



PLA Conference 2022

'Mentors as educators' with The Shannon Trust

Karen began the workshop by stressing the value and key role of mentors to the work of the Shannon Trust and provided an overview of the collaboration between the organisation and the prison service.

- Shannon Trust reaches 10% of people in prison who are likely to benefit from the charity's support and encourages the positive impact of learning.
- The charity works closely with partners, and now works in the community.
- HMPPS sees the value in the work of Shannon Trust.
- Emphasis is on people struggling with reading and engaging with them in a different way, using resources (in particular, Turning Pages):
 - Different approach takes learning out of a classroom environment, adopting multiple ways to engage with learners and not reinforcing past trauma of being in formal learning situations.
 - Work of mentors should feel more like supporting rather than teaching, working with a prisoner on their learning journey.
- 2020: 1145 new learners enrolled with Shannon Trust and 609 mentors were trained across all prisons.

The benefits of Shannon Trust's approach for learners, and for mentors:

For learners:

- Access to support outside the classroom
- Support from a peer who is not a 'proper' teacher
- Clear boundaries - support does not necessarily equate to friendship
- Provision of safe spaces and access to learning outside a formal classroom
- Improvements in behaviour

- through providing contact with another person, mentors are able to make a difference to people with challenging behaviour
- enables learners to make sense of demands thrust upon them during their time in prison
- Mentors provide a calming influence and encourage a sense of achievement

For mentors:

- Pro-social behaviour, giving back to society, demonstrating hope for the future
 - Ability to contribute positively to society and deal with breach of trust; change sense of self; positive impact on future life and career prospects.
- Getting out and about within the prison and interact with others on the wing.
- Process of learning to teach someone to read provides enrichment.
 - Ability to use techniques anywhere (learn how to approach a learner in a prison context, tailor learning to individual learners, listening to and ascertaining what a learner wants to achieve, see the potential in the learner and play a part in their learning journey).
- Interacting with others outside the prison environment.
- Seeing the progress of learners and the positive impact on the mentor.
- Finding spaces to teach enables the mentor to interact with staff.
 - More agency in an environment where agency has been taken away.
 - Often a challenge to find a space for mentors, so creation of spaces means people on the wing want the job of mentor.
- Sense of trust, where mentors are 'The Team'.

There was a general feeling that libraries and education departments were undervalued. When areas work together, it usually results in positive benefits, which ought to be recognised more across the prison estate.