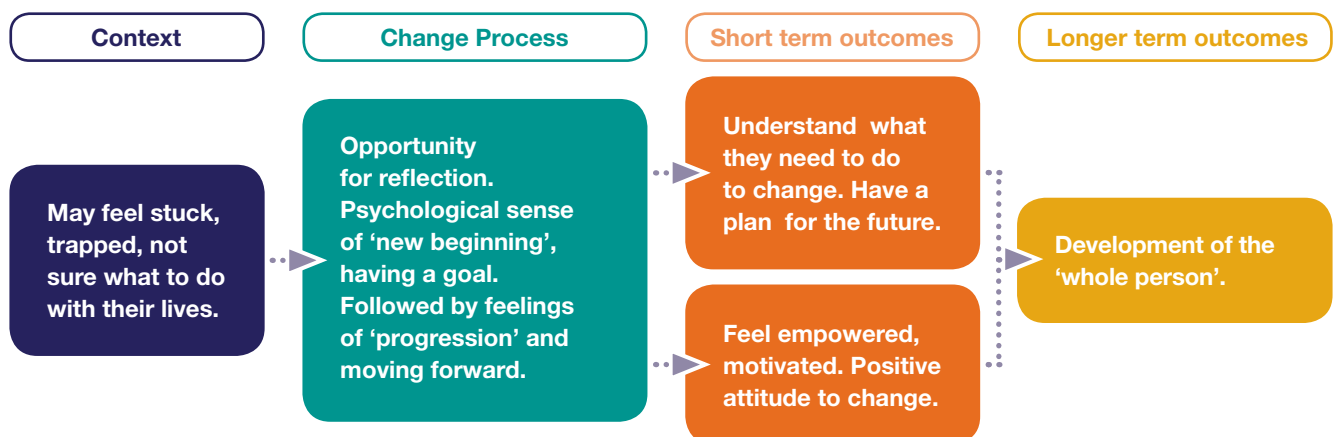
As Paul, the teacher who wrote to Inside Time (see Foreword), said education offers an opportunity for developing self-awareness and asking the big, existential questions. Some of these questions appeared in the collages:



**How did I get here? You've always got to ask yourself that question – It's a big question.**

.....

**What's holding me back? You need to ask yourself that. For me it felt like the whole world was holding me back before, but now I realize it was me, I was holding myself back.**





**f** Education can show you a new path, the right path, to take – you've got to choose the right one.

.....

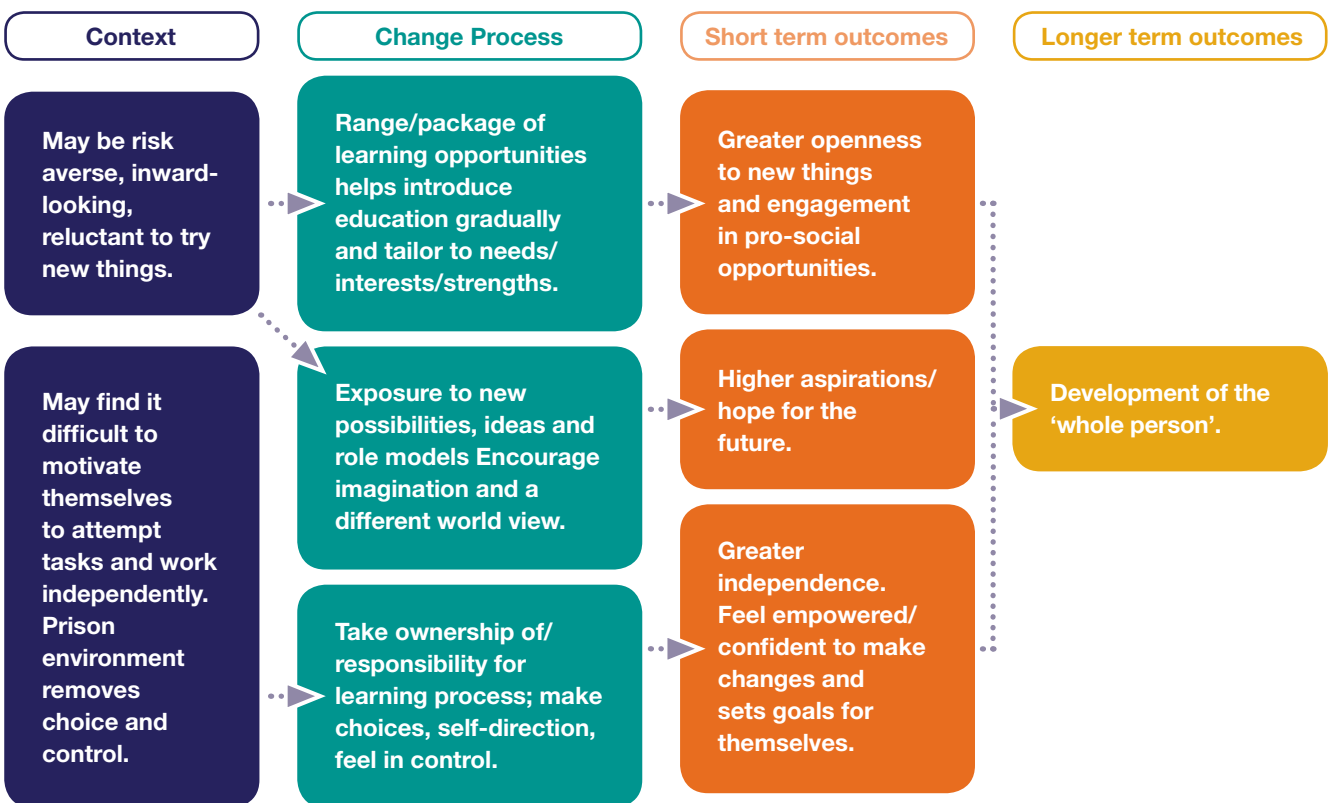
Next chapter. Going to prison, that's the end of that chapter now. I want to start a new one.

.....

Taking the first step can be scary, but education made me think – I can do this.

.....

You need people to push you out of your comfort zone, to have new experiences. You can do it!



**f** Most of prison is about taking away responsibility, education you do for yourself and therefore it empowers you.

.....

It gives you some element of choice and control in a place that takes away most of your choice and control.

.....

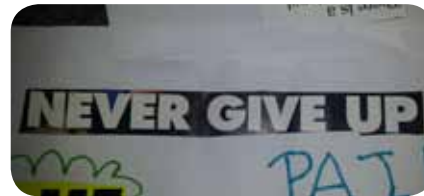
You realise you have right to your own life, decide your own direction. Change is possible!



# How to overcome obstacles

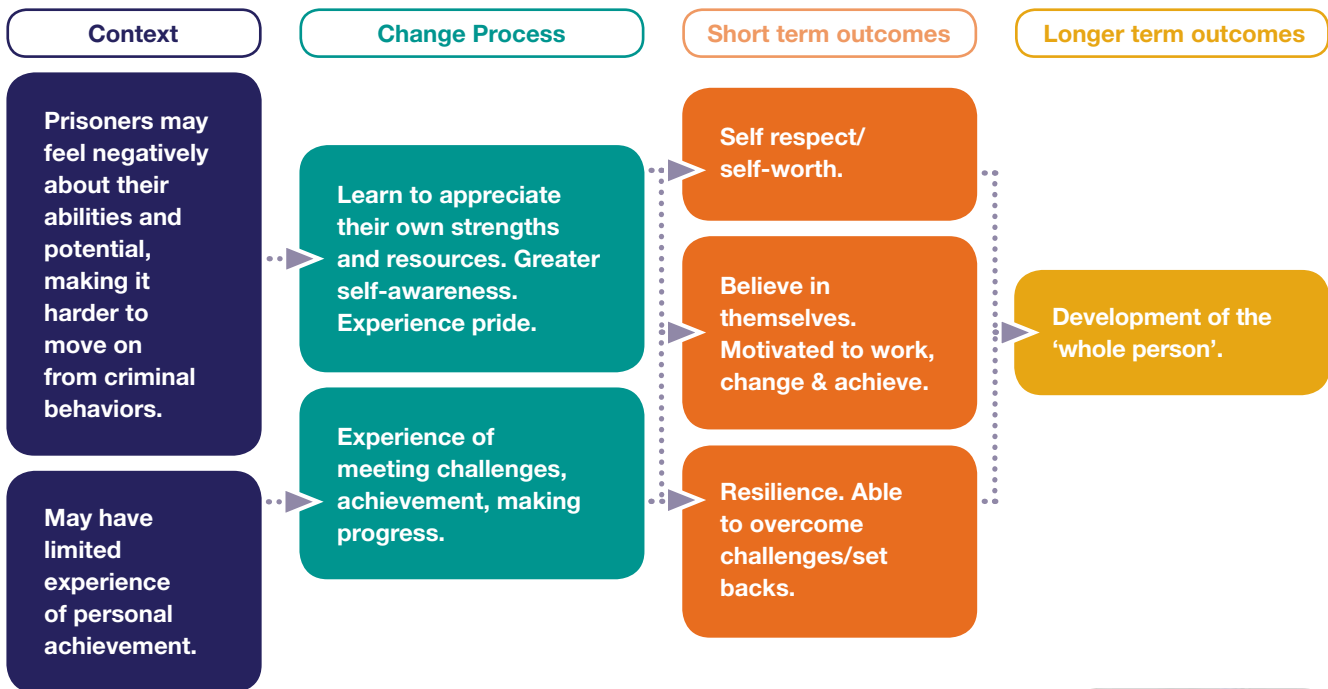
## Human Capital: Moving forward

Many of those in the focus groups described how education not only helped them 'decide to change', it gave them the tools to maintain that motivation and move forward. The collages reflect a variety of changes in attitudes and behaviours that support progression towards achieving goals, despite the setbacks and barriers, both internal and external, they encountered:



*I put don't panic. My thought is to panic and that's where fear caught me out, I'd instantly say no, but once you've processed stuff, when confidence kicked in, it allowed me to face anything.*

*Things are gonna be hard, things are gonna get to ya, sometimes you gonna feel like you are going to crumble beneath yourself. You have to learn to stay strong within yourself.*



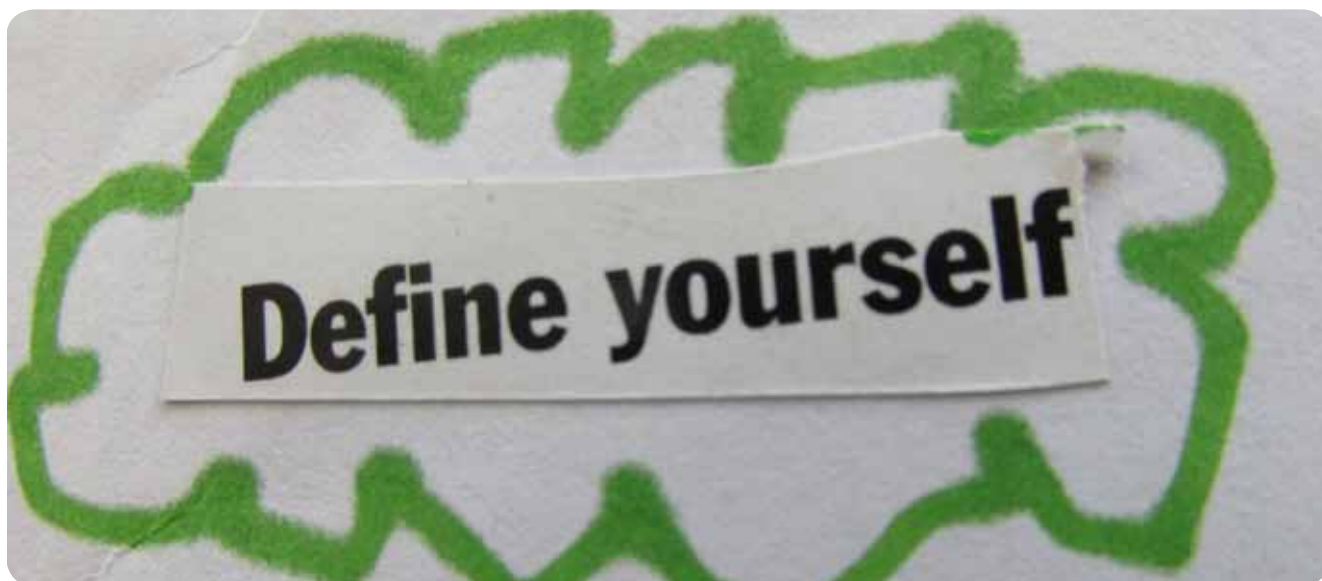
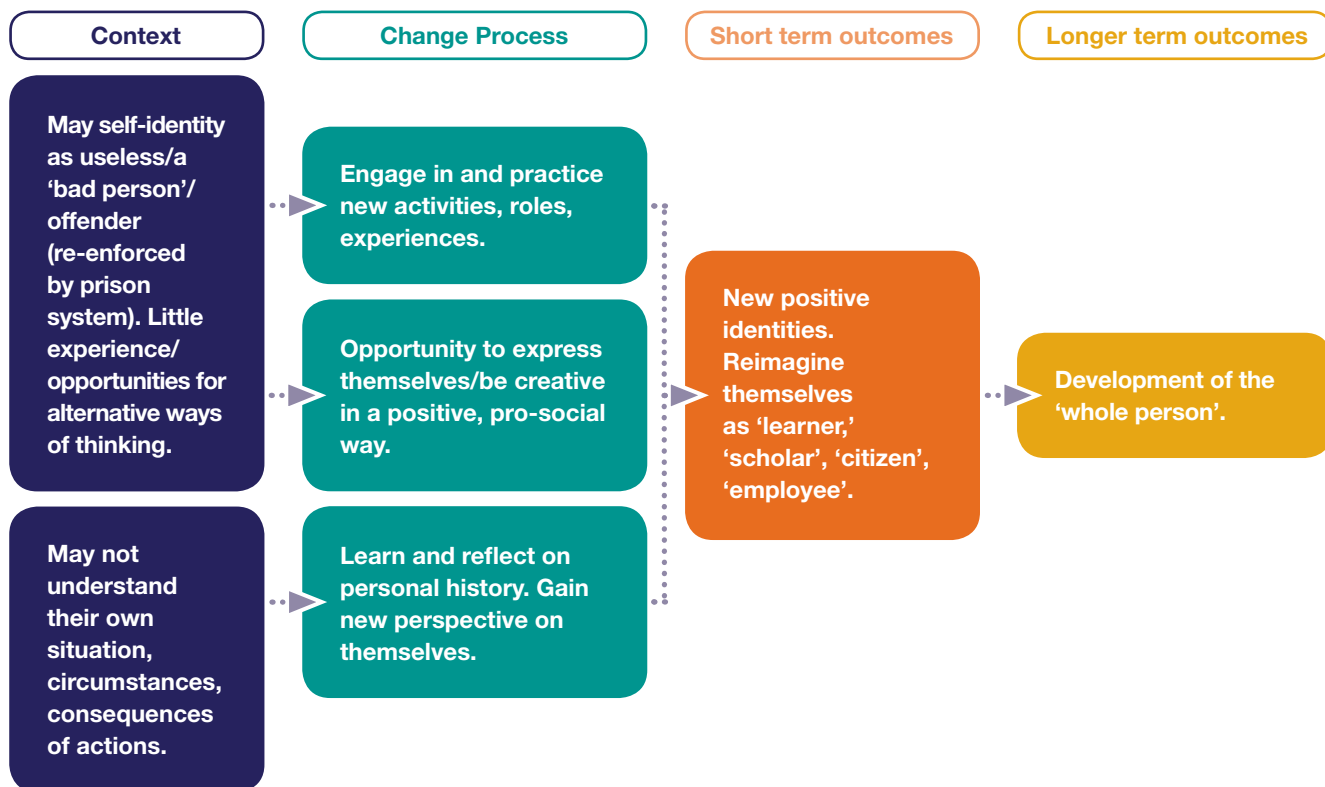
*I was really proud of myself. I got a sense of wanting more.*

*I had to break down the tasks and gave myself deadlines. I wish I'd know about doing that when I was younger. Breaking things down into small realistic tasks.*

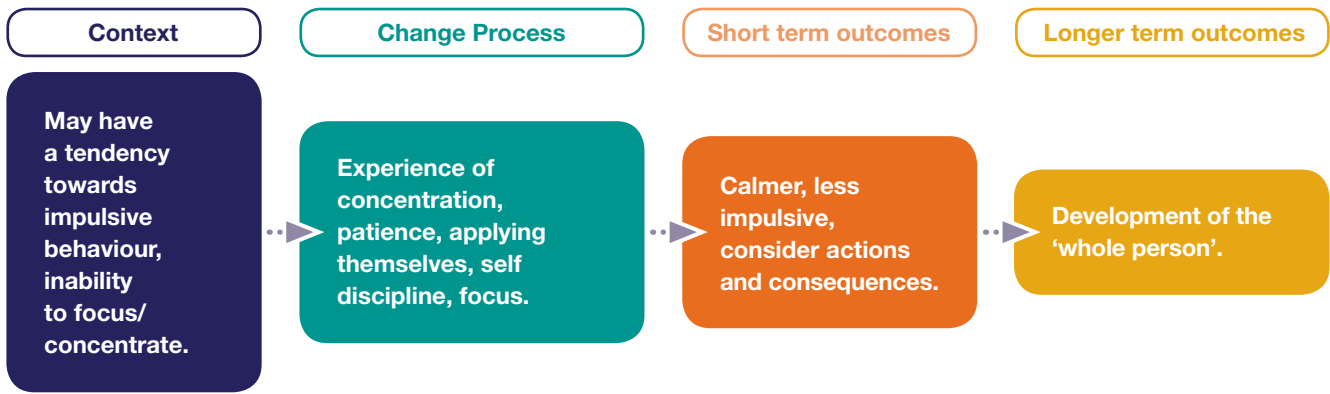
*I've got a picture of a sky scrapper coz that's how it felt like, having to climb from the bottom. I've put time out as I had to remind myself to set little goals. For me it was a challenge to believe I could do it.*







**“**  
*My teacher at school made me feel useless, worthless and I felt I couldn't achieve.*  
 .....  
*Define yourself – I like that, be who you are. What happened is in the past, it doesn't define who you are, you define who you are. You've got to make yourself better. Education helps define you.*  
 .....  
*Prison reinforces the offender identity.. education gave me options in my own mind, the chance to form a different identity: student, scholar, citizen, employee. Education reinforces that identity. Identity is important because it influences behaviour and actions.*  
 .....  
*Education changed my self perception. I wanted to be seen as more than a prisoner. I saw myself as a student actually.*



*Education made me a better person. If you'd have met me when I was 17 I was horrible. I felt like the world owed me something. I thought why do I need an education? I still could take a different path but my head's in the right place now.*

*I did a distance learning course, you have to discipline yourself or you never get round to it.*

*I've got a ladder because for every module I done it was a step up the ladder. Perseverance is key.*

*Time out – you learn to give yourself a time out, if you are stressing out, bring yourself down a couple of levels, take a breath.*

*You're not just learning maths and English, you are learning about yourself, how you react in different situations, what you like, what you don't like, what you're good at, what you're not good at, what you need to work on.*



## 4. Theme Four: Social Capital

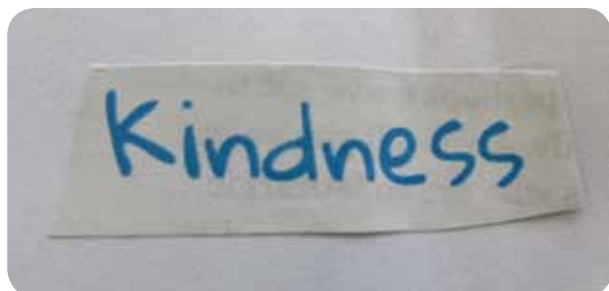
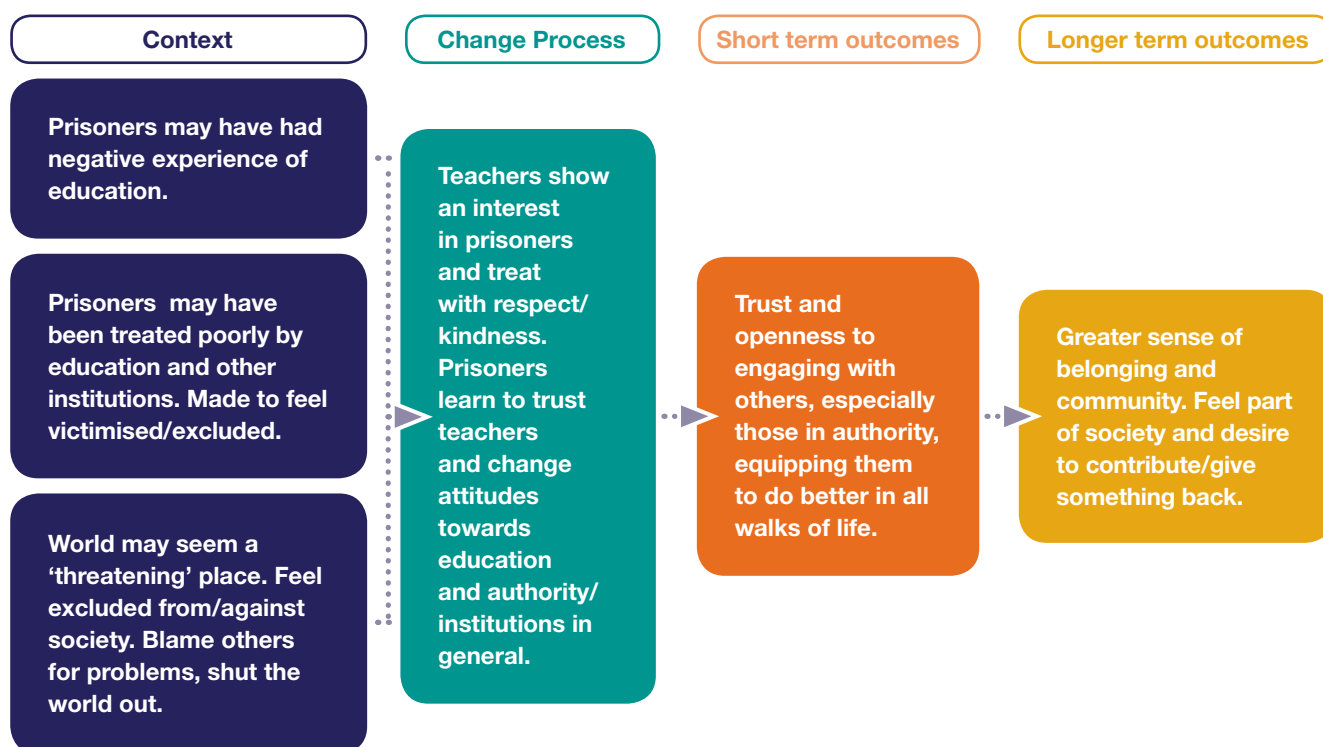
We have split this under two headings: **Belonging and Community** and **Active Engagement** to reflect the role education can play in: a) improving people's ability to relate to others and b) empowering them to actively participate in and positively contribute to society and their family.

### Social Capital: Belonging and Community

As mentioned above, Professor McNeill highlights the importance of social ties, bonds and relations as part of the desistance process. Speaking at an European Prison Education Association conference in 2015, Dr. Behan said:

*Although the prison institution itself can be negative, the people inside can help build up learners' strengths and draw out the positives. It is like 'a scaffolding of support'. Education can provide structures of meaning, feeling and mutuality away from a numbing detachment and self destruction, towards restoration and transformation.*

This was also evident in the focus groups:



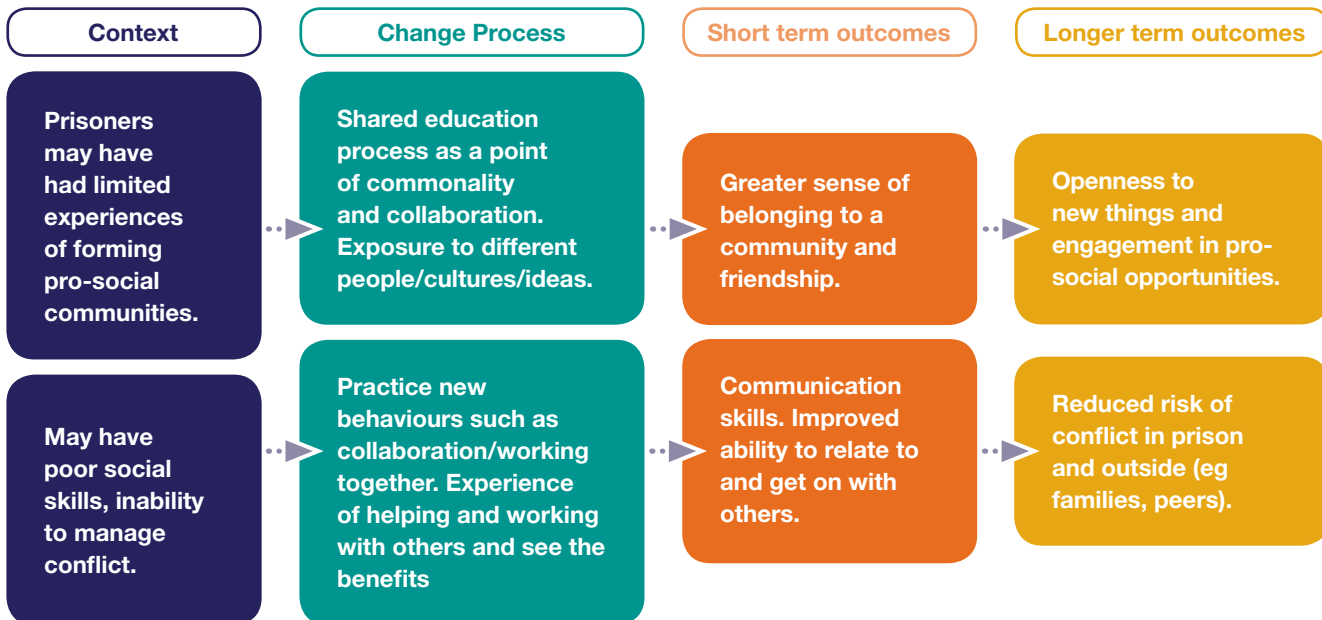


*When I wrote my first essay my tutor praised me a lot. I'd never had praise before, at school like. It felt good. That spurred me on to study more. That tutor saved me and turned my life around.*

*Education gave me empathy. Before I didn't care about anyone or myself. I thought I was broken. I care about people now and I care about myself. Others kindness helped me gain empathy.*

*You feel like you are on your own. You feel like I've done this to myself so I'm going to shut the rest of the world out sort of thing. If you've got support you can get back up on your feet.*

*At school the teacher would say to me, it was drummed into me, you're worthless and useless and not going to do anything. Jackie chatted to me when I was playing pool on the wing, she told me she could help me. Before people had let us down: probation, housing. But Jackie doesn't look at you as a prisoner, she looks at you like a human being who's had problems. It took a long time, seven months, to build up trust. She wants the best out of you – it's beautiful. I don't want to let her down, I won't go back to prison.*



*I had racist views, but the globalization course I did, opened up my thought process, I thought the English were superior, it was my ignorance. I started to look at people differently and became good friends with different people, it altered me in a massive way.*

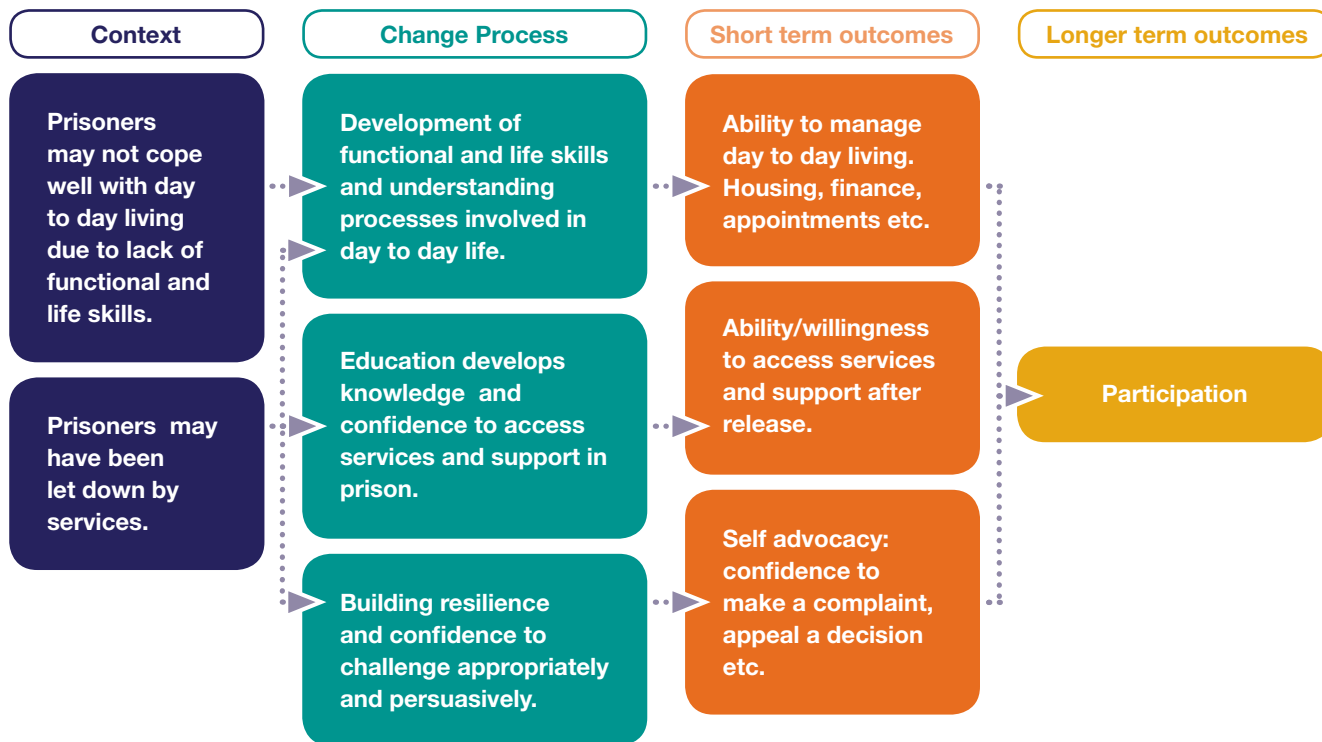
*I've always been the leader, having to listen to other people was hard.*

*Education helps you realise life isn't black and white, it makes you see things from different perspectives.*



### Social Capital: Active engagement

When analysing the focus groups, it was clear that the social benefits of education went beyond improving peoples' ability to relate to others, but could empower people to actively participate and contribute to their communities and families, whether in prison or after release.



**f**

*I couldn't read or write. They would ask me to fill in a form and don't give me a hand. When you're released you've got to go to doctor's appointment, housing appointment, probation appointment, all that stuff. If you can't read or write its impossible, it's overwhelming.*

.....

*On my prison canteen form I'd just pick a number, say 2 and 3, and wouldn't get the food I wanted as I didn't know what as I was ordering as I couldn't read it, but I couldn't tell someone or they'd take the piss.*

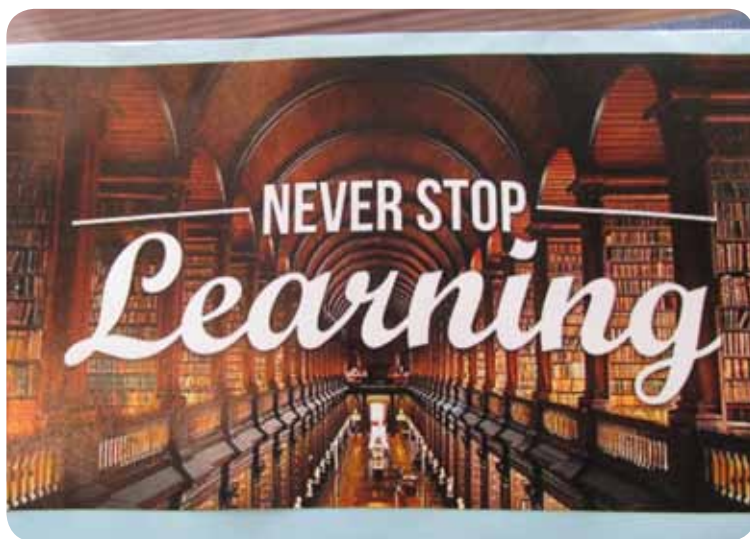
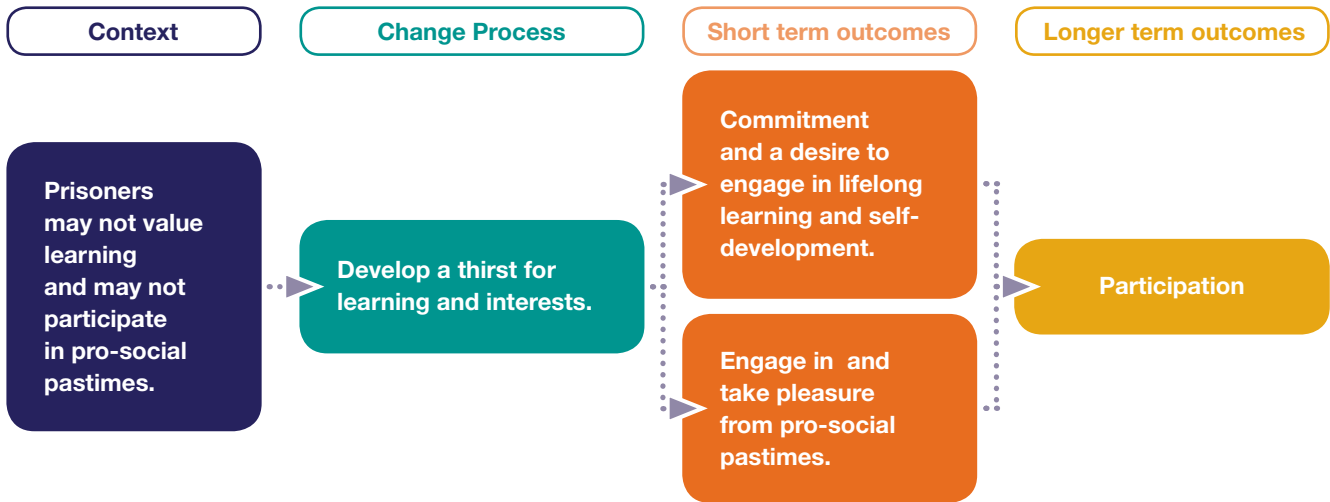
.....

*I didn't know how to make appointments, manage money or anything. It was a nightmare, but I'm capable now and help others.*

.....

*Education has given me the confidence to set and manage my goals. It's given me the confidence and belief to go for other things. It's a strong power to have within myself really.*



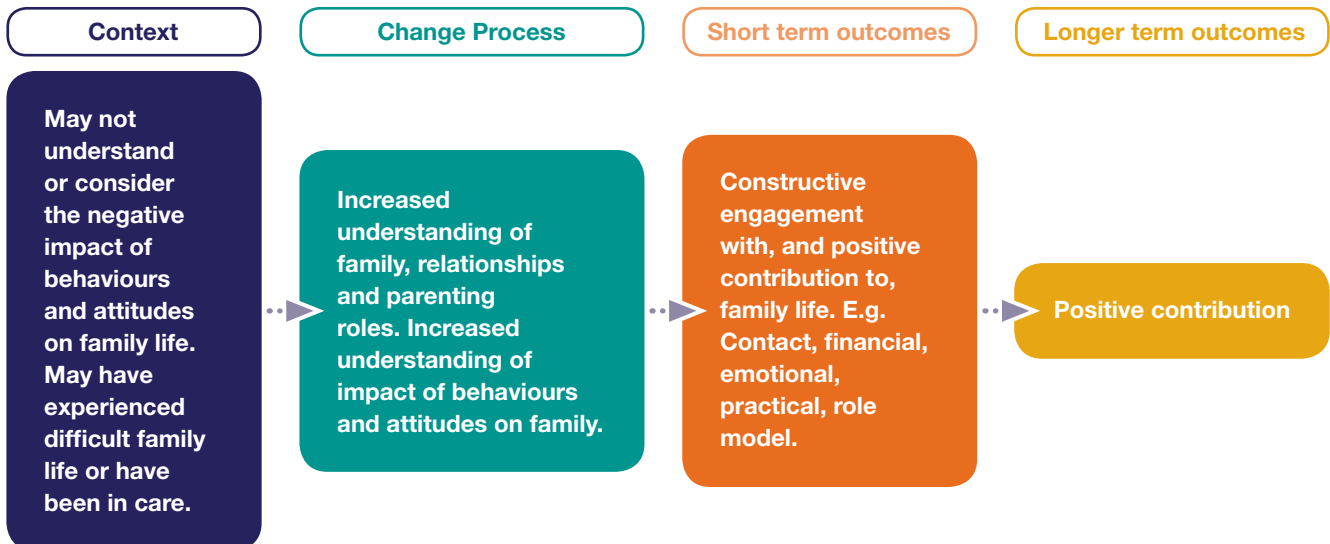


*I've got a lot of passion to learn more. I'm really considering a degree next year.*

*Since I did courses in prison I've done loads of courses after I left, including weekend courses at college.*

*I like nature, it's calm, I like to go for a walk in the woods every day. Don't need no money to do it – just put your shoes on and go!*

*I guess education was the start of my journey into this new life..since I've been released I've crammed in ten times the amount of things than in the previous twenty years. It's been colourful, varied and bright.*



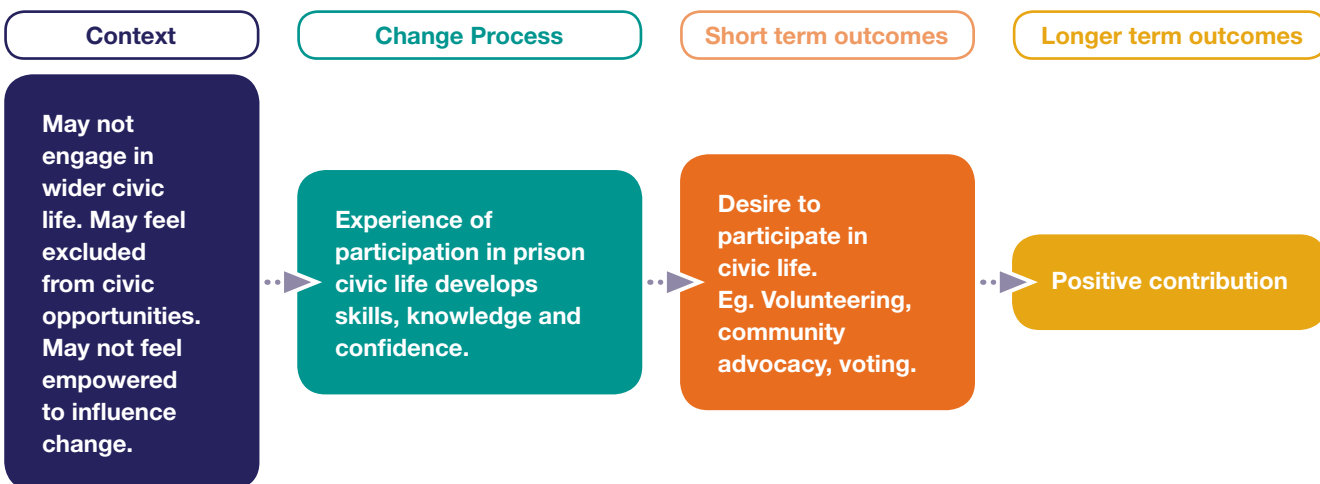
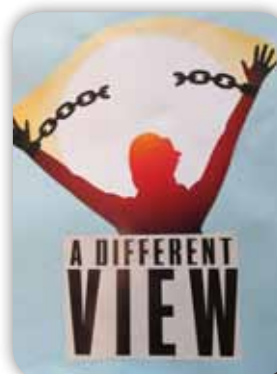


*The biggest effects were on my children, my daughter – I think if I had carried on smoking drugs - I think how she would have turned out, but instead she saw me graduate and she is excelling in school. I'm a role model now. I can help with her homework now.*

*I was in a children's home. Words like family were dreams. These were things I never really had in my life. Now built links with my family and now I have got a 15 month old baby.*

*At school I wasn't interested, I didn't engage at all. I was pregnant when I done my first course in prison. I knew I wanted to get somewhere. He is my motivation for everything. I got a call from the school saying he's doing really well.*

*Learning and going through the process of change allowed me to open up and have my family back in my life. They became like a support structure for me.*



*I want to help others. I want to be an example to others.*

*I did a coaching and mentoring course. I'm now working as a mentor, helping people one to one. I feel it's what I want to do.*

*I help others now, try to get them on courses, helping them helps me.*

*I never thought I'd be doing anything like this three years ago. I wouldn't believe that I would speak in front of an audience to tell my story. Some were crying.*

# 5. Theme Five: Knowledge, Skills and Employability

The more recognised role that education plays in helping people to develop the skills they need to improve their lives and move towards employment or self-employment.

*Evidence suggests that steady employment – particularly if it offers a sense of achievement, satisfaction or mastery, can support offenders in stopping offending. (Uggen and Staff 2001)*

Ministry of Justice, Evidence on Reducing Reoffending (2013)







*In my spare time I enjoy photography. I entered one of my pictures in a local competition and won a camera. I now do some work taking wedding photos. I like to get good feedback.*

.....

*I'd like to start a business with my partner, like a family business. I have ideas. It needs to earn me a living too – I've got goals like having a house and providing for my kids and family.*

.....

*I grew up in a household where everyone was unemployed. If my children grow up in a positive household, this will have a massive influence.*

.....

*I did a lot of volunteering at first to get experience.*

.....

*When I was younger I had a trial with Tottenham but didn't get selected. I thought studying to be a personal trainer was a realistic goal that linked to my dream to work in sport. Education made me think – I can do this. I enjoy it, but it also pays the bills.*



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Prisoners' Education Trust  
The Foundry · 17 Oval Way  
Vauxhall · London · SE11 5RR

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020 3752 5680  
lm@prisonerseducation.org.uk  
www.prisonerseducation.org.uk  
 @PrisonersEd  
 facebook.com/prisonersed

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