



Prisons Awareness Course



The Welcome Directory has a simple yet powerful vision:

To help faith communities become places where people who leave prison find acceptance. A place to belong that not only nurtures faith but also offers appropriate practical support.

People are at the very heart of this work; people who have found the benefits of being part of a faith community whether inside or outside the prison gates. Those leaving prison have a name, a story as well as hopes and dreams for their lives beyond the prison gate.

Participant Guide

The Welcome Directory



Introduction

This guide is designed to help you work through The Welcome Directory Prison Awareness Course. It contains the information and talking points that will be discussed in the small group conversations, so keep it to hand during the sessions! There is space for you to write comments, notes or reflections about the conversations in your groups, should you wish to.

Contents

Session 1: Taster - Beyond the Prison Gates.....	1
Starting Place Survey	1
Discussion 1: Everything Changes at the Prison Gates	2
Discussion 2: Understanding Backgrounds	2
Discussion 3: What do Faith Communities Teach and Do? (15 Min).....	5
Session 2: Experience - Faith In Prison.....	8
Discussion 1: Celebrating our Faith Communities	8
Discussion 2: Finding a New Faith Community upon Release	9
Discussion 3: Giving Back	10
Session 3: Action - Who We Are	11
Discussion 1: Trusting the 'Untrustworthy'	11
Discussion 2: Unlocking the Second Prison.....	12
Ending Place Survey	13
Further Action	14
A Directory of Welcoming Communities	14
How Do I Register My Faith Community?	14
How Can I Engage?.....	14
Other Sources of Information	15



Session 1: Taster - Beyond the Prison Gates

Session Aim: For faith communities to explore the themes, ideas and information surrounding prison, imprisonment and release, leading to a greater understanding of the issues, such as the consequences of a prison sentence and the difference that support can make.

Starting Place Survey

Spend a few minutes filling out The Welcome Directory Attitudinal Awareness Survey. Your responses are anonymous and will help us work towards a rehabilitative society.

The Welcome Directory Attitudinal Awareness Survey: Starting Place

Note your position between 1 and 7

1. If someone who has left prison came to your faith community would you...
(1 keep your distance / 7 accept them)
2. If someone who had left prison told you their story would you...
(1 be sceptical / 7 seek to understand)
3. In your heart of hearts how do you feel towards people with a criminal past...
(1 judgemental / 7 impartial)
4. If someone who had left prison and sought your help would you...
(1 point them in the direction of others / 7 offer care and support)
5. If someone who had left prison sought your friendship would you...
(1 keep them at arms length / 7 be open to being a friend)
6. If someone told you that they had been to prison would you allow that information...
(1 influence the present / 7 be left in the past)

Complete the sentence

7. Prison is
8. Someone who has left prison
9. If someone who has left prison wanted to become a member of your faith community they would



Discussion 1: Everything Changes at the Prison Gates

Approximately 53,000 leave prison every year. 15% of the prison population attends chaplaincy activities = 7,950 per year. About 660 people who have been practicing their faith leave prison each month. Only about 20% go on to join a faith community.

Talking points:

- **What do you think changes** for people when they leave prison? Think about the practicalities of life and their relationships.
- How might those changes **affect the way prisoners feel about making connections** with a faith community?
- **What are the practical barriers** for someone who has left prison in building connections with a faith community?

Notes and reflections:

Discussion 2: Understanding Backgrounds

Look at the Factsheet on the next page:



PRISONER FACTSHEET

The following statistics are taken from *The Bromley Briefings Summer 2021: Prison Reform Trust*, the *HM Chief Inspector for Prisons Annual Report 2016-2017* (where marked with *), from the *Ministry of Justice Transforming Rehabilitation Guidance 2014* (where marked with a +) and *The Lammy Review, 2017* (where marked with ^).



15% prisoners were homeless before entering custody.
44% of prisoners reported living in their accommodation prior to custody for less than a year and 28% had lived there for less than six months.



59% regularly played truant from school.
32% of women and 43% of men were expelled or permanently excluded from school.
57% have literary skills expected of an 11-year-old.
20-30% have learning disabilities or difficulties that interfere with their ability to cope with the criminal justice system.
47% have no qualifications.



13% have never had a job.
81% of women and 67% of men were unemployed in the four weeks before custody.



71% of women, compared with 47% of men, said they had mental health issues
25% of women and 15% of men have symptoms indicative of psychosis.
46% of women and 21% of men have attempted suicide at some point.
27% of male prisoners declared a disability, likely to be linked to an increasingly ageing prison population. *



64% have used Class A drugs.
22% drank alcohol every day in the four weeks before custody.
66% of women and 38% of men in prison report committing offences in order to get money to buy drugs.
70% of prisoners had been drinking when they committed the offence for which they were in prison.
Nearly half of women in prison report having committed offences to support someone else's drug use.



48% of people in prison have a history of debt.
40% of prisoners and 64% of former prisoners felt that their debts had worsened during their sentence.
64% of prisoners said that they had claimed benefits during the 12 months before they went into prison.



31% of women and 24% of men were taken into care as a child. 54% in Young Offender Institutions have been in care.
53% of women and 27% of men experienced abuse as a child.
50% of women and 40% of men observed violence in the home as a child.
57% of women in prison report having been victims of domestic violence as adults. +
54% of prisoners have children under the age of 18.
25% of prisoners are from the BAME community (despite representing 14% of the population), while over 40% of young people in custody are from BAME backgrounds. ^



In your group choose two of the subject areas above to discuss: housing, education, work, mental health, alcohol and drugs, finance and relationship.

Talking points:

- **What would it feel like to have the issues mentioned on the 'Prisoner Factsheet',** in the area you are discussing?
- How might those issues create **barriers for people rebuilding a positive life** after release from prison?

Notes and reflections:



Discussion 3: What do Faith Communities Teach and Do?

Discussion aim: Consider some of the ways to be part of a compassionate response

Talking points:

- Think about the words on page 6 of your guides. **What does your religion/faith teach** about those words, and how might that **affect your response** to people who have been in prison?
- What examples do you know of, **where faith communities have addressed the issues of [belonging, trust, rollercoaster, etc.]?**
- Do you think there is a **gap between what your faith community teaches and what it does** with regards to welcoming prison leavers?

Important question:

- **In what way can you help your faith community address at least one of the issues we have just discussed?** (Aim to have every person in the group answer this question.)

Notes and reflections:



ROLLERCOASTER

Over time most people give up crime but leaving this life can be like a rollercoaster. It is important for those who support people leaving prison to acknowledge that all recovery has its ups and downs and they should therefore be prepared to be disappointed from time to time. Resettlement is messy. Life is messy. Isn't it for everybody?

INCLUSION

Stopping criminal activity is supported strongly by having access to what is considered to be a normal life by being included in the wider community. Three key dimensions of being involved in a community are the capacity to purchase goods and services, involvement in economic and socially valuable activities and social inclusion with family friends and the wider community. Inclusion helps to curb feelings of shame, isolation and a reluctance to get involved.

ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance emerged as the most commonly cited theme in choosing a faith community. Participants experienced repeated rejection and isolation in the transition out of prison. Probation was a stigmatising experience, looking for jobs was often disheartening and re-connecting with family and friends could be fraught with old hurts and rejections. After repeated humiliations one person was relieved when he went to church and found "they treat me just like a normal person." He remained in the same church throughout the study. Being 'welcomed with open arms' offered participants respite from the difficult realities of transition. It was important that this welcome was felt to be "authentic", "familial", extended by "people who really care" and not dependent on non-deviance.

EXAMPLE

Participants said that volunteers helped them to change through providing opportunity, inspiration and example: opportunity to respond to the gift of caring relationships. Inspiration through seeing that others can do it and believe they can too, and example through modelling how to deal with difficulties and struggles in a positive community. Communities who are proactive and responsive in showing ways of both being and becoming 'good' are shown to help people leave crime behind.

SOLIDARITY

Through working with prisoners, volunteers came to understand that prisoners were not so 'other'. It is through solidarity that we have the hope of empathy - to feel the pain of the other and so to be moved to compassion. Compassion is one of the central acts of individual and communal faith - the practical outworking of virtue. Solidarity also leads us to understand our own potential to fail. It was Simone Weil in *Waiting for God* who says "I have the germ of all possible crimes, or nearly all, within me." 1951:7

DIFFICULT

Most criminals want to stop committing crime but leaving a life of crime is a difficult, slow, faltering, precarious struggle, involving episodes of relapse and recovery. Giving up crime is unlikely when the difficulties faced upon release are too great to overcome.

DISEMPOWERING

For people leaving prison life is limited in many ways: they are expected to take responsibility for their past actions and future responses, for themselves and for others, yet their power to choose is limited, freedoms are curbed and restrictions are placed upon important aspects of their lives. This is a confusing message. Limiting someone excludes them from the mainstream; they are different, to be watched and kept at arm's length. However, by being empowered to make decisions for themselves - something prison does not allow - people leaving prison can grow in confidence and personal responsibility.

BEFRIENDING

Knowing another person and being known by them in return has been shown to be a powerful factor in helping people change for the better. It is this openness to the other that nourishes human life and makes neighbourliness possible. However, being kept at a distance alienates and can lead to social exclusion.

TRUST

Many people believe that trust has to be earned, particularly people leaving prison. However, research shows that it is important to move beyond the question of whether a person is trustworthy to recognising that they are a person. By treating them as worthy because of their personhood we extend trust. This powerful and subversive act is a profoundly humanising one. The findings of this research suggest that perhaps being trusted is an inherent part of being, or becoming, trustworthy. As such, bestowing trust relies less on perfection and more on connection. However, when a person leaving prison is treated as a risk to be managed it can actually lead to an increase in reoffending as it tends to segregate and therefore dehumanise the person involved.

BELONGING

Faith communities are social communities that offer people a sense of belonging. This is one of the main benefits gained by joining a faith community. Worshipping with like-minded people who shared their beliefs and accepted them despite their past as well as being a place where people speak to you boosted self-confidence. The most important thing faith communities provide is connection with other human beings, practical help is secondary. Being involved in a faith community also provides a routine that is an important part of leaving old patterns of behaviour behind. Involvement in a faith community is made easier if they had established contact before release.



Before session 2

Watch the video called 'Connections' which can be found on the home page of our website: welcomedirectory.org.uk. Then think about the following:

- What did you notice that stood out or surprised you?
- Why does it matter?
- What does it mean for me?

Notes and reflections:



Session 2: Experience - Faith In Prison

Session Aim: For faith communities worshipping outside the prison gates to have the opportunity to meet faith community members who have experience of worshipping within the prison walls, to get to know one another and celebrate their respective faith communities.

This session includes guests, who are prison leavers, alongside the usual host team made up of prison chaplains, community chaplains as well as staff from The Welcome Directory.

Discussion 1: Celebrating our Faith Communities

Talking points:

- From what you've heard from the prison leaver about their experiences, **is there anything that has struck you?**
- Describe a time when you feel **your faith/ beliefs has helped you** deal with a challenging situation in life.
- Describe **how you are able to support others** in your faith community or **how you have been helped** by others in your faith community

Notes and reflections:



Discussion 2: Finding a New Faith Community upon Release

Listen to the experiences of people leaving prison and the chaplains.

Talking points:

- **From what you've heard, what might you/ your faith community do differently** to be part of the solution to help prison leavers transition better? **(Then ask Prison Leavers if they would agree/ add anything else?)**
- **Think of faith communities you know.** Consider both the practicalities of how that community meets (e.g. time, location), what they do (e.g. faith practices) and the attitudes there. **What barriers can you recognise?**
- What things could your faith community do to **help prison leavers make the transition** into your faith community?

Notes and reflections:



Discussion 3: Giving Back

Talking points:

- In what ways are you able to **get involved in your faith community?**
- If you could pick one thing, **what would you say your strength/ talent is?** Have you been able to **put this into practice** / invest this in your faith community to 'give back'? How does it **make you feel?**
- Why do you think it is **important to provide people with opportunities to 'give back'** into faith communities, as well as being supported by them?

Important question:

- **What can your faith community do to enable people who have left prison to contribute into the life of your community**

Notes and reflections:



Session 3: Action - Who We Are

Session Aim: For faith communities to explore the connections between who faith communities are at their best and some of the themes that recent research has shown to help someone leaving prison make a new life that is free from crime.

Discussion 1: Trusting the 'Untrustworthy'

Consider this quote: "It's hard to distinguish rumour from a report, fact from fiction, reliable source from dis-informant, truth teller, from deceiver. A crisis of trust can't be overcome by a blind rush to play small trust. **Our ambition is not to place trust blindly as small children do, but with good judgement.**" Onora O'Neill, 2002.

Talking points:

- Describe a time **when you trusted someone** and there was a positive outcome or when you trusted someone and there was a negative outcome.
- In what ways **does your faith/ beliefs help you develop trust** with people who have been untrustworthy?
- What ways can you **practically and wisely build trusting relationships** with people who have left prison?

Notes and reflections:



Discussion 2: Unlocking the Second Prison

Consider this quote: **“People transform themselves, we either facilitate it or hinder it.”**

Talking points:

- **How do you respond to the quote?** Why?
- Why do you think **people who have left prison find it difficult to ‘turn their lives around’?**
- What **attitudes**, in faith communities, can help people who have left prison **embrace the transforming nature of faith** or **hinder** their personal transformation?

Important question:

- **How do we put those attitudes into practice?** (When it comes to community/ friendship?)

Notes and reflections:



Ending Place Survey

Spend a few minutes filling out The Welcome Directory Attitudinal Awareness Survey. Your responses are anonymous and will help us work towards a rehabilitative society.

The Welcome Directory Attitudinal Awareness Survey: Ending Place

Note your position between 1 and 7

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What do you intend to do differently having completed the three sessions?



Further Action

A Directory of Welcoming Communities

The directory enables individuals leaving prison, chaplaincy and resettlement teams to easily identify welcoming faith communities beyond the gates.

- **Searchable Online Map** - Our website includes a searchable map, displaying all registered faith communities
- **Physical Directory** - A physical copy of the registered faith communities

How Do I Register My Faith Community?

The form for registration can be found on the homepage of our website or via the QR code.

- **Permission** from Senior Faith Leader
- **Policy** for Safeguarding and named lead
- **Point of Contact** or 'Champion' who will advocate on issues relating to prisons within the faith community
- **Prison Link**, either through volunteering at a local prison, previous significant experience or completing the Prisons Awareness Course



How Can I Engage?

- **Stay Informed** – Attend 'Welcome Directory Connections' Zooms
- **Pray**
- **Do** - Registering, Tell others who may be interested, Becoming an Ambassador, Meeting prison leavers at the gate
- **Give**



Other Sources of Information

Signpost

If you are helping those leaving prison, then Signpost can point you towards services that can offer support. It is a directory of organisations that help with finding somewhere to live, support with finances, suitable work or education, health and wellbeing services. Chaplains, mentors as well as members of Faith Communities can ask the people they support or welcome to tell them which services they are interested in or in need of, and then use Signpost to produce a printed list of services that can help them – see www.signpost.services



Signpost currently lists over 140 organisations that operate nationwide as well as those specific to the Greater London area. Other areas of the country are under development. If you can help gather information for your area of the country, or have any other questions, then do get in touch at contact@signpost.services.

