April Spotlight: Theatre in prisons

We've dedicated the second PrisonerActionNet Spotlight to examining how theatre can strengthen prisoners’ positive identity. Further benefits of theatre for prisoners are listed below, along with the topic for this month’s forum discussion, examples of theatre projects currently working in prisons, a request for your project examples, and much more.

STRENGTHENING POSITIVE IDENTITY

PrisonerActionNet explores different ways of working with prisoners to strengthen their sense of positive personal identity: giving people the chance to explore their thoughts and emotions can increase their confidence and ability to deal with the world and its difficulties. A significant factor in reoffending is that offenders continue to see themselves as criminal, even if they have completed their sentence. In their own mind offenders may feel unable to shake off the identity of being a criminal: someone who keeps getting it wrong. (more)

FORUM DISCUSSION

On the forum this month we’ll be discussing: What are the best ways to encourage people to venture out of their comfort zone?

Please share your thoughts on the PrisonerActionNet FORUM by clicking here.

EXAMPLE OF THE MONTH

Theatre Nemo, Drama in Prison gets offenders into the creative arts, breaks down stigma and isolation, gives people art, they go on to do other things in the education department or have developed their IT skills. Quite a few people who’ve left prison have gone on to do college courses in music or have taken other drama courses in the community. Participating in drama enables prisoners to find a voice to explain how they feel to others, for example... (more)
MORE THEATRE PROJECTS IN PRISONS

**HMP Erlestoke and Pimlico Opera**
Prisoners from HMP Erlestoke rehearsed with Pimlico Opera for six weeks full time towards a professional production of West Side Story. This is a serious artistic endeavour of the highest quality. Any prisoner who volunteers to take part is given something to do - performing on stage, as a stage manager in the wings, wardrobe, lighting, building the set... *(more)*

**Clean Break**
Clean Break is a theatre company with an independent education programme whose work is rooted in the belief that theatre changes lives. Clean Break was set up in 1979 by two women prisoners who believed that theatre could bring the hidden stories of imprisoned women to a wider audience. Still the only women's theatre company of its kind today... *(more)*

**Synergy Theatre Project**
Established in 1999, Synergy Theatre Project works towards rehabilitation with prisoners, ex-prisoners and young people at risk through theatre and related activities whilst placing the wider issues surrounding criminal justice in the public arena. Synergy's work is founded on the belief that theatre can be transformative and challenges perceptions of both prisoners and society, building a more positive future... *(more)*

YOUR EXAMPLE

Do you know of or are you involved in a theatre project with prisoners or ex-offenders, such as those listed below? Please let us know:

- What did the project aim to achieve?
- What activities did the project involve?
- What would you say the project has achieved?
- Has the project been assessed or evaluated?
- Are there any other aspects of the project you would like to tell us about?

Please reply to this email or email amyd@lemosandcrane.co.uk

MEMBER OF THE MONTH

**Sue Whale**, OLASS Manager, HMP Erlestoke, Joint Bronze Winner of The Good Prison Award

HMP Erlestoke facilitated a learner-led programme utilising the creative arts to raise awareness of learning styles. Prisoners focused on developing understanding, tolerance, support and value of diverse communities. Several external artists were engaged to work with the group exploring learning, appreciating differences and treating everyone with respect. The wide range of learner-suggested activities included participation in the Pimlico Opera Les Miserables production... *(more)*
# Theatre Projects from the Good Prison Award

## HMP/YOI Doncaster
Theatre and Performing Arts - we offer tailored performance and play writing services that explore the causes of offending behaviour and focus on the impact of crime within society. We have a partnership with the Central School of Speech and Drama and offer student placements throughout the year.

## HMP High Down
High Down runs the Geese Theatre “Insult to Injury” programme. Geese are a team of actors and group workers who present interactive drama and conduct workshops for prisons. The company believes that drama is a powerful and effective vehicle for inviting individuals to examine their own behaviour and as a catalyst for promoting personal development and change. ‘Insult to Injury’ is for men with an acknowledged and persistent history of violent offending. Using some of Geese’s tried and tested theatrical metaphors, the programme invites participants to explore the process of violence, how it operates for them and to practice skills in order to avoid future violent offending. They run regular course in High Down and prisoners who have taken part in this course have given the following feedback: “I’ve learnt to look at other ways of dealing with problems rather than lashing out all the time… When I leave prison I’m definitely going to put the things I’ve learned into practice, so that I don’t come back again.”

## HMP Huntercombe
The Geese theatre group facilitate interactive role play through group work courses in which offenders who are thinking about change can discuss their lifestyles and offending behaviour and develop strategies to avoid reoffending.

A number of scenarios are explored and offenders feel able to express their inner thoughts and feelings through acting through a number of roles.

The courses focus on

- Understanding motivation to offend
- Exploring offending from others’ prospective
- Exploring strategies to avoid offending
- Goal setting

The courses are very practical and use theatre, drama and active exercises and they can be completed without any written work. Following each course there are feedback sessions and many positive comments made about a number of offenders, many of whom have used the experience to help understand and address their offending triggers.

## HMP La Moye
This year we arranged a drama therapy workshop with the support of Jersey Opera House. Prisoners demonstrated considerable enthusiasm and commented on an enhanced feeling of community after the workshop. Although this was a pilot workshop, we hope it will be the first of many.

## HMP New Hall
Huddersfield University currently work in partnership with ourselves and attend the prison twice a year to complete drama workshops. This is an opportunity for the women to gain experiences in other fields.

## HMP/YOI Parc
This year saw the performance of a play, ‘Forever Delayed’, written by a group of prisoners on the frustrations of IPP sentences. This was subsequently performed at the Sherman Theatre Cardiff by professional actors.
Click [here](#) for 80 pages of innovation and good practice from The Good Prison Award.

## MORE FROM PRISONERACTIONNET

**MONUMENT TRUST LECTURE**

Civilisation Spurns the Leopard ([more](#))

**PRISONERACTIONNET BRIEFING**

Transforming Rehabilitation: A revolution in the way we manage offenders ([more](#))

**ARTS ALLIANCE EVIDENCE LIBRARY**

An online library housing the key research and evaluation documents on the impact of arts-based projects within the Criminal Justice System ([more](#))