

# Engaging imprisoned men as peer researchers to better understand health and wellbeing in prison

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*No photographs or recordings during this presentation please*

Public Health Wales Research Showcase Event

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# Introduction

## What did we want to achieve?

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- To better understand the health and wellbeing needs of men in prison (from the men themselves)
- To evaluate the concept of using peer-research amongst men in prison

# Background

## Why use a peer approach?

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- Recent increase in peer roles in prison (mentors and reps)
- Consistently associated with positive outcomes\*
- Cost effective?
- Very few examples of 'peer research'†
- Offers an emic perspective from real life experience

\*Bagnall et al (2014) BMC Public Health: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-015-1584-x>

†Elwood-Martin (2009) IJPH: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449200902884021>



# Background

## Why is health and wellbeing in prison important?

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- We see around 10,000 annual admissions across our 6 prisons in Wales
- Those in prison are underserved populations
- Prison can both protect and expose health
- Improving the health and wellbeing of those in prison brings both individual and community benefits

# Method

## Project recruitment

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- HMP Parc
- The peer researcher was a paid role for 2 days a week over 6 months
- Criteria for recruitment:
  - Length of sentence
  - Educational attainment
  - Experience of peer mentor work
  - Security clearance
- Established two teams of men
- Each team underwent training in research techniques\*

\*Access Alliance (2013): <http://accessalliance.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Everyone-can-do-research-toolkit-May-2013.pdf>

# Method

## Data collection

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Aim: to scope health and wellbeing needs and then look into the most significant needs in more detail

- 10 focus groups
- 9 one-to-one interviews
- 60 Pilot questionnaires
- **154 final questionnaires**

# Results

## The most recurring themes

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- Emotional needs
- Respect
- Safety
- Communication

# Emotional Needs

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- 42% of respondents felt their emotional needs had changed since being in prison
- A change in emotional needs appeared more likely in those:
  - Who were older (Age 56yrs and older  $p < 0.05$ )
  - Who had longer sentences (10 years and longer  $p < 0.05$ )
- 66% felt the prison could do more to support emotional needs



# Respect

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- The need to feel respected was expressed throughout the project
- 59% of men felt respected by staff
- Those who felt respected were more likely to:
  - Report positive emotional wellbeing
  - Feel safe in prison
  - Report positive relationships with prison staff
- Respect appeared linked to communication

# Safety

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- 50% of respondents reported feeling safe or very safe
- 25% of respondents felt unsafe or sometimes unsafe
- Those under 35 years of age were more likely to feel unsafe than older men
- Positive correlation between staff and prisoner relationships and safety

# Communication

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- Being able to effectively communicate appeared positively linked to wellbeing
- 51% of men reported communication between them and their personal officer as reasonable, good or very good
- Personal officer schemes appeared to positively improve communication
- Electronic communication was viewed positively but some comments indicated it detracted from face to face communication

# Conclusions

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- All four themes were inextricably linked
- Small changes may have a big impact, suggestions included:
  - Access to mindfulness, meditation and self-reflection
  - Being able to keep a plant or small pet
  - Brightening the wing areas with more colour
  - Evening wing query sessions
  - Monthly meetings with management
  - Improved access to exercise and the outdoors – walking club, Park Run, LGBT gym sessions

# Recommendations

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- 15 recommendations produced as part of the final report
- Peer research was effective in exploring the health and wellbeing needs of those in prison and could be used more widely
- We need to understand the spectrum of emotional needs in prison including separation, bereavement and loneliness

# Outcomes

## What did the research lead to?

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- Changes to the regime to improve health and wellbeing:
  - Weekly Parkrun© at HMP Parc\*
  - New mattresses and bedding
  - LGBT gym session
- Presentation of findings to prison SMT and other stakeholders
- Poster presentation at RCGP Secure Environments Conference 2018
- Paper in submission to International Journal of Prisoner Health

\* Park Run at HMP Parc: <http://www.parkrun.org.uk/parc/>

# Experience of being a peer researcher

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- Sense of achievement
- Opportunity to uncover health and wellbeing concerns
- Opportunity to make recommendations

# Benefits of using a peer research approach in a prison\*

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- Enables action
  - Provided line of communication between those in prison and management
  - Implementation itself supported education and provided skills
- Advocates power to be shared between researcher and researched
  - Provides a voice within a safe structure
  - Altered the existing power balance between those in authority and those in prison (against the disempowering design of a prison)
- Active involvement of participants in the whole process
  - From design to implementation

\* Baum et al (2006) *J. Epi Comm Health*: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/jech.2004.028662>



# To conclude

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- The peer research approach was successful in exploring health and wellbeing concerns in a prison setting
- Peer research supports the NHS Wales core values of 'integrating improvement', 'working in true partnership' and 'focusing on prevention, health improvement and inequality'\*
- Improving health and wellbeing in prison will address inequalities and have wider community dividends

# Any questions?

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- *In memory of Jess Bowen*

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