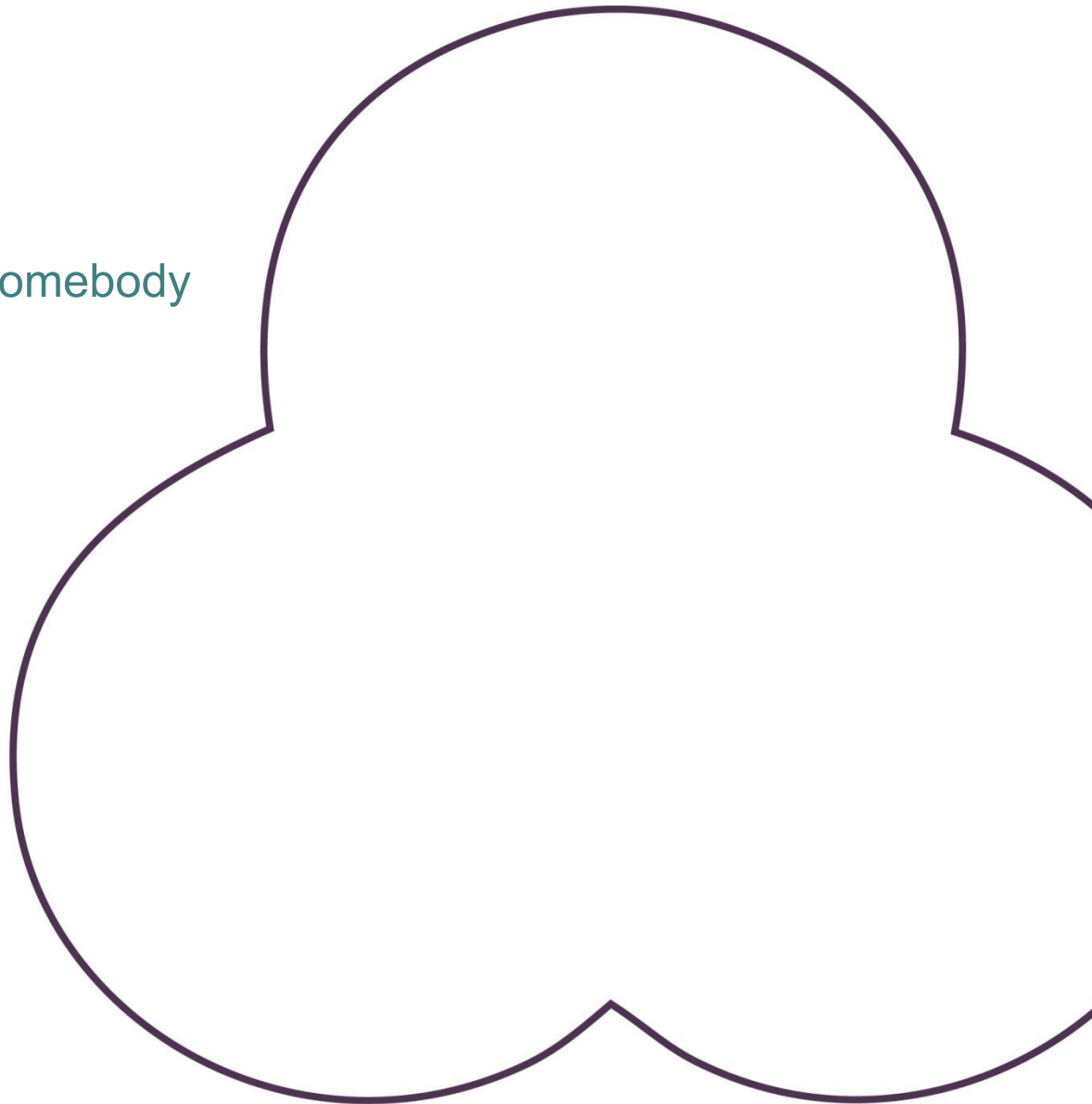


Becoming Somebody



**Basic Caring Communities (BaCC)  
Theory of Change**

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**Title** Basic Caring Communities' (BaCC) Theory of Change

**Client** Prison Advice and Care Trust (Pact)

**Client contact** Bridget Moss, Development Manager

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# Foreword

## Foreword from Brian:



My name is Brian and on the day I was released from prison I had nowhere to go and no one to turn to. All the agencies that were meant to help me on my release had let me down. I was on the edge; suicidal, desperate. If it wasn't for Pact I don't know where I would have ended up.

The first day of being released is so important and without my Basic Caring Communities group I would have been back on the drink and the drugs. Not only that, but I would have been put back in prison for sleeping on the street. Pact gave me practical and emotional support. It was truly life saving to have somebody there who was non-judgemental, who would listen, give advice and be sympathetic to my plight. It really was the story of the Good Samaritan happening to me. It was one stranger helping another stranger out of the goodness of their hearts.

The support I got from Basic Caring Communities should be available to everyone who comes out of prison. I can only imagine where I would be now if I had gotten this support 20 years ago. The group helped me rethink and evaluate my life, and I hope that Pact gets the support it needs to keep this integral work going.

## Foreword from Julian Corner, Chief Executive of LankellyChase Foundation:



Evaluations often run out of steam at the point of establishing whether an intervention is effective, so that most of the time they shed little light on the how or the why. The policy maker, commissioner and indeed service provider is then left far too much scope to insert their own 'common sense' understanding of why it must have worked. Hence the wrong learning gets distilled and applied time and time again. By asking NEF consulting to develop a theory of change for Basic Caring Communities (BaCC), Pact (Prison Advice and Care Trust) has sought to understand better the effectiveness of its own practice in order that the right things can be valued and replicated in future. What is particularly striking in this report is how often a purposeful and yet human and agenda-free relationship is stressed as pivotal by both 'helper' and 'helped'. Those readers who will be glad to hear a released prisoner say 'They gave me a pathway' may also be confused to hear another say 'They didn't want anything from me'. By highlighting the tension between these two statements, this theory of change poses a crucial challenge to current policy: might an unconditional approach actually deliver much better results than one that is designed to drive at explicit outcomes? There are no hard and fast conclusions here, but it is the kind of counter-intuitive insight around which evidence, and not just conviction, needs to be built if we are serious about paying for practice that makes an actual difference to people.

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# 1. Introduction

## About Basic Caring Communities

Basic Caring Communities (BaCC) is a programme of support for ex-offenders leaving prison run by Pact (the Prison Advice and Care Trust). The programme was initially set up as a two year pilot study in 2008 for ex-offenders leaving Wandsworth Prison.

BaCC takes its name from the groups of volunteers that assist the ex-offenders upon release. Most support programmes involving volunteers can be considered mentoring schemes. In these programmes there is typically one volunteer who acts as a befriender, typically supporting the mentee towards a specific goal, which is often career-related. In BaCC, rather than relying on one volunteer, a team of four volunteers work alongside the ex-offender. The philosophy that inspires the BaCC model does not advocate a traditional mentor-mentee relationship. Although the volunteers may often use their skillset to teach the ex-offender skills, the guiding principles advocate a more equal relationship between the two parties.

Together the ex-offender and volunteers form a group, or small community, with an emphasis placed on self-help within a supportive environment. The group aims to reduce the likelihood of re-offending by providing a social group in which the ex-offender does not feel judged, but instead valued for who they are, and able to develop their lives as they move back into society.

The volunteers involved in the programme are typically individuals from the Christian community motivated by their faith. Following a comprehensive course of training, the volunteers are teamed up with an ex-offender, who they meet prior to release. The day of release can cause the ex-offender great anxiety as outside prison they typically have a number of serious concerns, such as no stable housing. A number of ex-offenders do not have friends or family to meet them at the prison gates, so instead the volunteers offer this support. The relationship then continues for the crucial first three months following release. During this time the volunteers and ex-offender are in daily contact via telephone, and meet at least weekly as a group.

The ex-offenders that take part in the programme are typically identified by prison chaplains or Pact (staff members as individuals with a strong desire to not re-offend. All ex-offenders and volunteers go through a thorough risk-assessment procedure to minimise the likelihood that any of the group members- whether the ex-offender or

BaCC volunteers aim to reduce the likelihood of re-offending by providing a safe environment in which the ex-offender does not feel judged, but instead valued for who they are, and able to develop their lives as they move back into society.

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volunteers- will be placed in danger as a consequence of becoming involved in the programme.

Since the initiative commenced it has worked with ex-offenders leaving not only Wandsworth, but also Brixton, Bristol, Pentonville and Forest Bank in Salford.

## Overview of the research

**nef** consulting has been commissioned by Pact to conduct research into BaCC in order to understand and measure the journey of change for ex-offenders and volunteers.

Desistance from offending is a notoriously difficult aim for resettlement services such as BaCC to assist. Between April 2010 and March 2011 the proportion of individuals re-offending within 12 months of leaving custody was 47.2%<sup>1</sup>. The issues facing those leaving prison are a complex interplay between difficult personal, interpersonal and societal circumstances.

Anecdotal evidence and preliminary data on re-offending rates suggest that BaCC has a positive impact on ex-offenders lives. However, there is a need to gain a deeper understanding of how BaCC enables change for ex-offenders.

Pact wishes to grow BaCC over the next few years, and a comprehensive knowledge of the factors critical to the programme's success will maximise the probability that these factors can be replicated and thus quality maintained.

Behaviour change for the volunteers is not the key aim of the project and thus this is not covered in the same depth as impact on ex-offenders. However, engagement with volunteers suggests that the programme may bring changes to their lives, and key outcomes are discussed.

Identifying the impact of BaCC on ex-offenders and volunteers is the first phase of this project. A second phase of the work will further develop BaCC's data collection tools to enable these outcomes to be measured, with an accompanying measurement plan advising a data collection process. BaCC has begun a trialling using the refined tools to collect data.

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Justice (2013) Proven re-offending Statistics Quarterly Bulletin April 2010 to March 2011, London: Ministry of Justice Retrieved from: <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/statistics/reoffending/proven-reoffending-apr10-mar11.pdf>

Theory of Change is a valuable way of understanding the different elements that necessitate major behaviour change, and therefore can aid understanding of how the BaCC programme can impact on the life course of ex-offenders.

## Introduction to the Theory of Change approach

A Theory of Change describes all the ingredients necessary to bring about a long-term aim.

It is a valuable way of understanding the different elements that necessitate major behaviour change, and therefore can aid understanding of how the BaCC programme can impact on the life course of ex-offenders.

nef consulting have developed a framework (Figure1) for understanding the change journey. The approach is helpful to understand the critical factors required achieve the long-term goals of the ex-offender (the blue 'Aim' cloud). The framework distinguishes between external influences (pink arrows); key milestones in the journey (short, medium and long-term outcome dotted boxes); any critical timeframes (small solid-line boxes) and the activities or approaches (green arrows) that could be delivered by BaCC and its volunteers to maximise the likelihood of achieving the aim, and reducing the impact of any hindering, external influences.

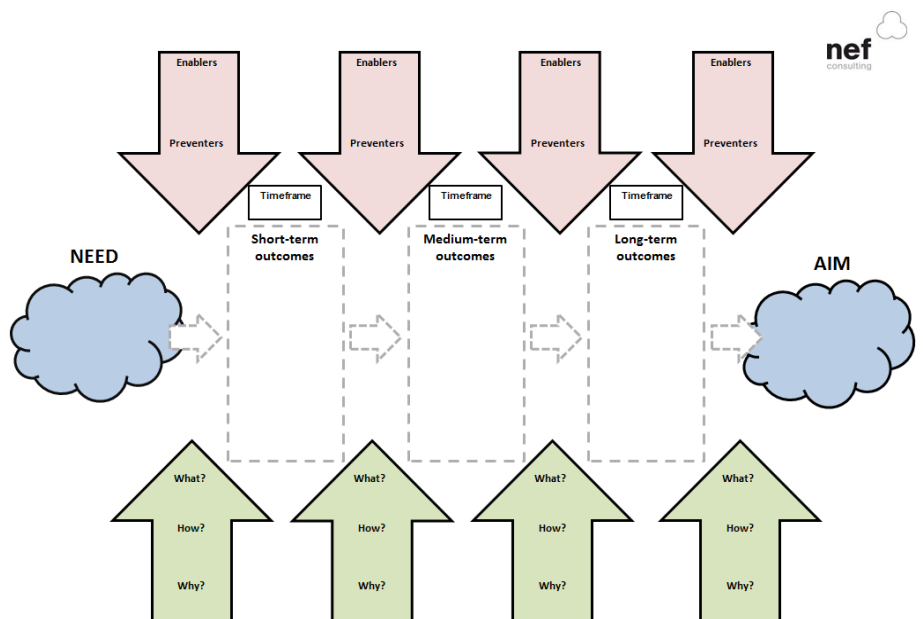


Figure 1: Theory of Change framework

The framework recognises that the change journey is typically a gradual process. Achievement of shorter term outcomes must be realised before the long-term aim is achieved. There may be regressions or returns, temporary or otherwise, back to earlier stages of the change journey, and again this is a normal part of the journey.

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Drawing on conversations with those involved with the programme, BaCC's Theory of Change describes the key themes in the complex journey an ex-offender goes through if they are to achieve desistance of offending behaviour, and a move towards a more stable, positive lifestyle. It identifies the role that BaCC can play in this journey, the individual characteristics of the ex-offender, and any social and societal factors that could enable or prevent the change process. The journey of change recognises that desistance may not be immediately achieved for all those participating in the programme, but that other outcomes, many related to emotional well-being, may be achieved. For the ex-offenders these outcomes have a value in themselves, and may ultimately contribute to desistance.

## Methodology

BaCC's Theory of Change has been informed by in face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews and focus groups with the following stakeholders:

- Ten ex-offenders interviewed at various stages prior, during and after engagement with BaCC
- Fifteen volunteers;
- Seven additional stakeholders (four prison Chaplains; one BaCC coordinator; one risk assessment officer; and one of the founders of the BaCC programme).

The majority of stakeholder engagement was half an hour to an hour in duration. During these sessions, stakeholders were asked questions about the BaCC programme and life experiences more widely.

All engagement was focused primarily on outcomes for the ex-offenders. However, engagement with volunteers also uncovered outcomes for the volunteers themselves. A semi-structured interview schedule was created (see Appendix 1 for example schedule for ex-offenders pre-release), with the interview content being guided by the interviewee responses.

In line with the different elements of a Theory of Change, interviews with ex-offenders intended to identify:

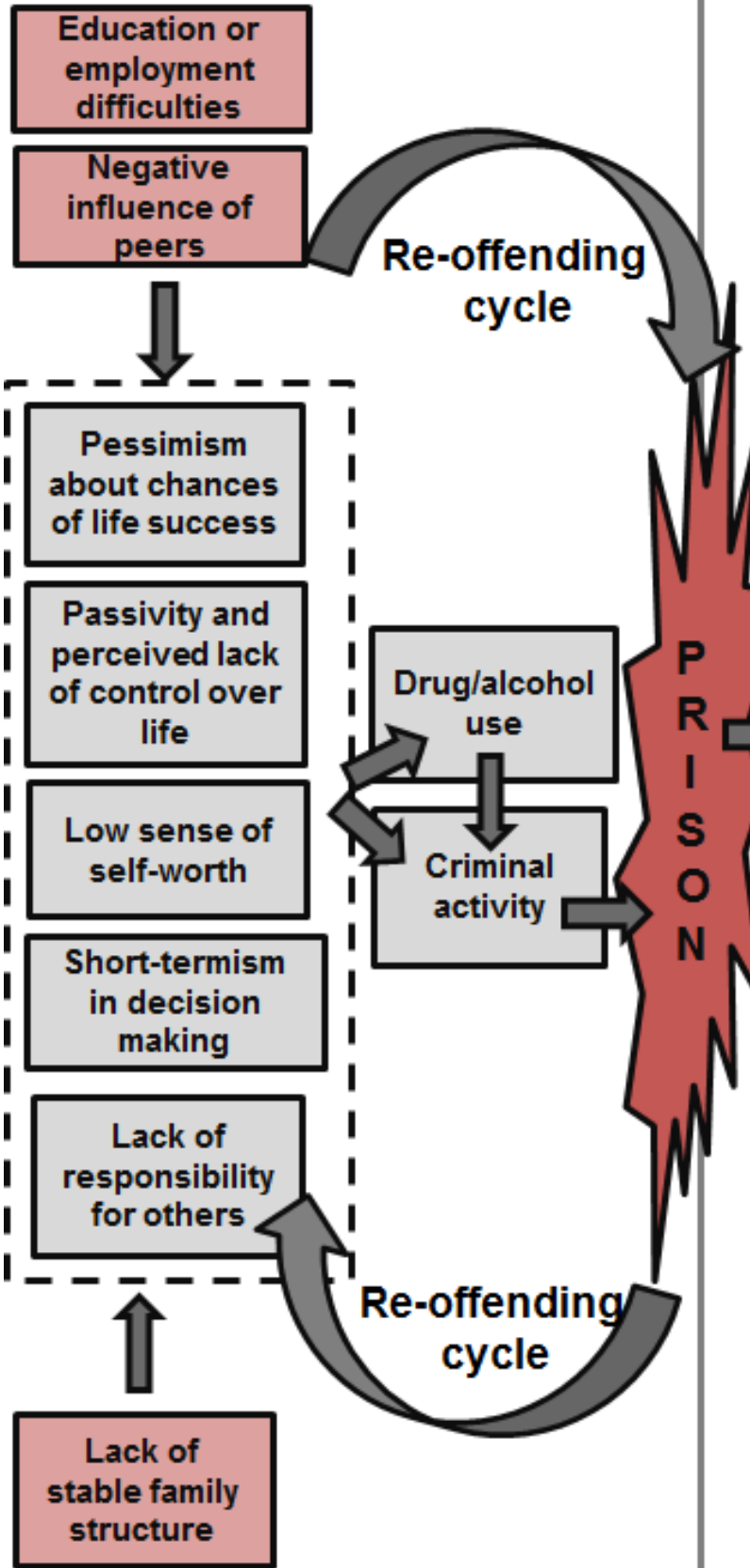
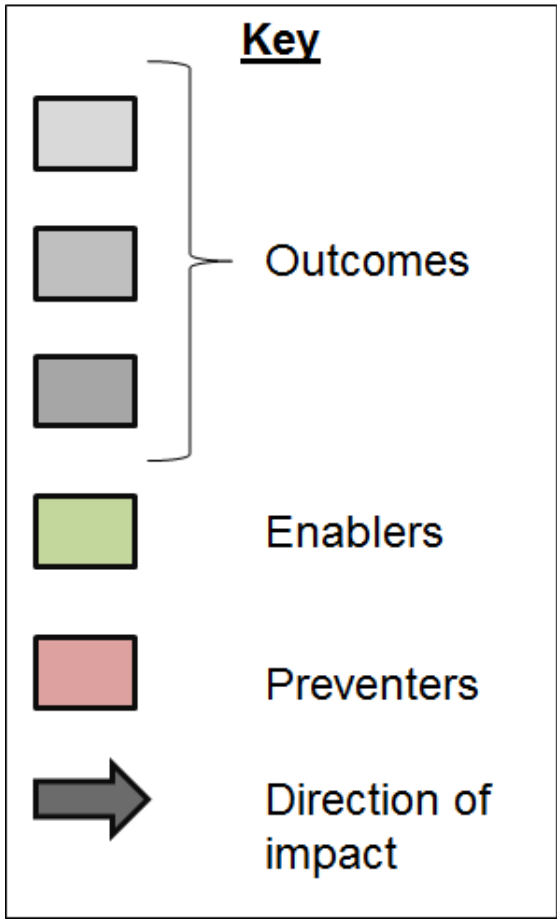
- Their previous experiences, including those that had led them to offending
- What they hoped for/had achieved through engagement with BaCC
- Their wider hopes and aspirations



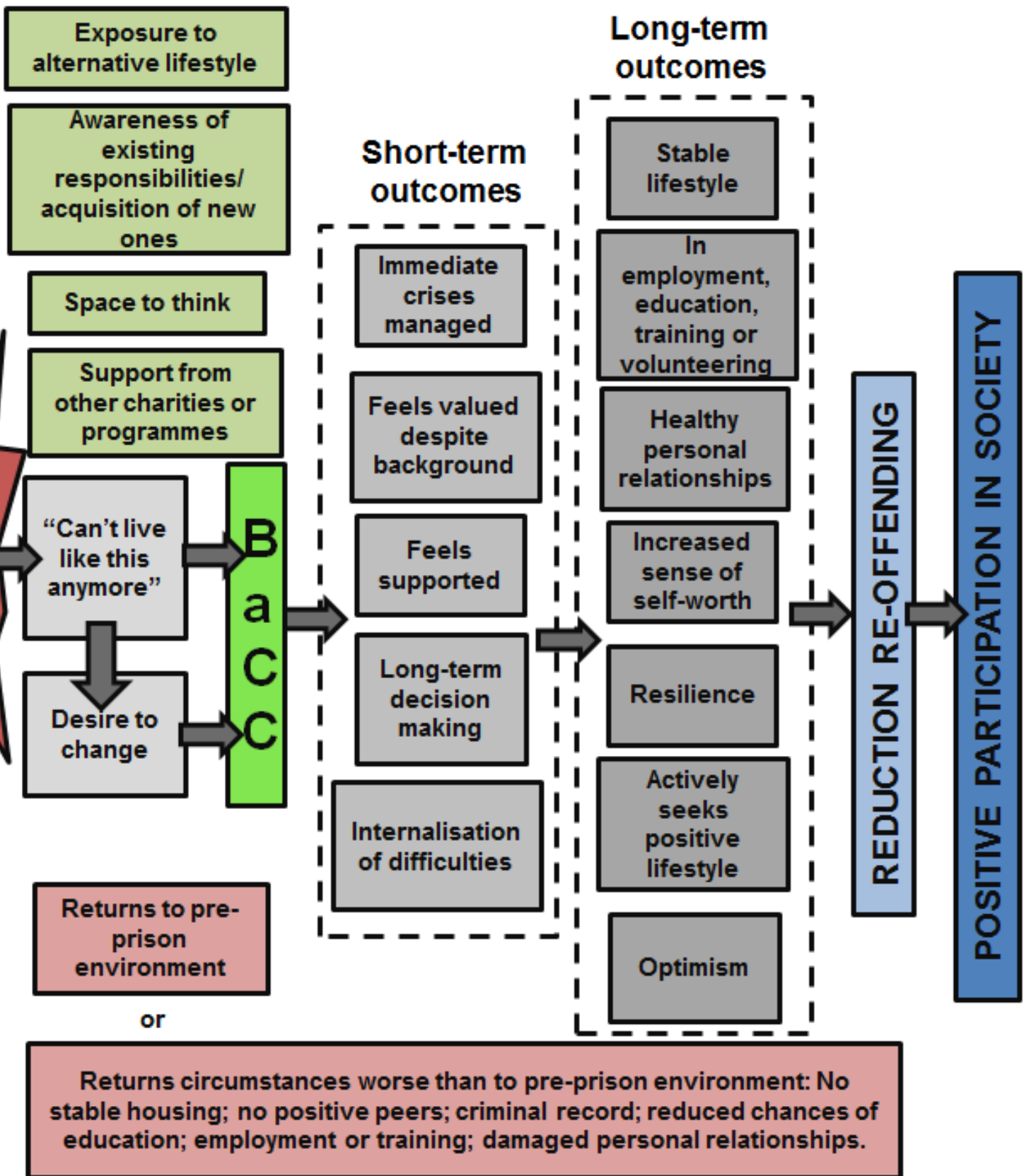
- 
- How they felt that BaCC could/had contributed to these wider goals
  - Any organisations, individuals or personal circumstances that may support/have supported or prevent achievement of goals.

Detailed notes were recorded during the interviews and focus groups. Once the data collection was completed the transcripts were reviewed and key themes identified. The following section details these key themes along the journey experienced by ex-offenders.

The Theory of Change is first presented in diagrammatic form and the life experiences of ex-offenders are then explored in greater detail. The remainder of the report presents the implications of BaCC's Theory of Change for redefining success in resettlement programmes, outcomes for volunteers and concludes with a summary of findings.



# The Theory of Change



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Although the stories of the ex-offenders, and those who supported them, were varied and complex, there were recurring themes and patterns that typified their journeys.

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Figure 2 presents our understanding of the journey that ex-offenders take whilst engaging with BaCC.

Although the stories of the ex-offenders, and those who supported them, were varied and complex, we were able to identify recurring themes and patterns that typified their journeys. Figure 2 depicts these themes across the journey ex-offenders take into imprisonment and their subsequent pathway to desistance.

The diagram presents our understanding of the outcomes “changes” that the ex-offenders experience as a result of their circumstances, both before and after prison. We also present the outcomes which lead to negative behaviour such as drug/ alcohol use and criminal behaviour, as they are key to understanding the re-offending cycle and how interventions such as BaCC can create the initial stepping stones to desisting from criminal behaviour. In the words of a BaCC participant:

*“You need to get to the bottom before you realise you need to get back up again”*

The diagram shows that the re-offending cycle continues until the individual decides that they can no longer live their life in this manner. At this stage they become willing to actively engage with external support, such as BaCC, upon release. The circumstances to which an individual returns after leaving prison has a huge impact on whether positive or negative (re-offending) outcomes are created. However, external positive influences can support the pathway to desistance.

Short-term outcomes resulting from engagement with BaCC are likely to happen during the three months of engagement with programme - if they are going to be achieved at all. The longer-term outcomes are not likely to be experienced until after the programme has finished, although ex-offenders may have begun to experience these outcomes to some extent prior to the programme finishing.

The themes and patterns depicted in the diagram are described in more detail in the following three sub-sections of this report: Pathway to Offending; Pathway to Desistance; and BaCC’s contribution to Desistance. The sub-sections follow the ex-offenders’ journey in chronological order, and where a theme represented in Figure 2 is directly referred to, the text is highlight in bold font.

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## 1. The pathway to offending

Through the interviews we identified some similarities in the life experiences and self-perceptions of the ex-offenders in their early lives and during the years leading up to their first imprisonment.

### *Environmental circumstances*

The ex-offenders often spoke of troubling, dysfunctional personal relationships. Most did not have close ties with their families, or as children had a **lack of stable family structure**. There were often traumatic family events which put tremendous strain on the individual, sometimes when they were still very young. For example, one interviewee told us that his father had committed suicide when he was a child, and that his mother had made repeated suicide attempts.

For many, relationships outside the family unit therefore became important. Some of the older individuals interviewed spoke wistfully of a youth spent with friends. However, **peers were often reported to be a negative influence**, as they were often engaged in unconstructive social activities, such as heavy drinking.

All ten of the ex-offenders interviewed reported poor **socioeconomic circumstances**, feeling they did not have the financial means to support themselves at various stages of their lives. Many grew up in deprived households, and the majority did not have stable employment or qualifications.

### *Self-perception and beliefs*

The environmental circumstances described appeared to have a negative impact on the self-perceptions and beliefs of those interviewed.

Many were **pessimistic about their chances of life success**. There was a sense that the individuals interviewed had **felt passive and they had little control over their lives**: life was just something that happened to them. They were reactive to things that went on around them, rather than being proactive and considered when making decisions. **Decisions were only made by considering the positive impact on short-term circumstances**, even if this meant that there may be severe detrimental effects in the long-term.

*“I robbed for the buzz. I didn’t have any responsibilities. It was easy money. I didn’t see any negative consequences.”*

Ex-offenders reported a **lack of responsibility for others**, and thus felt that there was no incentive to avoid criminality for anyone other than themselves.

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### *The development of criminal behaviour*

Interviewees did not identify a decisive moment that determined when they became a 'criminal'. Instead, over varying lengths of time, occasional negative behaviours developed into criminality. For some, this path was indirect: they became **problematic users of alcohol or other drugs**, and stole to fund their behaviour. For others, theft, which was the type of **criminal activity** most frequently reported, was a means to afford a lifestyle they did not feel they could achieve by more socially acceptable means.

No aspects of the individuals' lives worked in positive opposition to this slide into criminality. They did not report other factors acting as an incentive to resist criminal behaviour.

Aiming for more positive goals, such as a steady job, was seen to require an investment of time and personal resources which was disproportionate to the chances that these goals would materialise. Money could be acquired by easier but criminal means, in the short-term at least. Those interviewed reported feeling little concern about the risk of imprisonment.

### *Imprisonment and the re-offending cycle*

Many individuals went for years without conviction. However, eventually they were caught and sentenced to time in **prison**.

When an individual had finally spent their sentence they described how they **returned to the same circumstances in which they had existed before they had been convicted**: circumstances that had contributed to their offending behaviour. **In most cases the life ex-offenders returned to was actually worse than before conviction.** They were likely to have lost any secure housing or work they may have had, and any individuals who could have been a stabilising influence no longer wished to be associated with them.

The ex-offenders described how they existed in an environment where criminality surrounded them, and how they fought constantly to resist its pull. Sometimes, the return to offending behaviour would occur when they conceded this battle, finding it impossible to create a non-criminal lifestyle in a criminal environment. Others described the return to crime as necessary and desperate: stealing from shops to buy food, or breaking into a house to find somewhere to sleep. Eventually, they would be re-arrested.

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*“I’m not going to be starting trouble or being the big man anymore. I’ve been there and done that. I know it’s not the right thing, you’ve got to realise that and try something different.”*

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## 2. The pathway to desistance

The journey of change for interviewees who have desisted from offending is varied, but has allowed us to identify a number of recurring themes in the pathway to desistance.

Those who managed to desist reported that they had previously accepted the re-offending cycle as inevitable, and imprisonment an unavoidable part of this. However, they now viewed prison less passively, and instead with a mix of fear and exhaustion, feeling they **couldn’t live the lifestyle any longer**. The short-term benefits of crime were no longer seen as worth the risk of imprisonment. Despite this change in attitude, some of those interviewed still went onto re-offend. To achieve long term desistance from offending behaviour, successful desistors felt that it took a deeper, more resolute **desire to change**, rather than a need to simply avoid circumstances associated with not changing.

*“You’ve really got to want to change”*

There seemed to be a rejection of old ways, and a desire to build a new self-identity.

*“I’m not going to be starting trouble or being the big man anymore. I’ve been there and done that. I know it’s not the right thing, you’ve got to realise that and try something different.”*

Among the interviewees, we noticed that this transformation rarely had a single causal factor, but instead was the result of an interplay of social and environmental factors, such as relationships and job opportunities; and individual traits or beliefs, such as improved self-esteem.

For some, there **was acquisition of new responsibilities or relationships, such as birth of a child, or improvement in the quality of existing relationships**. This gave a sense of responsibility, that the actions of the individual were relevant to someone other than themselves.

*“I’ve put myself in a position where I have a lot of commitments now, a lot of responsibilities.”*

For others there was a clear change their self-perception and esteem. Despite their past, they realised that they did not need to carry the label of a ‘criminal’: they could reframe themselves, create another identity for themselves. This new identity could be more positive and

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socially acceptable: a good job, healthy relationships and stable housing.

Some reported that they were ready to make a permanent change to their lifestyle, but this statement was made with less conviction and resolute determination than the interviewees who had already stopped offending in the long-term. These interviewees tended to express sentiments that suggested they did not have the power to stop their offending behaviour, that they were a victim of circumstance and the chaos in which they lived.

*“Every time I am out of prison something goes wrong and I’m back inside”*

In contrast, those who had not re-offended for some time had developed a sense of control over their own lives.

*“The only thing that is going to prevent or enable me to get where I want to go is myself.”*

There seemed to be a level of internalisation and a verbal expression that they were willing to take on the challenge. They **expressed long-term goals and ambitions** rather than a desire for short-term satisfaction of needs or avoidance of negative circumstances, such as prison. They recognised that their circumstances were extremely challenging, and that to build a non-criminal life would take time, but saw this investment as worthwhile.

### 3. What is BaCC’s contribution to desistance?

Clearly, the pathway to desistance is complex, and there are a large number of negative factors that may hinder the journey. In many cases those interviewed succumbed to these.

As we have identified so far, the circumstances of the interviewees when they re-entered society were often more difficult than when they left. The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) organises programmes to reduce re-offending according to ‘seven pathways’<sup>2</sup>: Accommodation; Education, Training and Employment; Health; Drugs and Alcohol; Finance, Benefits and Debt; Children and Families; and Attitudes, Thinking and Behaviour. The individuals engaged in this research, and in BaCC, expressed difficulties with all these areas.

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<sup>2</sup> Home Office (2004) Reducing re-offending national action plan. Retrieved from [http://www.thelearningjourney.co.uk/reducing-reoffending-action-plan.pdf/file\\_view](http://www.thelearningjourney.co.uk/reducing-reoffending-action-plan.pdf/file_view)



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*“Where I come from you don’t have people being nice to you and doing things for you from the heart. - [With BaCC] there were no ulterior motives. They didn’t want anything from me.”*

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BaCC primarily provides emotional support, which addresses the ‘Attitudes, Thinking and Behaviour’ pathway. However, the seven pathways are not entirely separable: it was clear from engaging with the ex-offenders, as well as the volunteers and BaCC staff, that emotional support can have reciprocal impacts on other elements of an ex-offender’s life. Satisfaction of these Seven Pathways increases the likelihood of desistance, and in the right circumstances the environment provided by BaCC volunteers can contribute to these factors either directly or indirectly.

Figure 3 lists the different qualities that ex-offenders told us they valued about BaCC groups.

**What ex-offenders valued about the BaCC programme:**

- **Non judgemental**
- **Unconditional support**
- **No unsafe behaviours**
- **Space to relax**
- **Practical support**
- **Range of opinions**
- **Genuine empathy**
- **Treated as equals despite previous experiences**

Figure 3: Different characteristics of BaCC and its volunteers valued by ex-offenders

The remainder of this section explores these qualities in more depth, as the interviews inferred that these qualities contributed to creating stability in an ex-offender’s life: directly or indirectly contributing to the seven pathways and in particular, ‘Attitudes, Thinking and Behaviour’.

***BaCC offers ex-offenders a safe space***

For the most part, the ex-offenders first engaged with the programme because they were desperate for any sort of support they could find when they left prison.

*“Any sort of help I can take, I will.”*

Most did not feel that they could mentally survive further stints in prison. They told us that they did not want to re-offend, but were not entirely confident in their ability to not commit crime, particularly given the instability of their lifestyle. The regular meetings provided respite from their day-to-day lives. Volunteers were seen as **‘safe’ people in a safe environment**, where there was no risk of exposure to drugs or crime.

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*“The time I spent with them, they gave me the confidence I’d lost, they gave me back the meaning of being somebody.”*

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***BaCC volunteers offer non-judgmental, unconditional support***

Some explained that they were worried about being judged before they met the BaCC volunteers, but soon found this concern was unfounded.

*“I felt a bit vulnerable, that one or two might be judging me. There was a warmth when I met them. They made me feel there was nothing to worry about and that they were there for me.”*

The sort of unconditional support offered by the BaCC group was not typical of the relationships ex-offenders were used to in their personal lives.

*“Where I come from you don’t have people being nice to you and doing things for you from the heart. [With BaCC] there were no ulterior motives. They didn’t want anything from me.”*

Having more than one volunteer meant that there was a range of different opinions, and the ex-offenders explained how they forged different types of relationships with different volunteers. Often these differences were along gender lines, with female and male volunteers taking on maternal and paternal roles respectively.

***BaCC volunteers valued the ex-offender despite their background***

The volunteers were interested in learning about the ex-offenders’ lives.

*“Even though they know I’ve been a robber they want to talk to me, and it makes me feel good.”*

They treated them as equals, and gently encouraged them to actively seek a positive lifestyle. The ex-offenders lacked confidence and self-belief. The volunteers helped them see their strengths.

*“They made me realise there’s nothing to be ashamed about, what’s done is done, and the more you talk about it the better you feel.”*

*“The time I spent with them, they gave me the confidence I’d lost, they gave me back the meaning of being somebody.”*

***BaCC volunteers provided exposure to an alternative lifestyle***

Within their normal group of peers, **the ex-offenders had little exposure to the lifestyles they aspired to create for themselves. BaCC volunteers provided them with this exposure.** The ex-offenders developed an understanding of what a non-criminal way of life was like, and the steps they needed to achieve to progress

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There were a number of examples of where public institutions appeared to aggravate the complex situations of ex-offenders who were trying to resettle, so the BaCC group was an extremely worthwhile resource to moderate these potential negative impacts.

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towards this goal. Some began to recognise that they needed to aim for longer term goals and sacrifice shorter-term gratification.

*“My mind was in the right place, but the support network with Pact gave me a direction. Before I hadn’t got a clue what I was going to do afterwards. They gave me a pathway.”*

*“Before I thought ‘now now now’, but it doesn’t work like that, and if it does you don’t appreciate it”*

For one of the younger ex-offenders, the BaCC volunteers had become role models.

*“I feel like I want to be a bit like them, like the way [name of specific volunteer] is. She’s just lovely. It’s hard to explain, but everyone around her is nice too. I want to be like that, I want to be around people like that, I want to treat people like that and be treated like that.”*

#### ***BaCC volunteers help ex-offenders manage immediate crises through practical support***

The BaCC programme is designed primarily to provide emotional support rather than practical help. However, the circumstances surrounding ex-offenders often meant that more hands-on-help was necessary to avert serious crises.

Prisoners are given a discharge grant of £46 when they leave prison to support their first week following release<sup>3</sup>. However, the ex-offenders, volunteers and other stakeholders interviewed for this research all impassionedly explained how this sum of money was too small: typically it was weeks before prisoners received any benefits, and the meantime they were often sleeping on the floors of friends-of-friends, with very few possessions and no funds to buy food.

There were a number of examples of where public institutions, such as Job Centre Plus, appeared to aggravate the complex situations of ex-offenders who were trying to resettle, so the BaCC group was an extremely worthwhile resource to moderate these potential negative impacts. The groups did not give money to ex-offenders but they helped in other ways, for example, by donating old clothes during winter; buying them a bus pass if they had no money for transport; or

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<sup>3</sup> For information on discharge, including grant regulations, see [www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/offenders/psi-2011-25-discharge.doc&ei=oQI7UcTPC6GN7QaxwIHAAQ&u sg=AFQjCNE4lfsg181cmxpWH1oNxjAejlZGUw](http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/offenders/psi-2011-25-discharge.doc&ei=oQI7UcTPC6GN7QaxwIHAAQ&u sg=AFQjCNE4lfsg181cmxpWH1oNxjAejlZGUw)

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*“I feel I’ve come a long way from where I was. I’ve got positive thinking from them. I really don’t know what I would be doing if I hadn’t redone the exams. Every time I doubted they told me I could do it. That’s what I really needed. Now I am more positive. I believe I can do a lot of things now.”*

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directing them to websites such as Freecycle where they could find things they needed for free.

Despite the tremendous value of the practical help provided, some volunteers expressed they sometimes felt frustrated or powerless that there was not more they could do to help.

*“They are overwhelmed by practical problems...we could help them with them a bit but the guys needed more than just emotional support.”*

***BaCC volunteers offer practical support that may enable ex-offenders to develop long-term stability***

Volunteers did not provide practical help only in times of crisis. There were many examples of volunteers providing practical support that led to achievement of long-term goals and outcomes.

*“They showed me people and websites I didn’t know about, and dropped me off for jobs, gave me tools, picked me up after the job. It meant that I didn’t have to do these things alone to get the job.”*

It appeared that in some cases the ex-offenders may have been able to mobilise these resources themselves, but lacked the drive or self-belief to do so. BaCC seemed to provide an **external source of positivity that was contagious**. One ex-offender explained how his group had helped him find funding to do his NVQ, and when he initially failed they had encouraged him to sit the exams again. The second time, he passed.

*“I feel I’ve come a long way from where I was. I’ve got positive thinking from them. I really don’t know what I would be doing if I hadn’t redone the exams. Every time I doubted they told me I could do it. That’s what I really needed. Now I am more positive. I believe I can do a lot of things now.”*

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## 3. A wider measure of success

*“What is success? You might have had someone who every time they went to the Job Centre they wanted to explode. But now they don’t and that might be a massive achievement.”*

Given the difficulties ex-offenders face, volunteers questioned whether it was ill-considered to define an end to re-offending as the only measure of success, as is typically the case with most resettlement programmes.

*“What is success? You might have had someone who every time they went to the Job Centre they wanted to explode. But now they don’t and that might be a massive achievement.”*

It is possible that those involved in BaCC may have gone on to re-offend, but have also experienced other less tangible, but no less meaningful outcomes from their engagement with the programme. Indeed, through engaging with ex-offenders we felt it was often outcomes such as improved self-esteem that the ex-offenders appeared to value more than desistance itself. One prison chaplain explained the difference she saw in repeat offenders if they returned to prison again after engaging with the programme:

*“They come back and they say BaCC has helped them. Someone has taken an interest in them and it has made them think a bit more. And the conversation I have with them has changed. It’s a different conversation. They still haven’t quite made up their minds that they want to change, but talking through their situation has changed. They are talking on a deeper level. Their eyes and bodies are not wanting to run away, they are looking on a much deeper level at themselves. And they actually recommend it to other guys. But it’s just small changes, because we’re talking about complex problems- family, housing, these don’t change overnight.”*

These small changes could be vitally important in the process of long-term behaviour change, and although re-offending may not be prevented immediately for all individuals, many of those interviewed felt that desistance may come sooner for those that have engaged in the programme. As one volunteer put it:

*“I think we’re a tiny cog in a massive wheel. But that tiny cog is massively important.”*

### Outcomes of the BaCC programme

Taking account of what ex-offenders told us what mattered to them, and recognising that desistance is a limited measure of success, particularly given the difficult circumstances of ex-offenders, the outcomes that will be measured in the next phase of this research are

presented in Figure 4. These are the long-term outcomes represented in BaCC's Theory of Change diagram in Figure 2, mapped onto NOMS' seven pathways.

This represents a change from traditional outcome measurement in resettlement programmes which tend to focus on re-offending or the seven pathways only.

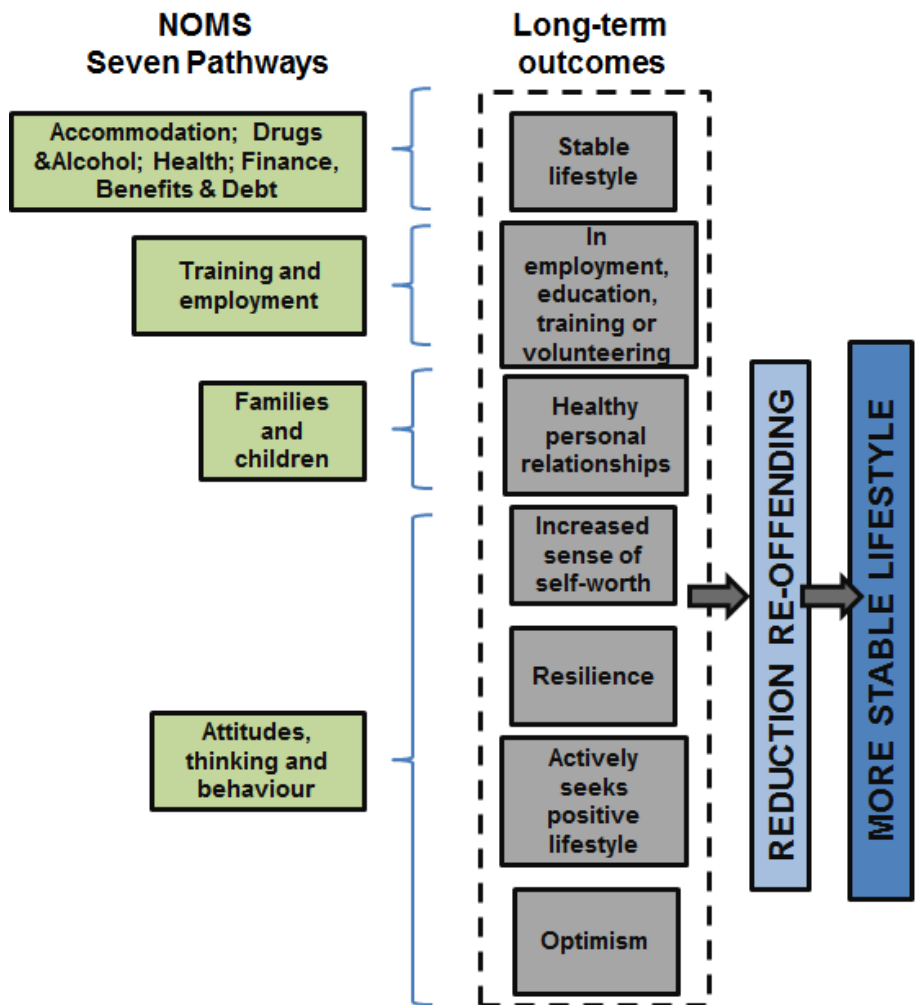


Figure 4: long-term outcomes for ex-offenders mapped onto NOMS' seven pathways.

For some programmes, achieving change across the pathways alone is a challenge due to the difficulties ex-offenders face upon release, as these are difficult to address in either isolating an individual pathway or tackling all Seven Pathways in their entirety. In reality, the achievement of progress along the pathways is dependent on a number of factors that are beyond these programmes' control; primarily, in the case of those interviewed, access to safe and secure housing.

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The outcomes that BaCC can influence most result from the non-judgemental, unconditional and genuine emotional support offered by the programme's volunteers.

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To measure effectively the impact of BaCC we have focused on what matters the most to ex-offenders, and the outcomes that are most directly linked to BaCC in the Theory of Change. These are the outcomes that directly result from non-judgemental, unconditional and genuine emotional support. These outcomes fit with the 'Attitudes, Thinking and Behaviour' NOMS pathway: increased sense of self-worth; resilience; actively seeks more positive lifestyle; optimism.

Additional outcomes enabled by BaCC can be mapped onto the remaining six NOMS pathways. Our research suggests that these outcomes are often prevented by difficult circumstances, but BaCC may in some cases be able to contribute to these outcomes (stable lifestyle; in employment, education, training or volunteering; healthy personal relationships) either directly through practical support, or indirectly by supporting ex-offenders to develop an alternative self-view that could empower them to overcome barriers and achieve these outcomes alone.

BaCC's Theory of Change is consistent with the existing academic literature. The most relevant theories and findings from the desistance literature are presented in Appendix 2.

## 4. Outcomes for BaCC volunteers

While the primary emphasis of this report has been on outcomes for ex-offenders, taking part in the BaCC programme also brings benefits to volunteers.

Volunteers receive comprehensive training as part of the BaCC programme, and forge working relationships with other volunteers in their support group. While these activities contribute to outcomes for volunteers to some extent, it is the direct engagement with ex-offenders that brings the most benefit to volunteers. The outcomes for volunteers are represented in Figure 5 and these outcomes will be measured in the next phase of the research along with the outcomes for ex-offenders.

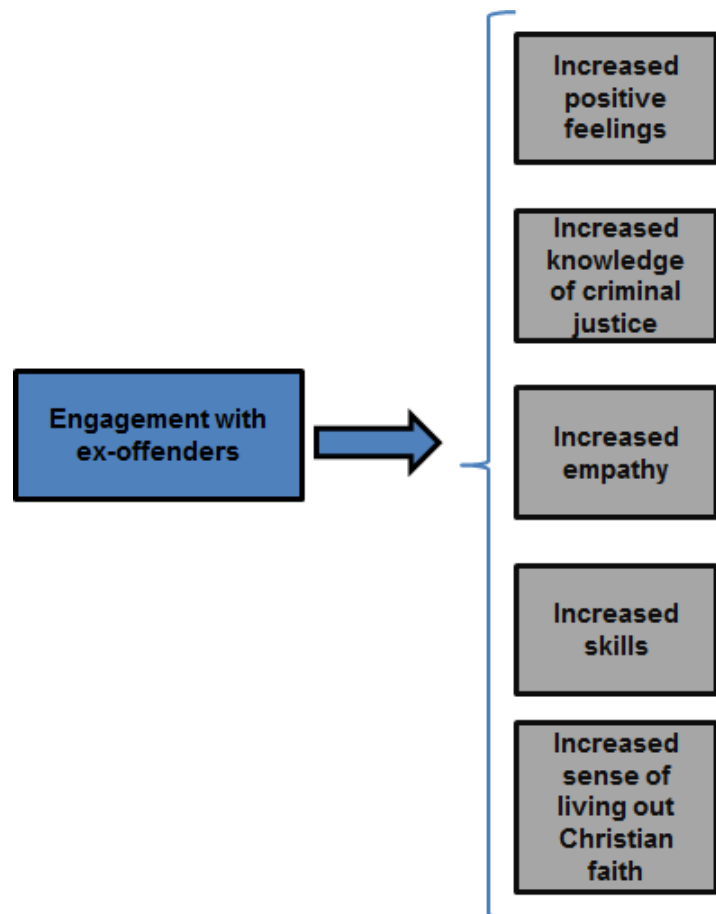


Figure 5 Outcomes for volunteers resulting from engaging with ex-offenders



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*“I’ve got a new level of empathy. Even in my work environment when I’m working with different people from different backgrounds. I can put my feet in other people’s shoes and I think that is a really valuable skill that I use consciously and unconsciously.”*

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Giving up time to take part in the programme led to **increased positive feelings** for the volunteers. This is consistent with the literature, which suggests that pro-social behaviour is a key driver of well-being<sup>4</sup>.

Prior to involvement with the programme, the majority of volunteers had little awareness of criminal justice. Speaking to ex-offenders **increased their knowledge of the criminal justice system**, and alongside this many volunteers actually experienced changes in their personal views about the role of criminal justice in society.

Volunteers also reported increased knowledge of personal circumstances of the ex-offender they supported. These circumstances, whether current or previous life experiences, were very different from those of the volunteers. They gained a greater understanding of how negative life events can impact on an individual’s circumstances, and potentially lead to criminality and the re-offending cycle. Consequently, they reported feeling more empathetic towards groups in society that are often demonised, such as offenders. Some volunteers reported that this **increased empathy** impacted on aspects of their personal and work life.

*“I’ve got a new level of empathy. Even in my work environment when I’m working with different people from different backgrounds. I can put my feet in other people’s shoes and I think that is a really valuable skill that I use consciously and unconsciously.”*

Many volunteers also experienced **increased levels of other skills**, particularly listening skills. Much of the initial training that volunteers received involved listening, but it was putting these skills into practice through engaging with ex-offenders that enhanced their ability to be a good listener.

Many of the volunteers who take part in BaCC do so because they are motivated by their Christian faith. Christianity’s teachings encourage followers to help others, particularly the poor and marginalised, by making a personal sacrifice such as time or money. The book of Matthew explicitly mentions supporting those who have been in prison through visits. The Bible, notably the book of Isaiah, also draws attention to social inequalities and injustice. The BaCC programme provides volunteers with an opportunity to live out

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<sup>4</sup> Huppert, F.A. (2009) Psychological well-being: evidence regarding its causes and consequences. *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-being*. 1(2) 137-164

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their Christian values by giving time to help ex-offenders who can be viewed as victims of social inequalities.

Although volunteers would describe how and why their faith motivates them to volunteer with BaCC in different ways, many reported an **increased sense of living out their Christian faith.**

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## 5. Conclusion

Our research has demonstrated that BaCC is greatly valued by the ex-offenders that take part in it. Having a non-judgemental, genuine support network for the first few months of release is a great asset at what is, for most, a very difficult time.

Our research suggests that the majority of outcomes for ex-offenders relate to emotional and psychological well-being. This is consistent with the primary aim of BaCC, which is to offer emotional support to ex-offenders as they transition to resettling back into the community. Our research has also indicated that BaCC may contribute to improving more structural circumstances for ex-offenders, either directly through practical support, or indirectly through improving the emotional resources of the ex-offender. However, the level of positive impact BaCC has on ex-offenders is heavily dependent on a number of factors external to the programme itself, for example, whether the environment in which many ex-offenders live is conducive to desistance.

Nevertheless, the value that ex-offenders place on improvements to personal well-being resulting from BaCC should not be understated. Furthermore, it is possible that these outcomes, which relate to the 'Attitudes, Thinking and Behaviour' NOMS pathway, contribute to desistance in the long-term if not initially.

The relationship that ex-offenders forms with the volunteers is reciprocal, and the volunteers themselves experience a number of positive outcomes. These outcomes relate to improvements in skills, knowledge and elements of personal well-being.

This report forms the first part of a programme of research to understand the impact of BaCC. The second phase consisted of development of data collection tools to measure the level to which outcomes are achieved for ex-offenders and volunteers. These tools have now been created and are currently being trialled with BaCC groups.

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# Appendices

## Appendix One

### Interview Schedule: Programme participants prior to release

Thank you for agreeing to chat to me today. Let me quickly introduce who I am and what I am doing. I work for an organisation called nef and we are working with the people that run BaCC to understand more about how it might support the people who take part. As part of this we are talking to people like yourself who are involved in the programme. We'd like to ask you a few questions today to help us with this. Nothing that we discuss today will have name attached unless we ask you first. The only exception to this is if you say something that makes me concerned that you might harm yourself or someone else.

I'm going to ask you a series of questions, if you feel uncomfortable at any time please let me know and we can move onto another question and if you want us to stop the interview at any time (and not come back to it) that's fine too.

### Reasons for engaging with Pact

- How did you find out about BaCC?
- What about BaCC appealed to you initially?
- Have you had other support to help you prepare for release?
  - If YES, what about it was good, and what was less good?
  - If NO, were you offered other support? If you were, what were your reasons for not taking it on?
- From what you know now, is there anything different about BaCC when you compare it to any other support you might have had or heard about?

### Aspirations

- If there was nothing to prevent you from getting there, where would you like to be and what would you like to be doing in
    - Three months' time
    - One year
    - Five years?
  - Is there anything about BaCC that you think might help you get there?
  - Why do you think it will help?
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### **External factors that impact on life**

- Is there anything in your life that might stop you getting from where you want to be in three months/one year/five years?  
E.g.
  - Family/friends
  - Work/skills
  - Money
  - Health issues
  - Housing
- How might these stop you?
- Which ones concern you most?
- Are there any other organisations outside of prison that you think could help you overcome these issues?
- Of the worries and problems that you have mentioned, are these new problems or are they problems you have had before?
  - If you have had the problems before, have they been related to you being in prison? Is this the first time you have been prison?
- Imagine you were leaving prison today and there are two different options. You are going take part in the BaCC programme and meeting the rest of your group, or you are going leave and this support is not there. What do you think would happen next? Do you think different things might happen in the next three months?

### **Anything else...**

- Is there anything else at all you would like to talk about?

### **Supplementary questions**

These questions are fillers that can be used with interviewees at any time should they feel uncomfortable with any of the main schedule.

- How old are you?
- Where were you born/where did you grow up?
- What were are convicted of?
- Was this your first time in prison?
- What are your hobbies?
- What are you most looking forward to when you get out?
- What are you least looking forward to?

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## Appendix Two

### Short literature review

The pathway to desistance identified through the interviews, and the recognition of the contribution of BaCC to this pathway, is consistent with the existing academic literature. The desistance literature is extensive and we share the most relevant findings in this chapter.

Current theories of desistance describe the importance of wider societal and institutional forces, as well as individual decision making, in preventing re-offending. Notably, Farral and Bowling<sup>5</sup> identified the role that specific events or other individuals could have on changing an ex-offender's decision-making. This supports the influence that BaCC volunteers can have changing an ex-offender's self-perception.

Sampson and Laub<sup>6</sup> described how such ties created a stake in society which could dissuade ex-offenders from criminal behaviour. Again, BaCC volunteers actively encouraged ex-offenders to seek work and rebuild relationships. For many, the relationships formed with volunteers seemed to act as a prototype for future, healthy relationships formed outside of the group.

Burnett<sup>7</sup> found that ex-offenders with intentions to desist offending could be split into different subtypes. Most notably in terms of this report, she distinguished between "avoiders", those whose main driver for desistance was not returning to prison, and "coverts", who were less likely to re-offend, and had begun to create a new identity for themselves. They had new concerns, such as family, education or employment, and they did not want to bring this into jeopardy. This reflects much of what was heard in the interviews about ex-offenders having a desire not to reoffend but lacking confidence around their ability to avoid criminality. It was when they had begun to create a new life for themselves, facilitated by BaCC volunteers, that they believed in their ability to change.

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<sup>5</sup> Farral, S. and Bowling, B. (1999) 'Structuration, Human Development and Desistance from Crime' *British Journal of Criminology* 39 (2):253-68.

<sup>6</sup> Sampson, R.J. and Laub, J.H. (1990) Crime and deviance over the life course: The salience of adult social bonds. *American Sociological Review*. 55 609-627.

<sup>7</sup> Burnett, R (2000) Understanding criminal careers through a series of in-depth interviews. Offender Programs Report, 4(1):14

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On a final point, Rex<sup>8</sup> studied the characteristics valued in probation officers by ex-offenders, and how the support offered by probation services can facilitate desistance. Amongst other traits, it was found that reasonableness and guidance on personal and social problems were favoured. The compassionate and unconditional support offered by BaCC volunteers fits this description.

**End of document**

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<sup>8</sup> Rex, S (1999) Desistance from offending: experiences of probation. *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*. 36(4) 366-83

