



**Nacro**  
WE CHANGE LIVES

**A JUSTICE SYSTEM FIT FOR THE FUTURE:  
RESETTLEMENT AND REDUCING REOFFENDING SURVEY BRIEFING**

November 2021

#JusticePostCOVID

## **A JUSTICE SYSTEM FIT FOR THE FUTURE: RESETTLEMENT AND REDUCING REOFFENDING SURVEY BRIEFING**

September 2021

### **INTRODUCTION**

Nacro recently carried out a survey asking people with experience of the criminal justice system (CJS) and those that provide resettlement support for prison leavers for their views on what the top priorities should be to promote effective resettlement and reduce reoffending.

We received input from:

- 26 people in prison
- 38 people who were receiving support from Nacro and had previously been in prison
- 57 staff working in resettlement from a range of voluntary organisations, as well as probation and prison staff, local authorities and the police.

It is clear that there is much common ground in terms of what both staff and the people they support think is important to promote rehabilitation and reducing reoffending. Homelessness and substance misuse were the most frequently cited factors that increase the likelihood of reoffending and so addressing these issues is seen as a top priority.

## ACCOMMODATION

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96% 

**of resettlement workers said that prison leavers having access to **stable accommodation** is extremely or very important to **prevent reoffending****

Nacro survey, May 2021

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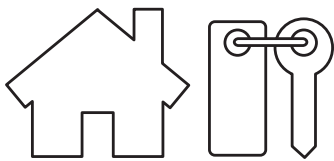
Almost everyone agreed that access to stable accommodation is either extremely or very important for prison leavers to prevent reoffending. Many of those who had been in prison had experiences of being released homeless, and several suggested this directly led to drug-use and/or reoffending.

Both staff and people with experience of the CJS were clear that prison leavers need access to supported accommodation, with multiple different levels of support available depending on need - including mental health and substance misuse treatment. This should aim to provide structure to their lives, and help them move towards independence by supporting with life skills, applying for benefits and looking for work.

Staff also reported that people require help accessing the private rental sector, and would benefit from legislation to prevent landlords from discriminating against prison leavers. One resettlement worker suggested that while new legislation was introduced in September to stop landlords from discriminating against those on benefits, some landlords have been finding ways around this by only taking on employed tenants or those with guarantors – which excludes many prison leavers.

Staff also suggest there needs to be more social housing available for prison leavers, and some of those with experience of the CJS felt strongly that those with substance misuse problems should be offered single accommodation, to prevent them being influenced by substance using peers.

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**“Having somewhere safe and secure is a basic need. The additional Government housing fund for Covid has been helpful, but for many has not translated into sustainable accommodation. There are significant barriers for many of this cohort entering the private-rented sector.”**

Nacro survey, May 2021

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98% 

**of people with experience of the CJS said it was important or very important to have **access to stable accommodation** when leaving prison to **prevent reoffending****

Nacro survey, May 2021

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## SUBSTANCE MISUSE TREATMENT

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100% 

of resettlement workers said that having **access to treatment** for drug and/or alcohol misuse was **extremely or very important to prevent reoffending**

Nacro survey, May 2021

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All staff and the majority of those with experience of the CJS agreed that having access to substance misuse treatment is essential to preventing reoffending. To ensure treatment is continued upon release from prison, staff suggested that through the gate services need to either be joined up with or work closely with services in the community, with good communication between the two being paramount.

Similarly, it was felt that better communication between substance misuse services and other services working with prison leavers would help maintain engagement. Some staff also suggested that there needs to be greater availability of support in the community.

Staff also stressed that having accommodation is essential to promoting engagement with substance misuse services, because if prison leavers are on the streets they are more likely to engage with substance-using peers.

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**“Better communication is needed between substance misuse teams and others supporting service users. It makes it harder for one to quit when they are placed with drug users while trying to stay clean. More communication with housing support and probation may help this.”**

Nacro survey, May 2021

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95% 

of people with experience of the CJS said they felt it was important or very important for people to have **access to treatment** to address drug and/or alcohol misuse to **prevent reoffending**

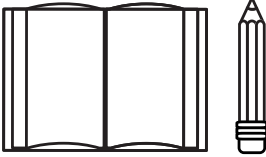
Nacro survey, May 2021

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## EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

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91% 

of resettlement workers said that access to **education and skills programmes in custody and the community is extremely or very important to prevent reoffending**

Nacro survey, May 2021

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Another factor that almost everyone agreed was either extremely or very important to preventing reoffending is access to education and skills programmes. It was felt that these will help prison leavers get back into work and be able to contribute to society. Those with experience of the CJS were clear that as well as an income, a job can provide structure, stability, and purpose. It also helps build confidence and makes you feel part of the community again.

**“Prison education could be a lot better...why are there no computer programming courses? They should also have more integration between prison ‘work’ and external companies, such as workshops in prison where you work for companies with a chance to work for them when released. Also, why can’t my CV go out to companies while I’m in prison?”**

– Nacro survey response, Person in contact with the CJS

To help prison leavers find employment, those with experience of the CJS suggested that:

- They need more opportunities to take NVQ Level 3 and 4 qualifications, as employers do not value Level 1 and 2 qualifications very highly
- They need more preparation for self-employment, including training in suitable skills and trades.
- Quality of work is important to preventing reoffending, so prison leavers need a diverse range of options so that they can find a role that suits them.
- Work available in prison needs to be made more worthwhile, so that it provides useful experience and a decent wage. The idea of a saving scheme for release using wages earned in prison was also suggested.

**“They need to make better use of the time for the people spend in the prison. Proper training should be provided to enhance the existing skills or to equip with some extra skills”**

– Nacro survey response, Nacro service user

Meanwhile, staff recommended

- Practical skills-based training, as well as help with CVs, interview preparation, criminal record disclosure and finding work placements.
- Help gaining functional skills qualifications such as English and Maths along with trade-specific qualifications and apprenticeships.

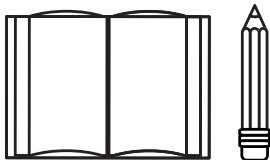
To further help prison leavers into work, staff and those with experience of the CJS recommended that organisations working in resettlement develop direct relationships with employers who are willing to hire people with convictions. Staff confirm that there needs to be a concerted effort to educate employers about the risks and benefits of employing people with criminal records, and improve their understanding of the legal framework related to criminal record checks. Both staff and people with experience of the CJS advocated for 'ban the box' legislation, to prevent job discrimination at the application stage. Those with experience of the CJS believe that such blanket discrimination is unfair and advocate for a more flexible approach that takes into account different circumstances.

**“Just having a job doesn’t reduce reoffending...I have witnessed the amount of people in and out on recall and they’ve had jobs. People are thrown into the ‘left over’ jobs when they leave prison: construction, warehousing etc. There are people in prison with some serious talent but have never been shown the way. Someone is more likely to stick with a job/career if it’s something they have a passion for, something that complements their existing skills”**

– Nacro Survey Response, Person in contact with the CJS

**“There is so much more to an individual than a criminal record”**

– Nacro survey response, Nacro service user

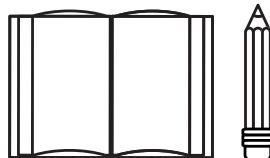


**“Much more and relevant education and training is needed, including self-employment. Many prisoners are highly dynamic and entrepreneurial but need much more and better support to channel their talents.”**

Nacro survey, May 2021

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**97%**



of people with experience of the CJS said it was important or very important to have **access to education and skills** in prison and in the community to help people to find work and **prevent reoffending**

Nacro survey, May 2021

## SUPPORT BEFORE RELEASE

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94% 

of resettlement workers **support Nacro's proposal** that people due for release on Friday should be able to be **released from prison earlier in the same week** to help their resettlement

Nacro survey, May 2021

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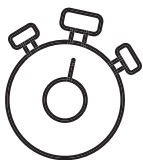
Staff and those with experience of the CJS had various recommendations regarding the support that should be available before release from prison. Help finding accommodation was the most common suggestion, and it was felt that additional funding should be provided for a wider range of accommodation support, including access to private rental solutions. Having benefits organised prior to release was also advocated for, so that prison leavers have access to funds right away when they exit prison. Currently, prison leavers cannot apply for benefits until they have left prison. This can take time and leave people without sufficient income on release. Many prison leavers have to take an advance payment of Universal Credit to get by in the first few weeks, which immediately forces them into debt.

Both staff and people with experience of the CJS felt that education, employment and training; substance misuse; and mental health support should be available as soon as possible once a person enters custody. In addition, a detailed action plan with clearly outlined objectives for both the day of release and also one detailing more long-term objectives - should also be developed with the prison leaver.

**“Everything about that first 24 hours should be known before the gate. I personally have seen so many people leave who did not know where they were going that night”**

– Nacro survey response, Person in contact with the CJS

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**“The day of release can be stressful for the service user. We need more consistent communication between different services and awareness of appointment times before release. This would also enable travel between appointments to be planned better.”**

Nacro survey, May 2021

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## SUPPORT ON THE DAY OF RELEASE

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**“A ‘departure lounge’ would be beneficial for service users upon their release: a place where they can access a wide range of different agencies - housing, substance misuse, mental health, Job Centre. An employment provider would also be useful.”**

**Nacro survey, May 2021**

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On the day of release, it was felt that prison leavers should receive support with attending appointments and accessing services. This could include being given a phone and relevant contact numbers, as well as transport to take them to appointments (or funds to cover transport costs). A mentor or support worker to help them navigate the day and support them with any difficulties was recommended. Staff felt that a ‘departure lounge’ offering a safe space to review action plans, and support for prison leavers to access relevant services, was a positive initiative.

**“The day of release should be a day of confirming and finalising plans. People should get their licence conditions 3 months before release rather than on the day...it’s like asking someone to do an exam they’ve never studied for”**

– Nacro Survey Response, Person in contact with the CJS





## FRIDAY RELEASES

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98% 

**of resettlement workers agreed with the statement:**

**'Being released from prison on a Friday can be a race against the clock to attend appointments and access services before they close for the weekend'**

Nacro survey, May 2021

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Resettlement staff overwhelmingly support Nacro's proposal that people with a scheduled Friday release (or other days immediately prior to a bank holiday) with an identified resettlement need should be released earlier in the same week. They almost all agreed that being released on a Friday creates extra stress for both prison leavers and staff. It can easily turn into a race against the clock to attend appointments before services close for the weekend, and missing just one can mean the prison leaver has to spend the weekend homeless or without vital medication.

**"Being released on a Friday can be difficult if you haven't got anywhere to go. Housing people is difficult at the best of times, not just with the pandemic on"**

– Nacro survey response, Person in contact with the CJS

Staff highlight numerous instances of stress and anxiety leading to relapsing into substance misuse, overdoses and even fatalities, as well as reoffending. Similarly, several of the people with experience of the CJS have been released on a Friday, and state they had difficulties with attending appointments and accessing housing, with some ending up homeless and relapsing into substance misuse.

**"Friday is a bad day to be released because the world of work goes home early"**

– Nacro survey response, Person in contact with the CJS

**"Once I had to sleep in a fishing pit until the Monday because that was the next day the person (at the housing service) was back in her seat at work"**

– Nacro survey response, Person in contact with the CJS

## CONCLUSION

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We are thankful to all the resettlement staff and people with experience of the criminal justice system who took the time to complete the survey and share their thoughts on how best to promote rehabilitation and reduce reoffending. Both groups feel that access to housing, substance misuse treatment, and education and training programmes are essential to prevent reoffending. They had numerous detailed recommendations for how support could be improved in these areas, which included better access to private rental options for prison leavers, stronger linkages between substance misuse services in the community and in prison, and ability to study a larger range of qualifications. It was also clear that both staff and people with experience of the CJS felt that these types of support need to be available as soon as someone enters custody. They also agreed that on the day of release prison leavers should be given support with attending appointments and accessing services. Finally, staff overwhelmingly supported Nacro's call to end Friday releases – highlighting how they can cause increased stress and anxiety, homelessness, overdoses, and even reoffending. Nacro will continue to campaign for better support for people in prison and as they leave to give them the best chance at a second chance. We will continue to ensure the voices of people with lived experience and those who support them are heard by decision-makers at the highest level.



## About Nacro

We are a national charity with more than 50 years' experience of changing lives, building stronger communities and reducing crime. We house, we educate, we support, we advise, and we speak out for and with disadvantaged young people and adults. We are passionate about changing lives. We never give up.



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