PRISONER PEER SUPPORT

Good practice guide for Insiders peer support schemes
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by Rebecca Teers
Introduction

The *Insiders* scheme involves training selected prisoner / trainee volunteers to provide basic information and reassurance to new receptions shortly after their arrival in prison. In many establishments this role is currently being carried out by Listeners and it is intended that developing a specialist *Insiders* scheme to carry out this function, particularly in high risk locals, will release Listeners to focus on their befriending role.

Effective peer support can contribute to suicide prevention in the widest sense by helping to create a safe, decent and healthy environment with positive prisoner/prisoner and staff/prisoner relationships, where prisoners’ problems can be voiced and addressed.

The first days in custody are particularly distressing for many prisoners, particularly those new to the prison system, and it is hoped that the *Insiders* scheme will help reduce the anxiety experienced by them. This early period is also high risk in terms of suicide; it is hoped that providing a peer support scheme where prisoners are trained to help others at this high-risk period will contribute to the wider suicide prevention strategy.

*Insiders* has two key aims:
- to offer reassurance to new prisoners
- to provide them with key information, which will be useful to them in their early in custody.

It is clearly distinguished from Listener schemes in terms of objectives, function and operation. *Insiders* are not expected, nor equipped to provide emotional support and do not operate under the principle of confidentiality.

During 2002, *Insiders* was piloted in eight and evaluated in six establishments. The evaluation demonstrated that the scheme had a positive impact on prisoners’ early experience of custody. The scheme adapted to different types of establishments with differing functions, facilities and populations. *Insiders* tended to operate more smoothly where it was fully integrated into everyday procedures. Schemes piloted on induction/first night units tended to allow
Insiders greater flexibility to work round time, staffing, population and environmental restraints than those based in reception.

Prisoners who took on the role found it personally rewarding and were keen to own and manage day to day issues themselves. Everyone who was interviewed during the evaluation said that they would recommend rolling out the scheme to other establishments, in particular the higher risk locals. The evaluation of the juvenile scheme, which was very positive, was completed before the rest of the pilots and in the light of this the scheme has been introduced at a number of other juvenile establishments. For a fuller description of the evaluation process and its results see chapter 7.

This guide covers the key issues involved in establishing an Insiders scheme. It suggests ways of working, which establishments can adapt to their own local circumstances.

Staff who piloted the scheme for Safer Custody Group particularly recommended setting up such a scheme in local, high risk establishments.

You may also find useful the guidance booklet on peer support, issued to all establishments in November 2002. The booklet can also be accessed via the Prison Service Intranet.
2 Guidance Notes

2.1 Main Features
The main feature of Insiders is using volunteer trainees/prisoners in reception / first night / induction to:

- offer information and reassurance on arrival at the establishment;
- provide positive information and immediate reassurance to new trainees/prisoners, and avoid misinformation;
- offer additional follow-up support to first timers, who are vulnerable to problems such as taxing which can exacerbate risk and vulnerability;
- help with basic needs, including letter-writing;
- help to ensure that information provided by the prison for distribution at courts or during transit is up-to-date. Insiders will be well placed to help identify any gaps and keep such material under review;
- alert staff if they are concerned about a new prisoner/trainee being at risk of suicide/self-harm or bullying;
- record that the initial interview has taken place, make referrals and in some instances following up issues with individual trainee/prisoner.

The scheme is not about providing emotional support for those in crisis, particularly in juvenile units, as this is something juveniles should not be asked to take on. In adult prisons there will be Listeners or other “buddy” schemes that Insiders can refer to.

2.2 Benefits
The particular benefits of the proposed scheme include:

- targeting the earliest period in custody where the risk of suicide and self harm is highest;
- improving the quality of life for juveniles in custody through promoting supportive relationships and a caring environment;
- reducing anxiety levels of newly admitted prisoners by offering peer support on arrival into custody;
- positive staff involvement, making use of their skills, enhancing their role, avoiding the creation of barriers, and feeding into positive staff/trainee prisoner relationships more generally;
- an appropriate practical role for juvenile trainees/prisoners.
2.3 Integrating Insiders
A peer support scheme based in reception / induction focusing on the first days in custody will be most effective when it operates as an integrated part of a wider strategy, so the following questions should be considered:

- how does the role of the Insiders in reception / induction relate to those of the staff, both specialist and generalist?
- how will information and assistance flow between the Insiders and staff?
- what part will the Insiders play in promoting the establishment’s safer custody strategy to the trainee/prisoner population as a whole (induction, publicity, provision of information, training, events)?

2.4 Suggested working methods
Insiders should introduce themselves to the trainee/prisoner, check if they have any immediate concerns, then reassure and provide basic information to the trainee/prisoner about:

- access to a phone
- anti-bullying information
- canteen procedures
- what will happen next i.e. going to first night unit, induction process.

Depending on when the new trainee/prisoner is seen, Insiders should either go through the information checklist with them, or explain that they or one of their colleagues will see him / her on induction the following morning. Some trainee/prisoners may be de-toxing, so they won’t be able to take in too much information. Sometimes an Insider may think it appropriate to refer a trainee/prisoner to a department within the prison or an agency outside the prison eg healthcare, CARATS, housing department. This should be recorded on the information for new arrivals check list, and reception / induction staff should be made aware of the need to refer. For examples of a checklist and monitoring form, see the guidance pack.
2.5 Suggested statement of purpose
“The Insiders Scheme at HMP /HMYOI.............aims to improve the quality of life for trainees /prisoners by promoting community responsibility, supportive relationships and a caring environment. We recognise that people in custody for the first time are specially vulnerable. The Insiders scheme seeks to reduce anxiety by empowering trainees/prisoners to help staff in the reception / induction process by establishing supportive relationships, and by disseminating relevant and accurate information about .......... and its regime.”

2.6 Co-ordinating the scheme
A co-ordinator for the scheme should be appointed as soon as possible. The co-ordinator should be involved in planning and developing the scheme process. In the pilot sites, the Suicide Prevention Co-ordinator and a member of staff from reception or induction were involved in establishing and then supporting the scheme.

2.7 Supporting the Insiders
Insider schemes provide a more practical service than Listeners and so will not require the same type of specialist support. However like any employees or volunteers, they will need to be properly supervised, advised and supported. The individuals chosen and methods by which support will be provided must be determined from the outset, or the scheme is at risk of failing.

2.8 Confidentiality
There is no need for an Insider to pass on to anyone the details of conversations with trainees/prisoners. If an Insider is concerned that a trainee/prisoner is at risk or vulnerable they will need to tell a member of staff. This boundary must be emphasised at an early stage in all information given to new trainee/prisoners. See also 6.4 for confidentiality guidelines.

2.9 Record of contacts
Some form of information checklist for new arrivals should be used as the record of each individual contact. It should be handed to the member of staff who is responsible for the scheme so that the effectiveness of the scheme can be monitored both for the Insiders feedback and management information.
2.10 Payment
Establishments should decide whether or not Insiders in reception should be paid. A voluntary scheme does have the benefit of winning the trust of others, as there is less reason to doubt a volunteer’s motives in undertaking the role and this would also ensure that the scheme will not be competing with existing volunteer schemes. However if there aren’t enough volunteers, the incentive of payment may be necessary. Any payment should not be more than that normally paid to reception orderlies.

It is very important that the peer support work is not better paid than other work in the establishment. This will provide a degree of reassurance that those applying for the role have a genuine interest in the work and help ensure that other schemes are not compromised.

2.11 Integration of peer support duties with other work
Establishments must think carefully whether a trainee/prisoner working as an Insider should also have another job in the establishment. It is important to ensure that trainees/prisoners missing work because they are undertaking peer support duties in reception / first night / induction don’t lose out in wages or earned privileges.

2.12 Rota
The peer support scheme should operate by means of a rota. The rota should be widely published to help staff to identify the Insiders on duty.
3.1 Involving all staff

For an Insiders scheme to be fully effective, it must have the backing of the senior management team and all staff at the establishment. Staff must be fully informed and involved.

- open and honest communication with all members of staff is essential - telling them of the principles of a scheme will help them to accept it;
- the benefits of the scheme must be carefully balanced against any drawbacks (including fears that the scheme may be abused), or conflicts with other priorities, most obviously, security;
- only when legitimate concerns have been addressed will all staff take ownership of a new peer support scheme;
- it should be made very clear to staff that this peer support scheme has full senior management backing;
- a reference guide (copies of this booklet) explaining the role and operating procedures of the peer support scheme should be made readily available to staff;
- work with Insiders in reception / induction should be noted in staff’s SPDRs;
- a publicised launch of the scheme by the Governor will demonstrate senior management’s commitment and ensure that as many staff as possible are aware of the work starting in reception / induction;
- posters designed by the new Insiders advertising their role will help both staff and new arrivals understand the scheme;
- using the national Insiders logo on posters and information will also promote understanding of the scheme.
4 Choosing Trainees / Prisoners

4.1 Selection Criteria
Volunteers will need to be:
• reliable
• trustworthy
• literate
• good communicators with appropriate interpersonal skills
• caring
• able to work in a team
• available for at least 2 months.

4.2 Security clearance:
Establishments must agree criteria – eg. no bullies, drug free, status, type of offence. The criteria may also depend on where the scheme is located – reception, first night or induction.

4.3 Who selects?
Suggested options include:
• Reception/First night /Induction staff
• Personal Officers
• An Insider representative - once the scheme is established.

A suggested application form is included in the guidance pack.

4.4 Who appoints?
The Insiders co-ordinator, in consultation with colleagues including the SPC, should appoint the Insider volunteers.

4.5 Job description:
A job description should be available to all applicants so they are aware of what the work entails.

4.6 Number:
Ideally there should be a minimum of three Insiders per establishment but this depends on the size of prison and number of new receptions.
4.7 Insiders compact:
Establishments are advised to get their trainees/prisoners to sign up to a compact, so that they understand their role and responsibilities clearly and agree to adhere by the code of conduct for the scheme (see suggested example in guidance pack).
5 Job Description

The following notes cover the suggested core responsibilities of the role and should be adapted to local needs.

An Insiders’ role is to welcome, check out concerns, pass on basic information and describe what is going to happen to the newly arrived trainee/prisoners in their early days in custody.

Insiders can:
- check the number of new-to-custody trainee/prisoners each day and see them as a priority, followed by prisoners who have been transferred in, and then change of status trainee/prisoners;
- welcome them in reception / first night/ induction checking out any immediate concerns they may have and sharing basic information with them;
- continue in reception / first night, or the following day on induction by discussing the information checklist with them (see example in guidance pack);
- make appropriate referrals on the prisoners individual check list and pass the information on to the staff co-ordinating the work;
- check what information the trainee/prisoner received at court or from the escort staff before he/she arrived;
- respect at all times the information shared by the trainee/prisoner and ensure that he /she knows what information about them is going to be shared with staff and other agencies;
- let staff know if they are particularly concerned about a trainee/prisoner’s welfare;
- complete with staff whatever statistics need to be kept to monitor the scheme and service provision (see example in guidance pack);
- abide by the compact agreed for the Insiders’ role;
- attend debriefing and support sessions as required.
6 Training Notes

6.1 Briefing Staff
All staff need to be informed about the scheme. Each establishment will need to decide who should be involved in the briefing sessions for staff. Staff in both reception / first night and induction will need to understand how the scheme works in more detail so they know what the Insiders will be doing. An hour should cover the basic outline of the scheme. Staff who are going to be more closely involved should if possible attend one of the Insider sessions.

6.2 Training Insiders
Selected trainees/prisoners will need a short and simple session covering the issues as listed below (see 6.3). Again each establishment will need to decide who runs the training sessions for the volunteer Insiders. The co-ordinator for the scheme should be involved and if possible a member of staff from reception/first night or induction. Once the scheme is established an Insider can also be involved.

Trainee/prisoner volunteers will need a minimum of half a day; juveniles and YOs may well need longer. Each establishment will need to decide how much time they have available and the best way to train groups of volunteers.

6.3 Format of training:
Training should be designed to meet needs of your prisoner population in short & simple blocks covering: -
• attitudes and values
• confidentiality (see guidelines at 6.4 below)
• recognising signs of distress
• communication skills
• sources of support at the establishment
• administration - information booklets, forms, monitoring etc

Use knowledge of trainees/prisoners and involve Insiders (once the scheme has been established) in future training, role-play, and in developing forms and information booklets.
6.4 Guidelines on confidentiality
Maintaining the trust of other trainees/prisoners is essential for the credibility of the Insiders scheme. It is important that other trainees/prisoners feel that they can trust Insiders, otherwise they will doubt the information provided for them and won’t feel comfortable giving any information about themselves.

So it’s important that all Insiders follow the scheme’s guidelines on confidentiality, and explain the nature of them every time they have contact with another trainee/prisoner in their role as an Insider.

Basic guidelines are: some information will be recorded, much of what fellow trainees/prisoners will not be shared with anyone (no gossiping with other trainees/prisoners) but if an Insider has concerns about a fellow prisoner/trainee, they must explain that they are going to share their concerns with a member of staff and if possible take the person they are concerned about with them.
7 Evaluation Summary

7.1 How Insiders was evaluated
The Insiders scheme was evaluated during 2002 at six of the eight pilot sites. The first stage was a baseline survey undertaken with 113 prisoners before the project began. This was to establish what information prisoners were receiving in their early days of custody before the Insiders scheme, to find out if there was any further information they would have found useful, and to measure their levels of anxiety. Stage two of the evaluation took place after the Insiders scheme was in place. Interviews took place with 55 prisoners who had seen an Insider. 17 officers and 18 Insiders were also asked for their feedback on the scheme.

Establishments were provided with general guidelines outlining the aims and expectations of the initiative, and a suggested checklist of key information to be provided to prisoners. Each establishment was then able to modify, develop and manage the project to suit their resources, procedures, population and layout.

Half the pilot schemes operated in reception. The rest were located on the first night or induction wing. Insiders’ contact with new prisoners usually took place within a few hours of the prisoners’ arrival. At one establishment, Insiders met prisoners on their arrival and then ‘followed them up’ the next day. In most places Insiders also worked as orderlies and their peer support role was integrated into their work shift.

In both stages of the evaluation, the intention was to interview people with limited prison experience soon after their arrival at the establishment, as this is the target population for the Insiders scheme. This was not always possible: 70% of those interviewed in stage 2 were first timers compared with 50% in stage 1. This means that we might expect people in the later sample to be less informed and have higher levels of anxiety than those in the early sample. However, 60% of prisoners interviewed in stage 2 were seen within 4 days of their arrival compared with 71% in Stage 1, which may have given them more opportunity to obtain information.
7.2 Prisoners’ responses to the Insiders scheme

- Respondents in stage 2 were much better informed than those in stage 1; nearly two-thirds in stage 2 compared with only one third in the early stage said that they’d received at least 10 of the 12 ‘key’ pieces of information e.g. about telephone calls, visits, regime etc.

- In stage 2, prisoners were more likely to say that they’d been shown how to do things rather than just told about the process. For example, they said they’d been shown how to use the phone or how to fill out an application form and this practical approach was felt to be particularly useful. When asked where information had come from, a quarter specifically mentioned the peer supporter.

- Prisoners were asked why they thought the Insider had approached them. Most mentioned the supportive role of the Insider before going on to describe the information they’d provided:

  “to support us … to help you get a good night’s sleep”

  “a friendly face … to settle you down”

  “to give you advice and help try and get you through it”

- 78% of prisoners said they found their chat with the Insider very or fairly useful. Over half said they felt a bit, or much better after their talk. 88% said that overall they thought the Insider scheme was a good or a very good idea. The main reasons prisoners said that they felt positive about their meeting with the Insider were: that they felt they could communicate better with another prisoner; that prisoners had a better understanding of how they were feeling; that other prisoners would know what information would be useful to them; and that they would tell them what it was really like. A number of prisoners said that they felt they couldn’t approach staff because they were too busy to deal with their questions.
“just talking one-to-one to another prisoner makes you feel more confident … they understand better”

“You come in and all you see is uniforms and then to see a friendly face meant everything”

“It was my first time and I was terrified… he said ‘don’t worry, it’s not as bad as you think’ … and actually he was right, it isn’t”

• Prisoners who were in for the first time found the meeting more useful than those who’d been in that establishment before.

• 8 respondents said that they would have found the scheme more useful if they’d been allowed more time with the Insider. A number of prisoners coming in on drugs said that they were in no state to take in any information on their first night. They suggested that the meeting would have been more useful if it had been carried out one or two days after their arrival. Similarly a number of prisoners said that they came into prison in a state of shock and were unable to concentrate on the information being provided.

• Anxiety levels were measured using the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS). Scores were categorised into four levels: normal, mild, moderate or severe anxiety. In Stage 1, 36% of prisoners had moderate or severe anxiety scores, compared with 22% interviewed in Stage 2. The average anxiety score was also higher in stage 1 than in stage 2 (8.4 compared to 6.8).

• Half of the prisoners interviewed in Stage 2 said they felt less anxious now than when they arrived, compared with only a third in the Stage 1 sample. There are other factors which may have had an impact on anxiety levels, such as changes in the way prisoners had been processed or the fact that people in stage 2 were interviewed later into their stay than those in stage 1. However, these findings combined with prisoners’ own accounts of the scheme suggest that it may have a positive effect on anxiety levels.
7.3 Implementing the scheme

Interviews were carried out with 18 Insiders, 11 officers & 6 Suicide Prevention Co-ordinators about their experience of setting up, developing and running the scheme. The following issues were raised:

- **Staff involvement**
  Most schemes faced some initial resistance from staff and it was seen as essential to inform and fully involve key staff in the design, selection, development and management of the project.

- **Selection**
  Careful selection of reliable, trustworthy and keen individuals was seen as vital. Most Insiders were recruited through staff recommendation and this was reported to work well.

- **Training**
  Most of the Insiders had a half-day training session (2 to 3 days for juveniles) and were satisfied with this. However, many said that a shorter session run by an experienced Insider or an officer outlining the role, responsibilities and expectations would have been sufficient.

- **Support**
  Levels of support by staff varied between establishments but all Insiders felt that having an officer contact was necessary because it allowed an opportunity to discuss problems or possible improvements and reassured them that someone was monitoring the scheme.

- **Environment**
  Ideally Insiders should have somewhere to work which allows them privacy and space. However at most establishments this was not possible. Allowing Insiders greater autonomy and flexibility in their approach, rather than being reliant on staff, helped Insiders work.

- **Staff time**
  Most officers said that the Insider scheme had no impact on their workload.
thought it had increased their workload because they had to unlock prisoners and escort them to see the Insiders and 3 thought it had reduced their work because they could refer questions to Insiders.

• **Information provision**
  Type, detail and method of information provision varied between sites. Those who took a more practical approach i.e. showing how to use phones or how to fill out apps were found to be particularly helpful. Insiders said having a checklist of key information was very useful.

• **Risk assessment**
  10 of the 18 Insiders said they had told a member of staff about at least one person they were concerned about. A number had also referred people to Listeners.

• **Identification and recognition**
  A form of ID such as T-shirts was seen as necessary to help legitimate the scheme with staff and prisoners. Certificates would give formal recognition of the Insiders’ role.

• **Clear role**
  The role and responsibilities of the Insiders should be clearly specified and distinguished from those of Listeners. Problems around confidentiality and effectiveness arose if there was any confusion between these two distinct jobs.

• **Vulnerable populations**
  A concern was raised that people who went straight to detox, healthcare or rule 45 might not have access to Insiders. It was suggested that these individuals could be contacted on the wings. In the case of detoxing prisoners, this could be a day or so after their arrival when they were in a better state to receive information.
7.4 Conclusions

The Insiders scheme has had a positive impact on prisoners’ early experience of custody being both informative and reassuring. The scheme successfully adapted to suit establishments with differing functions, facilities and populations. Those where the Insiders had been fully integrated into the everyday procedures tended to operate more smoothly. Schemes run on the induction/first night landing tended to allow Insiders greater flexibility to work round time, staffing, population and environmental restraints than those based in reception. However, with staff and Insider commitment, projects did function successfully in reception. Insiders gained great personal satisfaction from their roles and once established, successfully managed the day-to-day running of the scheme themselves. Despite some initial resistance, all 17 officers and 18 Insiders interviewed said they would recommend rolling out the scheme to other establishments, in particular those with a local function.

Evaluation report by Rebecca Teers,
Senior Researcher, Safer Custody Group