

A fresh look at housing needs and aspirations, from ex-offenders and frontline workers



04

Houses as Homes

Improved accommodation to reduce levels of re-offending



About SILK

The Social Innovation Lab for Kent (SILK) was set up in 2007, with two central tasks. First, to provide a creative, challenging environment for a wide range of people to work together on some of the toughest challenges the county faces. And second, through drawing upon cutting edge practice in the sectors of business, design, community development and social sciences, SILK set out to embed a way of working across the council that puts people - citizens - at the centre.

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Welcome

The research and report have been commissioned as part of the evidence base to inform development of The Kent Forum Housing Strategy. This work is both inward and outward-facing in its ambitions. It seeks to encourage organisations across Kent and Medway to realise the benefits of a shared approach to common problems where collectively it will add value. It also seeks to influence government in a way that will benefit Kent and Medway.

The economic downturn has exacerbated existing challenges, created new ones and has made it harder for the public, private, and voluntary community sectors to respond to these issues. However, it has also created an environment where innovation can thrive.

The coalition government has announced a series of proposals that will radically alter the way that services are delivered. This project is ambitious about how we can respond pragmatically to reduce the harm and cost related to recurring re-offending linked to the inability to find a home on release from prison.

John Littlemore, Chair, Joint Policy and Planning Board (Housing)

June 2011

Thank you to everyone who has been part of this project

Contents

Ambitions	3
Introduction	6
Local Context	7
Co-designing services using the SILK Methodology	8
Insight Idea	9
Action Recommendations	18
Ambitions that were agreed at the workshops	19
The Way Forward	24
Key Policy Documents	25
Personal Reflection	26

We acknowledge there are many different definitions to describe those who have committed offences; we are going to use the term 'ex-offender' to encompass all variations for the purpose of this report.

Ambitions

Ethnographic research undertaken by ESRO¹ to understand the reality of offenders' experiences was presented at multi-agency workshops where organisations, agencies, serving and ex-offenders reflected on the findings and developed ideas to build the ambitions in this report.

The Offender Sub-group of the Joint Policy and Planning Board for Housing has been identified as the ideal vehicle to take forward these ambitions and incorporate them into their ongoing action planning process. This multi-agency group, which works alongside ex-offenders where possible, has been instrumental throughout this work, notably in the development of the recommendations and ownership in taking them forward.

The summarised list of ambitions and recommendations is presented on the following page with more detail provided in the rest of the report.

AMBITION 1: PERSON-CENTRED, CO-PRODUCED SERVICES |

Service providers to recognise the value of working alongside serving and ex-offenders to design, commission and review service delivery and implementation, to ensure a more holistic, effective and efficient use of resource where service delivery addresses actual need and aspiration

RECOMMENDATION: Identify opportunities to highlight and learn from existing good practice; explore opportunities for pooling resources across agency funding streams to champion and further test a person-centred approach to support prisoners holistically from pre-release to post-release.

AMBITION 2: SOCIAL INVESTMENT | Build on the momentum of this project to explore how new models of social investment could provide financial support to reduce re-offending rates

RECOMMENDATION: Build on activity which is already testing models of social investment, for example Supporting People are testing payment by results, to further develop and refine models which could reduce re-offending rates in Kent.

AMBITION 3: LIFE SKILLS | Build on an idea that originated from an ex-offender at Her Majesty's Prison East Sutton Park to trial a property for serving offenders to use during their home leave if they do not have an alternative place to stay. This will enable offenders to familiarise themselves with life outside prison with a view to reducing re-offending rates.

RECOMMENDATION: Support the development of this model alongside serving and ex-offenders at HMP East Sutton Park, drawing on relevant partners as required, with a view to testing and defining a transferable and scalable model of best practice to reduce re-offending rates.

AMBITION 4: VULNERABILITY | It needs to be recognised and reemphasised that ex-offenders, where vulnerable, have the same priority status as other vulnerable groups in current homeless legislation

RECOMMENDATION: Further work with practitioners and offenders themselves is required to explore and better understand who is to be deemed vulnerable, with a view to developing a vulnerability assessment procedure which could flag up vulnerability status (as seen in Department for Work and Pensions system).

AMBITION 5: LEARNING | Continue to look further afield for approaches that could be beneficial in Kent; review mechanisms for sharing and learning from good practice locally across Kent and Medway

RECOMMENDATION: Build on existing infrastructure and successes to share information and learning horizontally at a strategic and local level; examine the possibility of closer links between the Medway Offender group and the Kent JPPB Offender Sub-group.

AMBITION 6: PUBLIC VALUE and PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT | Long term, transition from Performance Indicators to outcomes owned collectively across agencies and budget lines, that are relevant to individual circumstances and defined by people themselves

RECOMMENDATION: Identify opportunities for a multi-agency approach to review how to better understand what is of value to people, which could inform the development of a more accurate performance management framework.

AMBITION 7: LOCAL IMPACT | Raise the awareness of the impact on Kent's services by decisions made nationally

RECOMMENDATION: Identify opportunities to share local experiences nationally with a view to influencing policy making at a national level.

Introduction

“I just want my own place. My own space you know?
With my own front door”, (ex-offender research respondent).

‘... ex-prisoners with somewhere to live are between a fifth and a half less likely to reoffend than those without it. In crime reduction terms, resettlement is the only sensible solution. Resettlement is good for ex-offenders and good for society as a whole. Its value should not be seen simply in negative terms – the future crimes that were not carried out, the future taxes that were not spent. Resettlement should also be seen in positive terms because it enables former prisoners to contribute to society through their families, jobs and pastimes. It is a constructive approach that invests in people and often pays handsome dividends.’

Integrated Resettlement, NACRO (2005).

National research (see Key Policy Documents p.25) tells us that housing plays:

- a pivotal part of the resettlement process to reduce re-offending rates
- a critical role in the process of reintegration into society for those leaving prison

In practical terms, housing provides:

- a fixed address and phone number to receive support and business correspondence
- a base for redeveloping a (social) life
- a stable place from which to make contact with other people and reconnect with a community and society

This project, undertaken to inform the Kent Forum Housing Strategy, aimed to bring a range of people together from across sectors and organisations to improve awareness and understanding about the housing experiences of ex-offenders, with a view to identify opportunities to reduce levels of re-offending.

As in all SILK projects, it aims to compliment existing work, share existing good practice and create opportunities for people to inspire each other to continue to do things differently across Kent, Medway and beyond.

Local Context

Kent Statistics

- The Prison population in Kent went up 10% from 4468 (May 09) to 4913 (June 10). 835 offenders are in the YOI, 82 are women (Ministry of Justice, 2010)
- The number under supervision by Probation is 6037 (Ministry of Justice, March 2010)
- Kent's re-offending rate is 9.4% (July 09-June 10) (Ministry of Justice, 2010)
- "The reconviction rate for adults serving short term prison sentences is 61% within one year of release, the highest for any sentence. This is because the time in custody (six months or less) is not long enough for constructive work to be undertaken but long enough to damage family ties, employment and accommodation. This compares to re-offending rates of 37% for community sentences" (Kent Criminal Justice Board, Summer 2010)
- Kent has more prisons than any other local authority, with an exceptionally diverse prison population. Kent offenders only form c.20% of the Kent prison population (Kent County Council, 2010)

In the first week of December 2010, Justice Minister Kenneth Clarke announced radical proposals to increase punishment and reduce levels of re-offending.

It is important to acknowledge that people across Kent and Medway are already working to address these issues. The Kent Joint Policy and Planning Board (JPPB) for Housing is a strategic partnership between Health, Housing, and Social Care, looking at issues that would benefit from a joined up approach. They have a JPPB Offender Sub-group which is encouraging a more coherent and consistent approach to housing service provision for ex-offenders across Kent via the implementation of an Offender Protocol. This project seeks to provide evidence to support such collaborative initiatives that are already happening across Kent and Medway.

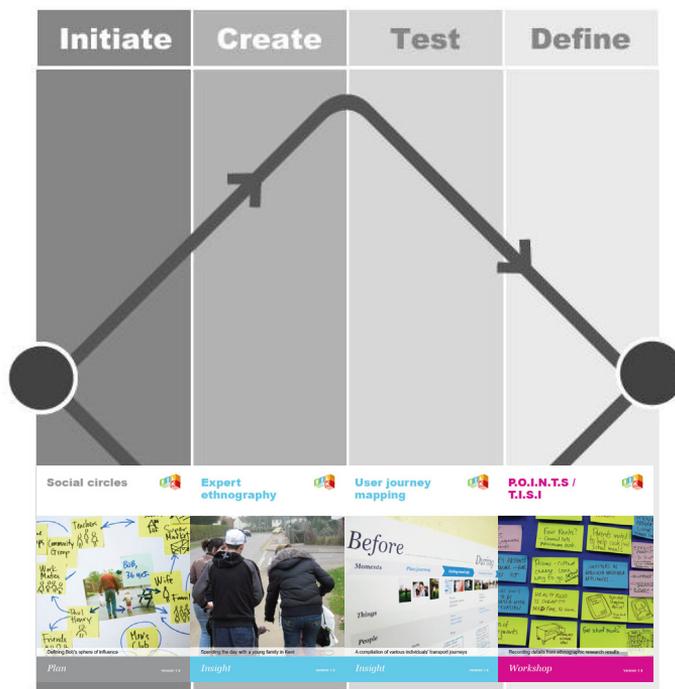
This project has built the case to continue to work in a joined-up way and given added impetus to existing activity. Members of the JPPB Offender Sub-group, other agencies and serving and ex-offenders across Kent have been instrumental in supporting this project, acknowledging the need to take a fresh look at the interface between housing and justice, and critical to take recommendations forward.

Co-designing services using the SILK Methodology

Since 2007, SILK has developed a person-centred Methodology to tackle issues which cut across service and sector boundaries. The SILK approach demonstrates how to put Localism into practice by drawing on co-production principles; providing a participatory framework for citizens and service providers to work side by side to solve complex problems. SILK projects give people an opportunity to explore issues from new perspectives, identifying opportunities for service improvement and better use of existing resource, while creating the momentum for radical change.

SILK's Methodology structures projects into a participatory design process, drawing on social science, community development, design and business principles. This is a policy project that follows a four phase structure as seen below

Initiate | Create | Test | Define



Insight | Idea

ESRO undertook an ethnographic study to better understand the daily realities of offenders' experiences. The full research report will be available on the SILK website (www.kent.gov.uk/silk).

Insights from the research were brought to life at workshops where a range of organisations and agencies sat side by side with serving and ex-offenders. The aim of the workshops was to absorb and reflect on the research findings presented by the ethnographic researchers and also add personal insights from first hand experiences of working in the field.

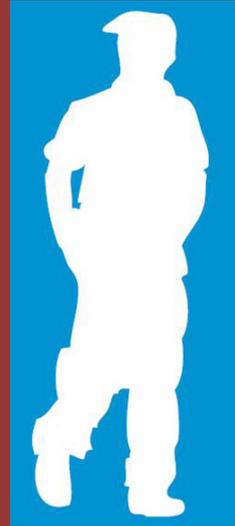
The intention was to bring a range of perspectives together and have an honest discussion. This created opportunities to challenge, reflect, debate and support each other in thinking about existing service processes in a new light.

The key research headlines are featured on the following pages and additional comments and insight from workshops are also included. **All workshop attendees agreed the research headlines mirrored their own day to day experiences.**



Is there enough housing?

This means different things to different people...



“Key question is not about housing, but rather are there enough homes/suitable accommodation”

“Services need to stay realistic about what is available and manage people’s expectations”

“Housing seems to be the main concern for an offender coming out of prison”

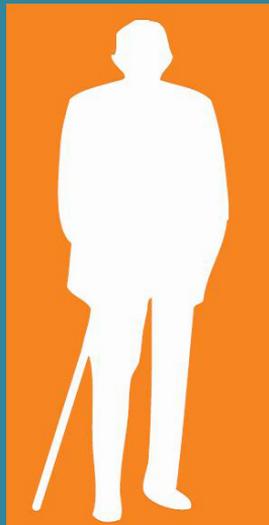
“It is unlikely that we will build 20,000 houses, so there needs to be smarter use through inter-agency co-operation and how we use existing provision”

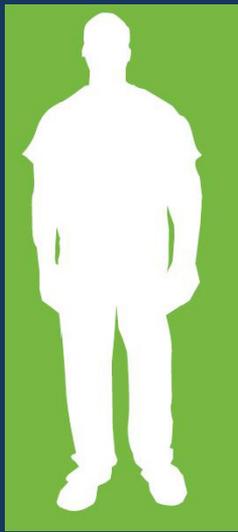
“It is difficult to do anything with someone who is in prison with a short time to serve”

“If you are serving a term of less than 12 months then it is unlikely there will be a resettlement officer, even though almost certainly they will still need to find accommodation”

“Paperwork is often not moving with the offender as they are moved from one prison to another”

“Resourcing, overcrowding and short notice moving of prisoners, undermines the quality of provision and works against coordination of services” - NACRO





Targets in one organisation may not dovetail with those of another... frustrating staff on both sides who are ostensibly working towards the same aim!

“Providers don’t even understand what each other is doing”

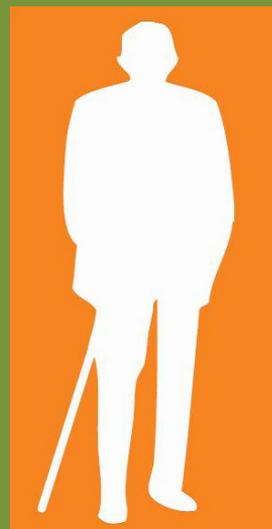
“We need to reduce the fog between agencies... hand over is where the greatest risk of failure is”

“Targets are not important to me - it’s about the individual”

“Need to consider bespoke service packages for individuals, rather than offering everyone the same thing. Different people have different needs and things that work for them”

“To the drugs-worker there is an addict, to the parents there is a burden, to the housing service there is a homeless person, to the probation service there is a criminal, to the prison service there is a frequent visitor, to the job centre there is a man who is difficult to employ, to the educationalist there is a dyslexic, to the doctor there is someone who is mentally ill etc.”

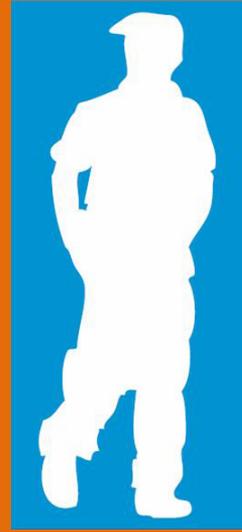
Current processes and procedures are reducing people to a single need at any given time



Ex-offenders know how to fulfill these roles

Ex-offenders complain of too much intervention and too little help.

Why?



They evaluate based on outcomes.

“Intervention is different from help. Intervention is designed and mapped before offered, to give help you need to listen first and then offer help”

“If what is offered doesn’t work, that will feel like too much - e.g. you attend a skills course but it doesn’t get you a job”

“We are working within a legal framework; there are somethings we have to provide”

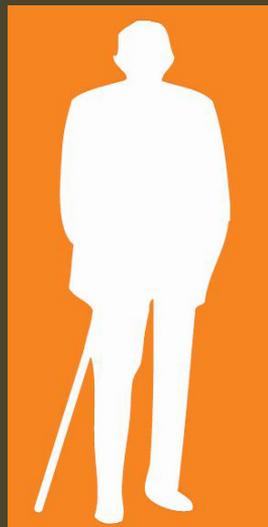
“Is intervention in the way of rehabilitation?”

“Prisoners and ex-offenders are vulnerable, however they are not seen as so. We need to change opinions”

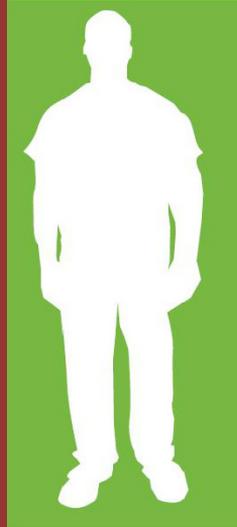
“The effects of institutionalisation are not visible, how can housing officers know?”

“Many young lifers do not have a clue about what living on the outside is like”

Institutionalisation is complex... In practice it means that people may not have the tools to deal with the outside...



Service users do not see or understand the myriad of services that are given to them...



“Prisons have limited resources available for resettlement”

“Why should service users understand or differentiate between different services? They don’t recognise workers are from different organisations, instead they are all from ‘the council’”

“Services differ between districts, however an individual may not know about different districts and why services offered are different in each one”

“Success is dependent on individuals, if they are under stress they won’t be able to go that extra mile to help”

“It is not just about roofs over heads, there needs to be a package of services”

“Employment is a main concern; basic skills and training is given but in reality they will not be able to get a job”

“People need to become part of the community e.g. knowing when to put the rubbish out”

“This is the same for all people, offender or not”

Housing issues cannot be looked at in isolation. Need a person-centred approach to reduce re-offending.



Houses need to be homes.

Action | Recommendations

Firstly it is important to acknowledge and recognise existing successes that are happening despite systemic challenges.

The JPPB Offender Sub-group represents a collective of key agencies who already have a work programme dedicated to service improvement and promoting better understanding between agencies. Since the beginning of this project, prisons are now represented and it is hoped that Kent Police will soon be too.

The JPPB Offender Sub-group is the ideal vehicle to take forward recommendations from this work and they have agreed to incorporate these recommendations into their ongoing action planning process.

There is also a critical role for ambitious locality-based initiatives, often pioneered by groups of determined individuals from across sectors and agencies, which need recognition, resource and space to continue to provide support for ex-offenders and their families and inspiration for continuous improvement.

Ambitions that were agreed at the workshops

AMBITION 1 | PERSON-CENTRED, CO-PRODUCED SERVICES

Service providers to recognise the value of working alongside serving and ex-offenders to design, commission and review service delivery and implementation, to ensure a more holistic, effective and efficient use of resource where service delivery addresses actual need and aspiration

Serving and ex-offenders are experts of their own experience. They are closest to the issues and closest to identifying possible solutions. A workshop participant stated: “to understand these issues we must talk to ex-offenders, we can’t possibly understand unless we’ve been there ourselves...”

There are certain characteristics of this approach which were identified; the importance of managing expectations by jointly setting parameters to build mutual respect and trust; responding immediately in a crisis situation; aiming for a continuity of support during transition and after care service with key workers playing a buffering role to minimise the impact of multiple service interventions.

Where elements of this type of approach are already happening across the sectors, they should be recognised and learned from in the review of service design and delivery. “We need to learn from the Youth Offending Team model – workers are inside and outside of prison and have good communication on both sides...”

Recommendation | Identify opportunities to highlight and learn from existing good practice; explore opportunities for pooling resources across agency funding streams to champion and further test a person-centred approach to support prisoners holistically from pre-release to post-release.

AMBITION 2 | SOCIAL FINANCE

Build on the momentum of this work to explore how new models of social investment could provide financial support to tackle current social issues

The Coalition Government is supporting new approaches to financing service delivery; Kent can continue to learn from progress being made nationally, for example the Social Impact Bond collaborative pilot between Peterborough Prison, the Ministry of Justice and Social Finance that started in August 2010.

Justice Secretary Kenneth Clarke has said: ‘The voluntary and private sectors will be crucial to our success and we want to make far better use of their enthusiasm and expertise to get offenders away from the revolving door of crime and prison.’

Recommendation | Build on activity which is already testing models of social investment, for example Supporting People are testing payment by results, to further develop and refine models which could reduce re-offending rates in Kent.

AMBITION 3 | LIFE SKILLS

Build on an idea that originated from an ex-offender at Her Majesty’s Prison East Sutton Park to trial a property for serving offenders to use during their home leave if they do not have an alternative place to stay

For people that have entered the criminal justice system at an early age or for long sentences, additional life skills may be required before full release. An ex-offender described “Prisoners often do not have life skills before going into prison; prison needs to be about training people with these skills and confidence”.

Agencies are starting to work together to test how a new model could work in practice, which will enable ex-offenders to familiarise themselves with real life outside prison before full release, thus reducing the re-offending rate.

Recommendation | Support the development of this model alongside serving and ex-offenders at HMP East Sutton Park, drawing on relevant partners as required, with a view to testing and defining a transferable and scalable model of best practice to reduce re-offending rates.

AMBITION 4 | **VULNERABILITY**

It needs to be recognised and reemphasised that ex-offenders, where vulnerable, have the same priority status as other vulnerable groups in current homeless legislation

All members of the Joint Policy and Planning Offender Sub-groups and other agencies attending the workshops declared specific support for this aspiration, although critically subject to an understanding that not every ex-offender will be vulnerable.

This will require engagement at an organisational and political level to ensure that the priority status of vulnerable prisoners is recognised in respect of homelessness legislation.

It was noted that particular attention should be paid to the transition period between age 17 and adulthood; reaching adulthood should not automatically reduce the level of vulnerability.

Recommendation | Further work with practitioners and offenders themselves is required to explore and better understand who is to be deemed vulnerable, with a view to developing a vulnerability assessment procedure which could flag up vulnerability status (as seen in Department for Work and Pensions system).

AMBITION 5 | **LEARNING**

Continue to look further afield for approaches that could be beneficial in Kent; review mechanisms for sharing and learning from good practice locally and horizontally across Kent and Medway

There are examples of good practice across Kent where information, advice and guidance are shared, although it is inconsistent across the areas.

The JPPB Offender Sub-group should be recognised as a forum which is already sharing information and learning across agencies at a strategic level. Further opportunities for the Sub-group may include working more closely with prisons via the Chief Executive of the Sheppey Cluster Group, the Gateway, community based resource centres and health centres.

Locally, the day-to-day experience and knowledge within frontline staff must be recognised as hugely valuable, and, if shared horizontally between peers could be critical to improving service delivery models. Likewise offender peer groups described as “worth their weight in gold” by a serving offender, could be facilitated to provide a programme of learning across prisons and other relevant service agencies to reduce re-offending rates.

Recommendation | Build on existing infrastructure and successes to share information and learning horizontally at a strategic and local level; examine the possibility of closer links between the Medway Offender group and the Kent JPPB Offender Sub-group.

AMBITION 6 | PUBLIC VALUE and PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Long term, transition from performance indicators to outcomes owned collectively across agencies and budget lines, that are relevant to individual circumstances and defined by people themselves

In the short-term, a more thoughtful approach to the design of performance indicators is required to minimise unintended outcomes for other agencies. In the longer term, there needs to be better understanding of what is of value to people which should inform and shape a performance management framework.

There was a request from an ex-offender not to “throw all the money at the most needy”, recognising that everyone might need low-level support of some kind at some point. It was acknowledged that not all offenders flag up warnings and may slip through the net, which is when issues fester and increase the chance of re-offending.

Recommendation | Identify opportunities for a multi-agency approach to review how to better understand what is of value to people, which could inform the development of a more accurate performance management framework.

AMBITION 7 | LOCAL IMPACT

Raise the awareness of the impact on Kent's services by decisions made nationally

The resettlement of ex-offenders out of area was recognised as a big problem that is affecting local service delivery; a number of actual recent cases were discussed at the workshops.

It was emphasised there is a need to recognise that this is about mindset, attitude and understanding which could be influenced through better knowledge nationally of practice at a local level.

Recommendation | Identify opportunities to share local experiences nationally with a view to influencing policy making at a national level.

The Way Forward

These recommendations are in varying stages of development and success will depend on the commitment of people to drive them forward. It is excellent that they will be incorporated into the JPPB Offender Sub-group Action Plan.

To some extent also, success may be determined by the national climate – a radical reform of the criminal justice system, to punish criminals more effectively and reduce re-offending, as announced in December 2010 by the Justice Secretary Kenneth Clarke.

We feel this report could not be more timely.

In this emerging climate then, where new concepts, approaches and models are emerging such as social enterprise, ethical investment and payment by results, there are genuine opportunities to do things differently and build on existing successes.

We hope that this project goes part way in better positioning Kent and Medway to explore and test new approaches, while simultaneously remembering the critical insight from ex-offenders and front line staff themselves, which must provide the foundation for future improvements.

Key Policy Documents

- 2001 “Through the Prison Gate”, HM Inspectorate of Prisons and Probation
- 2002 “Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners”, Social Exclusion Unit
- 2005 “Rehabilitation of Prisoners”, House of Commons Home Affairs Committee
- 2006 “Out for Good”, commissioned by the Howard League for Penal Reform
- 2010 “The Impact of Offenders & Prisons on Kent’s Public Services”, Kent County Council Corporate Policy Team

Personal Reflection
Insensitive Incubator: Will Myers
Poem recited at workshop 15th October 2010

A glimpse of life through electric an artificial window causes my eyes to burn
and

Weep with suppressed emotion.

They're kept in check by choice lest madness gain the upper hand and I
retreat into

The realms of havoc.

Escaping running constantly from that relentless hunter—reality.

Flaccid time, the pursuer's ally, always faithful—always present,

Cold and unswerving in it's progress, its egress.

Memory is a curse, a torture self inflicted to remind me there is an afterlife.

There is no hope, only the certainty that the pain will end.

When it does, what was known, will be no more.

Like that waking dream, that conscious fugue has direction and evolution

But never a solution.

It ages, matures, but never grows up.

Like some vast incubator for adult offspring this cold brick monolith spits

Out infants so ill-equipped to survive full term without returning to its

Nurturing narcotic—certainty—safety.

Lacklustre mentality ensures eternal fertility of the brick womb which

Never lets up in spewing forth its wounded embryos, its socially

Mutated progeny.

The immature clutch are incomplete, but strive to grow and not be forced

To return to the womb of woe that birthed them—

But a mother's calls to her young are oft heard all too clearly so loud,

So strong, so sad, so long.

This desolate desert of mirrored truth—real truth, this controlled hell, this

Enormous and corrupting cell.

Passing through the intestines of the system to be finally excreted back

Into the hostile bigoted fold of society.

The only saving grace, the only chance of redemption is that maybe the
Muck that clings to once innocent flesh might nourish at the same time as

Being a potentially fatal germ ridden salve.

Perhaps, and only perhaps it may heal, and so allow humanity to evolve
And recapture the likeness of cultural peers.

I just wish so much that my eyes would see clearly once again and the
Burning pain to stop.

My first breath of freedom will be the first breath of the beginning of the
Rest of my life.

The first sight of a free sun will burn my eyes and make them water, but
I will smile at the pain.

I will laugh at my return to the world of men—of life.

I will wash away the stink of punishment and revel in the remaining pleasant
Gentle perfume of learning.

About this report

This research and report have been commissioned as part of the evidence base to inform the development of The Kent Forum Housing Strategy. It seeks to encourage organisations across Kent and Medway to realise the benefits of taking a shared approach to common problems. Ethnographic research was undertaken by ESRO to understand the day-to-day realities of the resettlement process from the ex-offenders point of view.

Throughout the project, agencies, frontline workers, serving and ex-offenders have worked alongside each other and have formed the ambitions and recommendations within this report. In the current climate where new approaches and concepts are emerging, we hope that this project goes part way in positioning Kent and Medway to explore and test an enhanced way of working.
June 2011

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