Justice Committee
Inquiry into Purposeful Activity in Prisons
Written submission from The Robertson Trust

1. The Robertson Trust

1.1 The Robertson Trust is the largest independent grant-making Trust in Scotland. Every year the Trust funds a wide range of charitable projects across Scotland with our priority areas including Care, Health, Education and Training and Community Art and Sport. We aim to help those most in need and to improve life for as many people as possible. In 2011/12 the Trust awarded £14.6m to recognised charities throughout the country.

1.2 The Trust also proactively works in a number of Development areas: Community Sport, Criminal Justice and Alcohol Misuse. Development awards are preceded by research to identify where the Trust can have the greatest potential impact in an area of Scottish life where a gap in service provision exists. Through these awards we aim to make a sufficient investment over an extended period of time to enable independent evaluation to identify elements of good practice in a project. We then use the learning from these projects to help inform local and national policy and shape future service delivery.

1.3 We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Justice Committee’s inquiry into Purposeful Activity in prisons. In addition to funding a wide range of third sector organisations that work with offenders both during their time in prison and after they are released into the community, The Robertson Trust plays an active role in developing the capacity of the criminal justice sector by helping to improve partnership working between agencies and by sharing best practice from criminal justice projects in order to improve service delivery. Through our long term investment in criminal justice, we have developed a growing evidence base about ‘what works’ to reduce reoffending. This response is based on the considerable knowledge and expertise the Trust has gained from funding and evaluating charities that work with young offenders, women offenders and families of offenders.

2. What is Purposeful Activity?

2.1 The Trust believes that Purposeful Activity in prison should include any activities that provide offenders with information on, and support with, the issues that are widely recognised as affecting their likelihood of reoffending after they leave prison\(^1\). These include activities which address:

- Physical and mental well-being
- Housing and accommodation
- Drug and alcohol misuse

• Literacy
• Employability
• Relationships with family, peers and communities
• Finance and budgeting
• Independent living
• Attitudes and behaviours

3. How should Purposeful Activity be measured?

3.1 When measuring purposeful activity, it is vital that service providers measure the activities’ outcomes and not just their outputs. It is wrong to assume that offenders will automatically benefit from an activity simply by attending it and therefore it is essential that when assessing the impact of purposeful activities, service providers consider not only how many offenders access an activity and how often but also are able to measure what, if any, outcomes they achieve by doing so.

3.2 The Scottish Government note that while it is difficult to measure the impact that any individual activity has on reducing reoffending, services that enable offenders to achieve such outcomes as increased confidence and motivation, improved employability skills, reduced alcohol and drug use and strengthened relationships with friends and family are likely to reduce an offender’s risk of reoffending in the long term. Consequently, services should be supported to measure the impact that the activities they deliver have in helping offenders to achieve these intermediate outcomes.

4. What are the benefits of purposeful activity and are there examples of best practice?

4.1 The key benefit of purposeful activity is that delivered the right way, it can help reduce the likelihood of offenders reoffending after they leave prison.

4.2 Third sector organisations play a valuable role in delivering purposeful activities by working with offenders to address their support needs and helping them to engage with mainstream services once they are released from prison. Our evidence shows that to be most effective:

• Offenders should be supported to engage in purposeful activities as soon as possible after they enter custody and they should be able to continue to engage with these activities once they leave prison.

• Service providers should put the needs of the offender at the centre of the activities they receive.

• Offenders should be assigned a designated worker who can build a relationship of trust with them and provide a consistent point of contact through their time in prison and on their release.

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• Activities should be delivered in partnership with a range of agencies so offenders can receive joined-up support for their multiple needs.

4.3 When delivered in the right way, engaging in purposeful activity can enable offenders to gain skills in areas ranging from employability to improved family relationships. Case Study 1 and Case Study 2 provide an example of two services that The Robertson Trust funds that demonstrate good practice within each of these areas.

Case Study 1: Access to Industry’s ‘Passport’ programme

Access to Industry's Passport project operates in Polmont YOI and HMP Edinburgh and provides through the gate support for offenders returning to Edinburgh and Glasgow. The project engages with offenders 4 to 6 months before they are released from prison and aims to give them the support they need to move into employment or education. Service users are assigned a dedicated Passport Caseworker who works with them on a 1 to 1 basis while they are in prison and continues to engage with them in the community after their release.

Partnership working lies at the core of the Passport service. Passport Caseworkers work in partnership with a variety of agencies both in prison and the community to ensure the service users are able to access the support they need. For example, the project has developed strong relationships with a range of partners in Edinburgh and Glasgow, including local regeneration agencies, colleges and employers through which they are able to offer service users a menu of training and work placement opportunities. In addition to improving the employability skills of the people who engage with the project, these local partnerships also help to aid their reintegration back into the community.

Findings: As of 2011, a total of 459 offenders had engaged with the project of whom, 83% continued to engage after their release from prison. Through engaging with the project, the offenders achieved a range of positive outcomes including gaining SQA qualifications, gaining employment and moving into further education. Significantly, only 30% of people who engaged with the project returned to custody, against a national average of 60%.

Case Study 2: Aberlour’s ‘Mother and Baby’ project

Aberlour’s Mother and Baby project works with prisoners in the Mother and Baby Unit in HMP and YOI Cornton Vale and those who receive enhanced “Little Cherub” visits with pre-school children. The project aims to help the women to develop the skills required to adequately parent their children and to develop strong attachments. Parents receive a range of support including learning how to interact positively with their child through play, setting boundaries, promoting a positive diet and developing sound emotional health. The project has since been extended to also support women with older children.

3 The full evaluation of the ‘Passport’ service is available to read at http://www.therobertsontrust.org.uk/index.php/publicationstemp/offenders-and-their-families/
A key strength of the project has been the Project Worker’s ability to earn the trust and respect of the women. She is held in high regard by the women who describe her as being approachable, non-judgemental, trustworthy and showing genuine care and concern for the women and their children. Given that many of the women feel that they have been let down by other services, the high value they place upon the support they receive from the Project Worker is significant and it is clear the Worker makes them feel respected as mothers. Across the prison, the Project worker has proved particularly effective at engaging women that had previously been considered as difficult to work with and this has also enabled other services to work with them.

Findings: The ‘Mother and Baby’ project has achieved high levels of voluntary engagement with 84% of the women who were referred to the Project Worker, choosing to engage with the project. Positive outcomes reported by service users included feeling more confident as a parent and having an improved relationships with their children.

5. What barriers may exist to relevant prisoners engaging in such activities?

5.1 Whether an offender engages with a service depends on how much they value it rather than whether it is voluntary or mandatory. Evidence from the projects that The Robertson Trust has funded, highlights that an offender will choose to engage with an activity if it is of a high quality and responds to their needs.

5.2 Case Study 3 highlights the positive impact that high quality voluntary services can have in engaging offenders in purposeful activities both during their time in prison and after their release.

Case Study 3: Moving On Renfrewshire

‘Moving On Renfrewshire’ started as a partnership between Action for Children, Fairbridge and the Prince’s Trust as a response to the significant number of individual voluntary organisations working in Polmont YOI. The project takes a ‘youth work’ approach to supporting young offenders and linkages are made with other services both during and after custody.

The project is designed to respond to the young people’s individual needs. Project staff initially ensure that the basic needs of the young people are met, such as housing, benefits, and health requirements. They then work to address issues known to be relevant to offending such as low self-esteem, poor communication skills and employability skills. Support workers work alongside local partners including Renfrewshire Council and other voluntary organisations to ensure the young people are able to access the support they need. Many clients commented that the project workers supported them to make their own decisions and take control over their future. The project has now been expanded to Inverclyde and East Ayrshire through the establishment of a Public Social Partnership.

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4 The full evaluation of the ‘Mother and Baby’ project is available to read at http://www.therobertsontrust.org.uk/index.php/publicationstemp/offenders-and-their-families/
Findings: Between June 2008 and March 2012, 121 young people were referred to the project. 90% of eligible young people engaged with the project in prison and 87% have continued to engage with it post-release. The project has contributed towards reductions in reoffending rates with only 26% of Moving On clients having returned to custody within 2 years, compared to 50% of young offenders with similar characteristics, at a national level5.

5.3 An additional barrier to prisoners engaging with purposeful activities can arise from the challenges that third sector organisations can face when delivering services in prison. Third sector organisations the Trust fund have highlighted the difficulty they can experience in both gaining access to prisons to deliver activities and gaining access to offenders once they are within the prison. This can negatively impact on the quality and consistency of the activities they are able to deliver and their ability to develop relationships with the offenders.

6. Is access to purposeful activity consistent across the prison estate and can it be improved?

6.1 Activities provided by third sector organisations vary from prison to prison and until recently, the procedure for bringing in non-SPS funded third sector services has been relatively uncoordinated and dependent on local management6. This has meant that available resources were not always being used the most efficiently and that offenders were not able to access the joined up support they needed.

6.2 In 2008, the Partnership Development Initiative was launched which aims to address this issue. Case Study 4 demonstrates the progress the Initiative has made in helping to ensure access to services is more consistent and coordinated across the prison estate.

Case Study 4: The Partnership Development Initiative

The Partnership Development Initiative was launched in 2008 to help coordinate and improve partnership working between third sector and public sector agencies who deliver criminal justice services in prison and in the wider community. The initiative is an innovative cross-sector response to the need to use all available resources in a co-ordinated manner which puts the offender at the centre of service design. It is overseen by a multidisciplinary management group made up of the Scottish Prison Service, Community Justice Authorities, the Criminal Justice Voluntary Sector Forum, the Scottish Government and The Robertson Trust.

The Initiative has developed The Model Framework for Partnership Working which is a tool to improve project planning, communication and co-ordination across the sectors in order to maximise its impact and sustainability. The Model Framework acknowledges the differences between agencies and the need to work together to reduce reoffending. It also teases out the ‘detail’ around delivery, challenges

5 The full evaluation of the ‘Moving On’ service is available to read at http://www.therobertsontrust.org.uk/index.php/publicationstemp/offenders-and-their-families/
6 Partnership Development Initiative (2010) Towards a Model Framework for Third Sector Criminal Justice Services, Available at: http://www.cjalb.co.uk/docs/PartnershipDevelopmentInitiative.pdf
perceptions and builds a transparent, equitable partnership relationship between the third sector resource and the public sector ‘host’.

The *Model Framework* has been formally embraced by the Scottish Prison Service and must now be used for all new non-purchased third sector work in prisons. A version has also been developed for use in the community by Community Justice Authorities and Social Work Agencies. The effectiveness and usage of the Framework is currently being externally evaluated and findings will be made available in Summer 2013.

The Robertson Trust
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