

# Summary Report

*Exploratory analysis of co-created and co-facilitated group-work programme for people with convictions*

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In collaboration with the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (SVRU)

This report provides a summary of a 2019 study conducted as a part of a Masters degree in Transnational Crime, Justice and Security at the University of Glasgow.



## 1. Introduction

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The Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (SVRU) has undertaken a significant programme of work to reduce violence, and advance understanding of the complexities of desistance and crime, in Scotland. In relation to this work, the VRU have piloted a new co-produced programme, called the *Resilience* Programme. This programme aims to enable people with lived experience of the criminal justice system to run resilience based group-work sessions, where individuals meet to share their experiences with each other in a supportive setting. This is the first time that a co-produced programme has been piloted in a particular context.

Based on the narratives and experiences of participants in the *Resilience* Programme and staff from the SVRU, the main aim of this research was to broaden the empirical knowledge base relating to co-produced programmes for people with convictions and to examine how group-work of this nature works in practice.

More specifically, this research also set out to answer two sub-aims:

- To evaluate the co-created and co-facilitated Resilience group-work programme through the perspectives of the group participants and staff.
- To reflect on the significance of these findings for future work involving co-production with people who have previous convictions.

## 2. Methodology

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The research took a qualitative methodological approach, which involved group-work observations and nine semi-structured interviews with staff and group-work participants. These methods were chosen to understand whether participants engaged in the programme, how participants engaged in the programme, listen to what topics they discussed, gain an in-depth understanding of how the group-work sessions are run, and to compare themes that were identified from the interviews with discussions that took place in the group-work setting.

This study was approved by the University of Glasgow ethics committee (approval number PGT/SPS/2019/119/CRIM) before any interviews or observations took place. All participants and staff consented to interviews and observations both verbally and in writing. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and analysed thematically.

## 3. Summary of findings

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Within this context, resilience was broadly defined as the 'ability to bounce back from hard times'; however, participants did have their own views about what resilience meant to them.

### Key Themes:

- **Confidence and sense of purpose:** The sense of purpose and pride participants felt about being a part of a co-produced group-work programme came up in all participant interviews that were conducted and seemed to be pivotal in supporting the participants' increased self-esteem and confidence.

*'We are nae doing this programme that someone else built fae us. We've built it'. We are going tae know it like the back ae our hand, an we're going tae be proud ae it [...] the fact that we're building our own programme gives me this feeling that... cannae think ae a word fae it...kinda quite buzzing [...] When there's no group-work, I'm ...quite down.'* (Alex)

*'When I came I couldnae look anyone in the eye. I couldnae...I was really nervous. I'd just gone through my recovery, an I was only about 8 months into it or something. So, I was still really nervous I was. An ehm, by doing the group work you learn more about something every day, which made it easier fae me tae open up'*(Logan)

- **Vulnerability and emotions:** The theme of vulnerabilities and emotions arose in multiple interviews and was often a key talking point observed in the group-work sessions. All the members of the *Resilience* Programme mentioned how the programme had helped them open up about their own emotions and vulnerabilities and that this was one of the most challenging parts of the programme.

John explains how he thought asking future participants to allow themselves to be vulnerable should be done slowly and not in one of the first sessions.

*'we were breaking it down an seeing what we would add or take out, an like what I was getting from the first session was like tae not ask people tae get vulnerable on the first initial group. Because obviously a lot of the guys have nae got a back-up, an are nae used tae opening up tae people. Do you know what I mean? It may be an image thing. So I think when it comes tae like asking the guys...like one ae the questions was 'what are your hopes and fears' an 'what are you expecting from this programme' an I thought we should maybe just ask 'what are your hopes' an not so much their fears because that's you getting vulnerable.'*(John)

Alex describes how one of the facilitators had helped with the process of understanding one's own emotions.

*'I felt like I had tae feel something. I was like 'I don't feel anything', so I was getting worried that I didnae feel anything. I was like, 'I just feel okay'. And, a couple ae times after a couple of months ae things happening [one of the facilitators in the Resilience programme] said 'see? They're your feelings. You said you feel whatever, you're feeling something'. So, I realised that I'm starting tae recognise an feel my feelings. Whether I wasnae feeling them before or not. Or I was just nae recognising them fae what they were, but I am now.'* (Alex)

Taken together, interviews showed how valuable learning to feel their emotions and being vulnerable in front of one another was valuable for the participants.

- **Desistance and 'readiness':** When discussing desistance, many of the interviewees talked about what they called 'readiness'. For the programme to work, they had to be ready for it, motivated and genuinely wanting to change their lifestyle.

*'You need tae be ready for the programme, you need tae want tae change your life. Like, a lot of boys have come in and they've not completed the programme and they've left. So, I think it is good you dae the twelve months (of the Resilience Programme) as well because I feel like you need twelve months.'* (Logan)

- **Relationships and trust:** Throughout all of the themes, building positive relationships to other *Resilience* members and SVRU staff has been pivotal in the participant's lives.

*'I don't know...I just really enjoy it (The Resilience Programme)! I really enjoy...it's not just what we dae in here, it's the people. It's been really good tae be able tae vent. Good being able tae pull them (staff) aside and trust them enough tae...say stuff.'* (Alex)

*'We've just got a good bunch of people, you know what I mean? Who understand what people came from [...] There's resilience in looking after each other, because someone may be going through a bit of a bad time when they're speaking about it, and I'm sitting there with probably the same thing thinking 'that's what I'm going through' you know what I mean? Without even realising it'* (Robert)

#### 4. Conclusion

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Through group observations, as well as conversations with participants, it became apparent that co-producing the resilience programme was beneficial. More specifically, individuals felt that:

- They were appreciated
- They had a useful role to play in the programme
- They had a purpose in their life
- They had improved their understanding of their own emotions, and were more comfortable opening up about them (but that this was still challenging).
- The involvement of those with lived experience of the criminal justice system gave the group more credibility within the population of interest.

Two aspects that were highlighted as being crucial to the programme's success were 1) positive and trusting relationships and 2) an individual's readiness to both engage in the resilience group work and change their lifestyle. As such, both group and individual factors are important here.

Future research should examine whether co-producing a programme of this nature within a prison context would be feasible.



*'I think the fact that obviously like we're so involved with it. Like it's...it's good fae like how you feel about yourself, you know what I mean? It's almost like I feel like I'm worth something, an that I'm part of something an helping. Ehm...it's...aye...I'm not used tae feeling that you know what I mean? Because obviously we're helping like build this whole thing, an it's like 'god we've been picked out of so many people' dae you know what I mean? So it's nice tae be appreciated an asked tae help.'* (John)