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PERSONALISATION IN PROBATION SERVICES

EXPLORING THE CONTRIBUTORS
TO A WORKING CULTURE OF
PERSONALISATION

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COSIE

Co-creation of Service Innovation in Europe



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A heartfelt thank you to everyone who has played their part in enabling us to create this.

THE CoSIE PROJECT

The vision that underpins the CoSIE project is that public service innovations can be achieved by creating collaborative partnerships between service providers and service beneficiaries. As part of the CoSIE project, partners from across 10 European countries will test and develop diverse methods of co-creation in the field of public services. With innovative practices, the project aims to improve the inclusion of all citizens and to promote their possibilities to act as active members in service design and society. Find out more by visiting the **CoSIE website**.

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ABOUT

Interserve is committed to developing and evaluating more personalised ways of working with service users in order to: promote positive life choices; tackle root causes of lifestyle problems; and to build personal capacity and resilience. As part of the Cosie Project – a pan-European scheme looking at the co-creation of public services – Interserve has piloted new ways of co-designing more personalised probation services. Within the pilot process, one of the co-creation tools adopted has been Community Reporting which has been used to gather insight stories from staff and service user on their perspectives of probation services.

Key learning has emerged from these stories. For example, the **experiences of service users** highlighted many of the things that they valued about the service such as the opportunity to engage in peer mentoring, as well as shedding light onto areas that could be improved such as support provision for low risk offenders. The **staff stories** focused on people's motivations for working within the sector with many explaining how the desire to help others was a key factor for them entering this career. However, the stories also brought up issues such as changes within the service that were preventing them from doing the job to the standard they would like.

This publication looks at these stories and the insights within them through the lens of personalisation, exploring what can be deciphered from the stories about how probation services can better meet the needs of the individuals involved. The overarching message from this is that personalisation is not something that can be delivered by staff to service users in a linear fashion. Rather what must be established is a working culture of personalisation – for both staff and users – that permeates all aspects of service delivery. Through examining what the contributing factors of this culture could be and by asking probing questions to its reader, this publication seeks to support professionals working in probation to understand how they can enhance personalisation their roles.



"THE MENTION OF PEER MENTORING WAS A LIGHT BULB MOMENT. IT MADE ME THINK I CAN DO THIS... I CAN GET INTO THE PROBATION SERVICE."

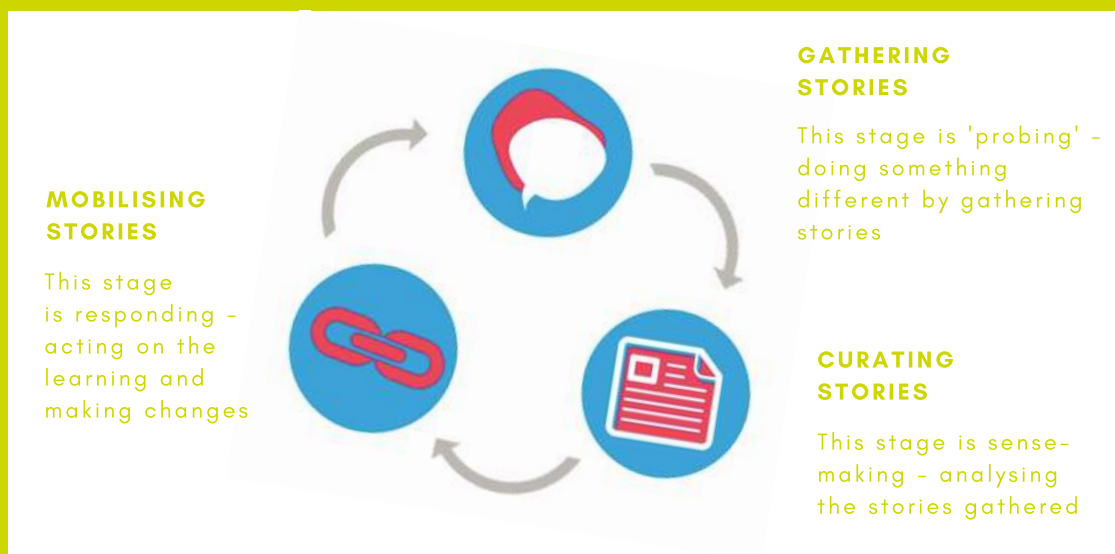
WHAT WE DID

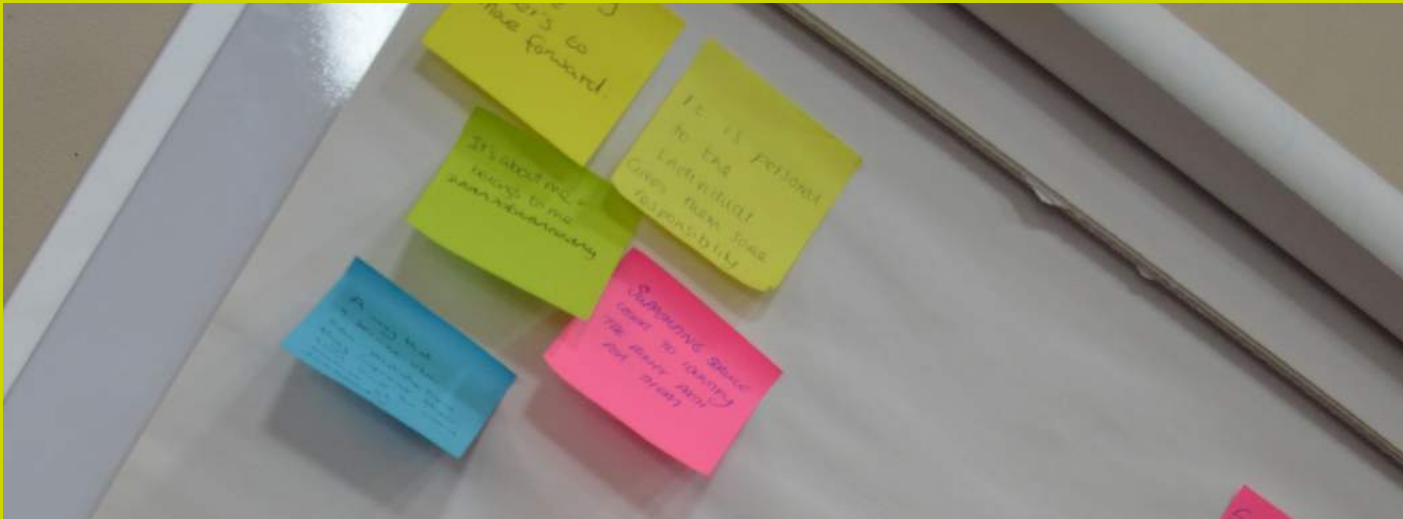
Community Reporting is a storytelling movement that uses digital tools such as smartphones and tablets to support people to tell their own stories in their own ways. Central to Community Reporting is the belief that people telling authentic stories about their lived experiences offers a valuable understanding of their lives. Through collating and curating stories from our growing network of Community Reporters, we seek to inform policy, processes and practice. Interserve has been collaborating with People's Voice Media to use Community Reporting methodologies to better understand how they can enhance personalisation within probation services. This collaboration has

had three stages:

1. *Gathering Stories*: We trained 11 members of staff and peer mentors as Community Reporters who captured over 40 stories from staff and services users about their experiences of probation.
2. *Curating Stories*: We analysed the stories gathered through a series of sense-making sessions to produce a set of key findings.
3. *Mobilising Stories*: We delivered participatory workshops in which the findings were showcased and worked with stakeholders to determine how the findings could be utilised within the probation sector at individual, organisational and systemic levels.

DIAGRAM 1.1. THE COMMUNITY REPORTING METHODOLOGY





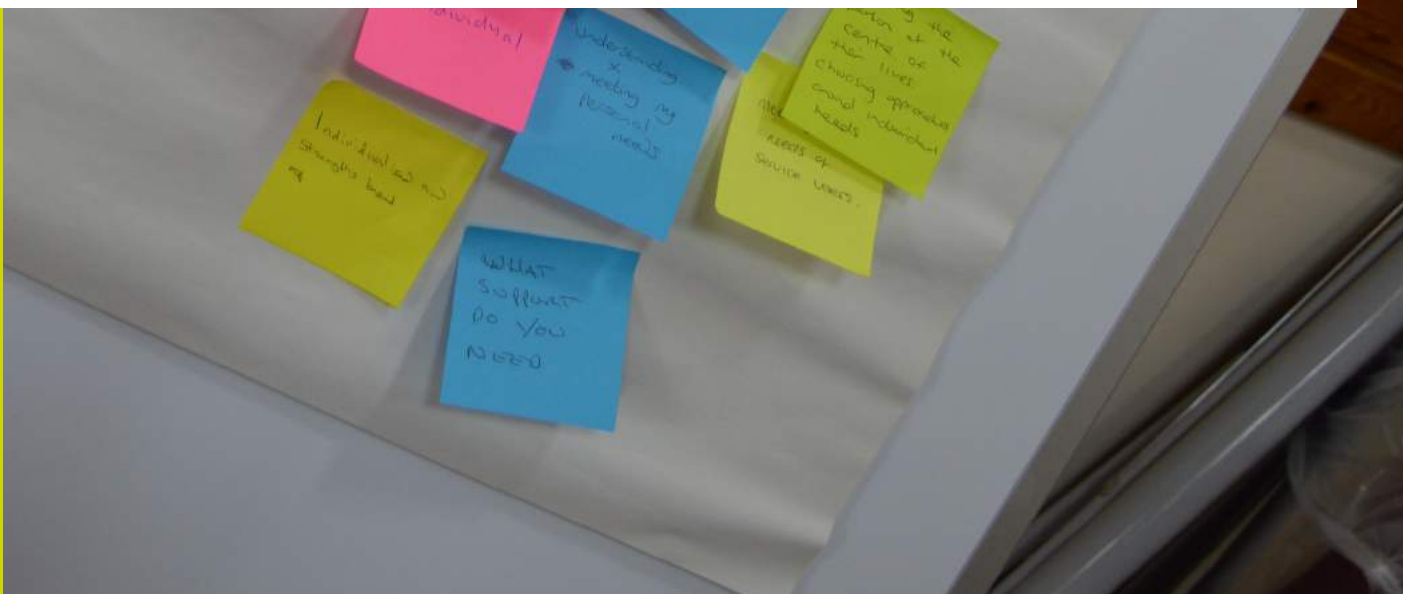
1. KEY FINDINGS

From the stories gathered, three core themes emerged that contribute to creating a culture of personalisation.

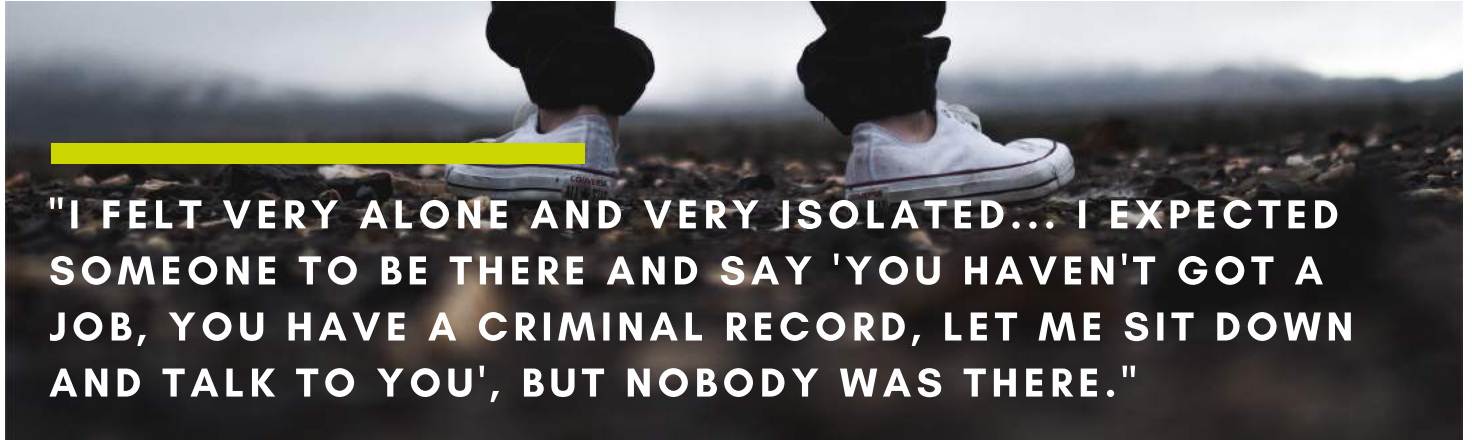
'Understanding Me' covers aspects such as treating people as individuals and understanding their needs.

'Not Being Judged' explores how receiving a conviction carries various types of stigma and how this affects people.

'Helping Others' identifies how giving is a strong motivator, and by engaging with and developing people's individual sense of purpose people can bring about change in themselves and others.



UNDERSTANDING ME



"I FELT VERY ALONE AND VERY ISOLATED... I EXPECTED SOMEONE TO BE THERE AND SAY 'YOU HAVEN'T GOT A JOB, YOU HAVE A CRIMINAL RECORD, LET ME SIT DOWN AND TALK TO YOU', BUT NOBODY WAS THERE."

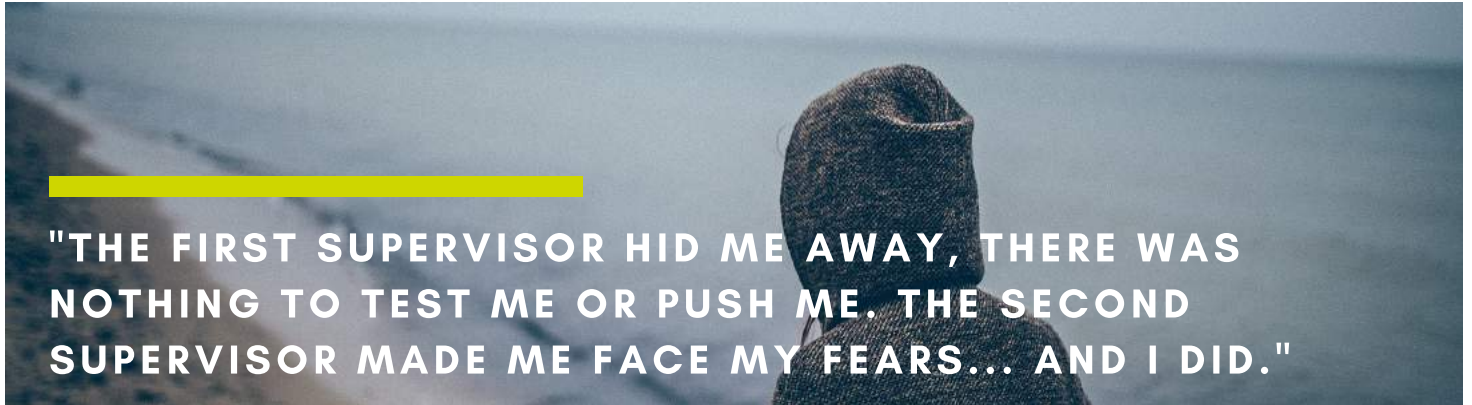
The stories highlight the importance of listening to people as “one size doesn't fit all”. A literal example of this can be found in an unpaid work story, in which a person was made to work in boots that were too big. Additionally, this person was the only female on the unpaid work site and felt uncomfortable with the “sexism”. The lack of understanding of her needs as a female - practically and socially - meant that for this individual, the experience of unpaid work was not as positive as it could have been.

When people’s individual needs and circumstances are taken into account, the experience of receiving a conviction and probation can be less traumatic. A storyteller describes, her wellbeing suffered during the court process as she did not know if she would be sent to prison. As she states, it was “hard saying goodbye to the kids” prior to attending court. However, during the hearing the judge took on-board her “family circumstances” and that she would “do anything to stay with her family”, ultimately deciding not to pass a custodial sentence. The individual came out of this process feeling positive as her circumstances and the context of the crime were taken into consideration.

Understanding people’s circumstances is fundamental to providing the support they need to rebuild their lives. Speaking about his experiences of probation, a low risk offender describes how he lost his job and lifestyle. Whilst on probation he felt that he wasn’t given support to get back into employment, which resulted in him feeling “very alone and very isolated”. However, another person describes his experiences of probation as a “positive one” as it allowed him to learn about himself and why he behaved in a way that led to his conviction. Opportunities to obtain personalised advice and to discover more about yourself are key enablers for individuals.

Getting to know people is essential to providing the right support. As one worker outlines, “it’s about unpicking what has happened in the past to move forward”. For them, hearing people’s stories should be seen as “privilege” as people trust them with details about their lives. It is with both this trust and understanding that professionals are in position to help the people in the probation system to make positive changes in their lives.

NOT BEING JUDGED



"THE FIRST SUPERVISOR HID ME AWAY, THERE WAS NOTHING TO TEST ME OR PUSH ME. THE SECOND SUPERVISOR MADE ME FACE MY FEARS... AND I DID."

A key aspect of personalisation in any service is to see the beneficiary as “an individual and a person”. In terms of probation services, seeing the person you are working with and not just the crime can create more productive relationships between professionals in the sector and the people they work with. Speaking about his experiences of probation, one man highlights the importance of this type of relationship in helping him bring about changes in his own life. Talking about his probation worker, he says she is “not autocratic or authoritative, she’s been very supportive”. This has enabled him to “get straight” and overcome his issues with alcohol - “I haven’t had one thought of retreating back to the pub”.

Building these types of relationships involves understanding the stigma surrounding having a conviction and understanding people’s sense of shame upon receiving one. As one man details, he has ‘protected’ himself from this societal stigma by restricting who knows about his conviction to only professionals and his wife - “people haven’t judged because they don’t know”. He describes how he is trying to get on with his life and put the conviction behind

him, but he feels judged by his probation worker who keeps bringing up the crime during their sessions. As he states, “Every time I go and see my probation officer, I come out there feeling crap. I dread going... he keeps pushing, I don’t understand why.”

Situations such as the aforementioned one can occur when communication between worker and service user lacks clarity about why certain work is being done around a conviction. This could include explain why things like ‘triggers’ are being explored, or through pushing people out of their comfort zones. Speaking about her experiences of unpaid work, a woman talks about how she didn’t think she could do it and felt great “shame”, particularly around wearing the “nasty orange vest”. At first she was hid away doing work off-the-streets by a “sympathetic” supervisor, but then another supervisor took her outside litter picking. This pushing of boundaries and telling her she “could do it” by the second supervisor enabled her to “face [her] fears” and ultimately overcome her sense of shame. Creating positive relationships enables workers to know when pushing can be positive, and when it is having negative impact.

HELPING OTHERS



"WHEN IT ACTUALLY FINISHED I FELT DEPRESSED, I KNOW IT SOUNDS STUPID... IT GAVE ME SOMETHING TO GET UP FOR ON A SATURDAY MORNING."

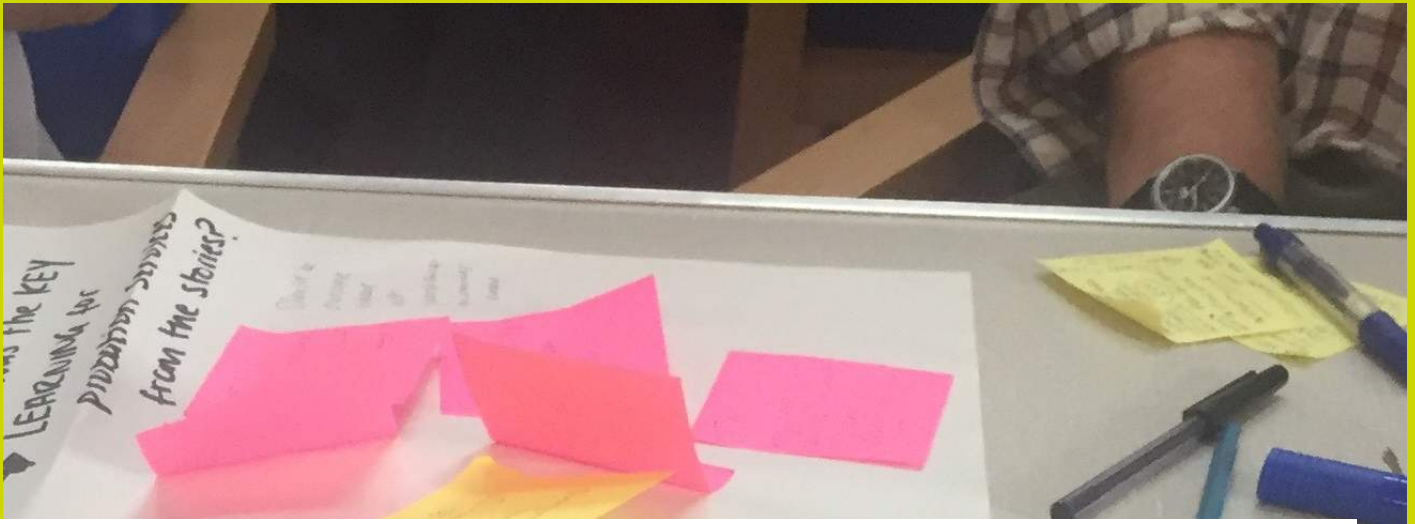
Whilst elements of the stories gathered portray negative sentiments towards unpaid work, a number of the stories also highlight the positives aspects of it. One man explains that unpaid work gave him something to do in his life following him and his wife's convictions. As she went to prison, he found that he was often alone at home - "it was a horrible feeling left by yourself, doing nothing". Unpaid work offered him something to "get up for" and from doing it he feels he's paid back his "debt to society".

The idea 'giving back' via unpaid work was highlighted in a number of stories. For one person, it made them feel "as though I was part of society", whilst another person talked about how "it's nice to do things in your own town, especially in a hospital". The time spent giving to others and society provided people with time for reflection, with one person stating that it showed him "what can be achieved, rather than going to prison". Giving, or helping others, make us feel good about ourselves.

Supporting people to tap into such intrinsic motivations - whether they are staff or users - is a key tool for providing

probation services that enable people to identify their sense of purpose and ultimately, sense of self. Both of which contribute to people leading positive lives. For service users in probation, peer mentoring plays a key part in this. Speaking about his experiences of probation, one man states how he "became a peer mentor to help other people in my situation", whilst another person describes how it was a "light bulb moment" in rebuilding her life and career opportunities. One man, who initially turned down the opportunity to participate in peer mentoring through the belief of his case manager, did eventually get involved and now has "a purpose".

It is unsurprising that staff's motivations for working in the sector have similar drivers and characteristics. As a worker states, their motivation is "to work with adults to bring about positive change", whilst another worker states how they wanted a role where they "could really support people". Reminding staff of these motivations can be useful during periods of uncertainty or change by focusing them on their original objectives in entering this career.

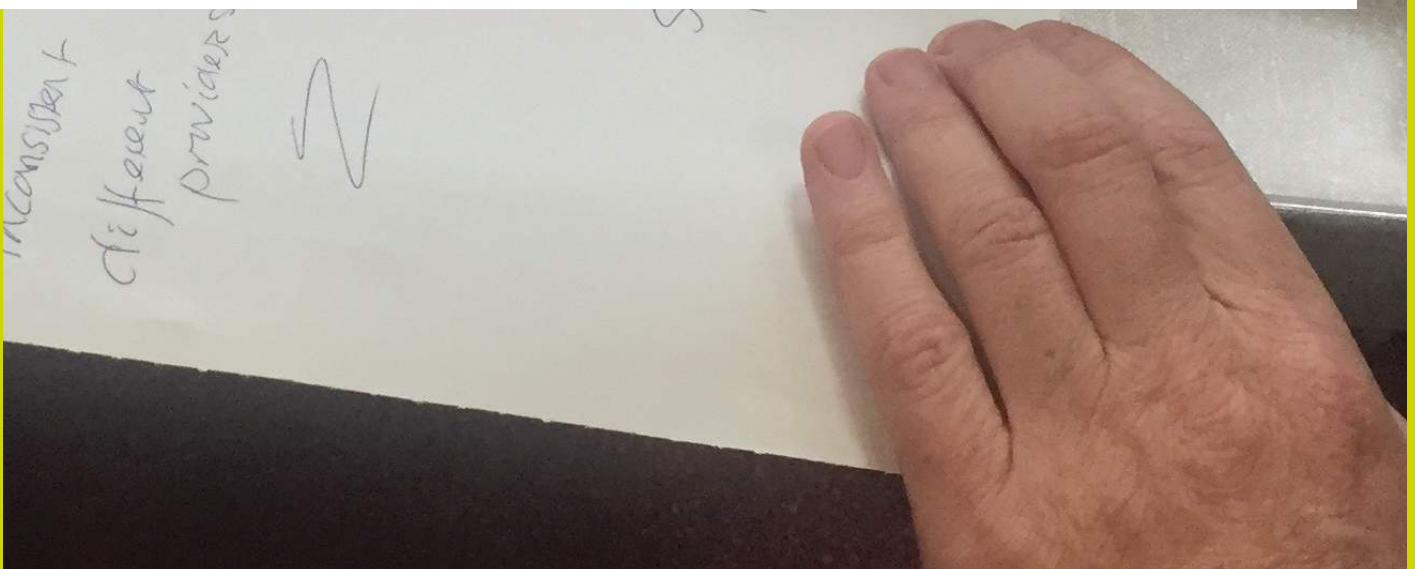


2. PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

This section explores three of the stories gathered and puts forward a series of questions to help you to consider what can be learned from them about personalisation. It concludes with some practical suggestions as to how you can contribute to creating a working culture of personalisation within probation services.

You can also access any of the stories gathered during this process **here** and use the following key questions to help you to decipher your own learning from them:

1. What is the key message of the story?
2. What is the learning for probation services?
3. How does the story relate to your experiences?



FROM INSIGHTS TO CHANGE

The insights in the stories gathered should be seen as stimuli to provoke further thinking, disrupt the status quo and give the opportunity for new ways of doing things to emerge. Three stories have been selected that highlight a range of topics, issues and experiences of accessing and working in probation services. The perspectives represented in these stories are not intended to be representative of the wider findings of this project, but rather as discussion initiators.

Take a look at the stories selected and use the questions provided as a basis for reflecting on what can be learned from them and how this learning can be put into practice. You can choose to do this on your own or with your colleagues.

CHANGING A NEGATIVE INTO A POSITIVE

In this story, a woman talks about her experience of probation from the moment she received her conviction to the opportunity of peer mentoring that took her life in a different direction. You can listen to the [story here](#).

KEY DISCUSSION POINTS

1. What elements of probation supported this person and why?
2. What other elements of support could have been provided and how?
3. What have we learned about creating a culture of personalisation from this story?

"I THOUGHT MY LIFE WAS OVER. I LOST MY JOB, THERE WAS NO DIRECTION AT ALL TO MY LIFE."

A CHANGE IN ME

This story is from a man who had received various custodial sentences. In this story, he talks about how during his most recent prison sentence he felt he had lost everything. During this stage of his life and on probation he began to change. You can listen to the **story here**.

KEY DISCUSSION POINTS

1. What were the contributing factors to the changes in this person's life?
2. What techniques were and could be used in probation services to initiate or support these types of changes?
3. What have we learned about creating a culture of personalisation from this story?

"I WASN'T INTERESTED IN DRUGS, I WASN'T USING DRUGS. THEY WERE THE PAST FOR ME."

CHANGES IN PROBATION SERVICES

This story is from a person working in probation services. They talk about their original and current motivations for working in the sector, as well as outlining some of the key challenges that they face in their work. You can listen to the **story here**.

KEY DISCUSSION POINTS

1. What are the challenges this person faces at work and how could they be overcome?
2. What is the impact of these challenges on the person and the people they work with?
3. What have we learned about creating a culture of personalisation from this story?

"YOU DON'T KNOW WHETHER YOU ARE COMING OR GOING. I CAN'T REMEMBER THE FACES NOW SOMETIMES OF PEOPLE..."

WHAT YOU CAN DO



Creating a working culture of personalisation requires both top-down and bottom-up processes to be moving towards the same goal and in a changing environment - as probation currently is - this is not an easy task. However, regardless of role, position or authority within the probation service, every person has some degree of power as an individual make to change however small they may feel it to be. More so, everyone within the sector has the responsibility to try to do this.

Within the CoSIE project, staff and service users within probation services have been working with the findings and stories presented in this publication to identify how a working culture of personalisation can be achieved. As stated earlier, a core aspect of this is acknowledging that personalisation for service users cannot be achieved in a vacuum that does not extend the same offer to people working in probation. Therefore, the key contributors to creating a working culture of personalisation that follow transcend the staff/user binary and are positioned at the relevant level of change - individual, organisational or systemic.

Contributors to a working culture of personalisation

- **Creating personal connections:** This involves going beyond process-based expectations and involves getting to really know people. This can be achieved by taking the time to listen to people and get to know their story, ensuring you answer calls and emails so that people's contact feels valued, demonstrating empathy by connecting to people's emotions and checking in with colleagues and service users outside of set

meetings. It can also be as simple as remembering people's names and seeing them as a whole person and not just as a colleague or service user.

- **Tapping into people's intrinsic motivations:** This involves supporting people to create and (re)connect with their own personal sense of purpose and self. Ideas for how this can be achieved include using peer mentoring to show people that positive change is possible, as well as reminding colleagues of the special work that they do and giving space to discussions about why they do it. Providing opportunities and environments to give and to help others is rewarding.

- **Recognising people's achievements:** This involves celebrating mini-successes, setting clear expectations so that achievements can be seen by all parties and promoting positive reinforcement by encouraging people and reminding them of the positive impact they are making to others or in their own lives. Acknowledging the 'little wins' along the journey helps to highlight positive progress and can provide the encouragement needed to move forward in difficult times.

- **Using peer support techniques -** This involves encouraging peer-to-peer interactions between past and present service users, and also between different staff members. This can be achieved through promoting peer mentoring between past and current service users and by creating post-probation peer support groups. These have the benefits of building trust with the probation service and could help avoid people feeling 'lost' following their court order. More so, utilising peer support structures between staff within the service could provide spaces in which staff can share and learn from each other's experiences.

You can also listen to all the stories as part of this process **here** and see what thinking and actions they can inspire in you and the people that you work alongside.





WANT TO FIND OUT MORE?

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