

# New in 2002/03...

## PARTICIPANTS' VIEWS ON THE ROLE OF A MENTOR/KEY WORKER AND PEER SUPPORT:

"So I think it would be something like a support group, you know, where you've got a support link as it were, you know, maybe made up of other people who've been in custody. You know, ex-offenders who've got jobs who can come in and talk to you – 'Look, this is how we did it.'"

"There should be help anyway, not just for housing and jobs, there should be help there for ... everybody automatically thinks it's just housing, it's just jobs – but it's more support emotionally as well."

"I think if you just got allocated a key worker or something, somebody who could spend a reasonable amount of time with you every day ... someone just to reassure you and guide you."

As well as new developments in individual local projects, during the year SOVA launched three important new initiatives...

### Women into Work (WiW)



"A lot of people patronise you as well, you know, like ... saying that they understand what you're going through ... they haven't got a clue."

This is a transnational initiative supported by European funds through the EQUAL programme. Women into Work has three

distinct phases: researching the needs of disadvantaged women, particularly offenders in relation to employment (research led by Sheffield Hallam University); piloting new and innovative approaches to improve their employment prospects (using ideas produced by the research); and, finally, disseminating and mainstreaming lessons from those pilots. Phase one nears

completion and preliminary findings are available. Two hundred and seventy eight women have been interviewed and a number of key themes have already emerged.

All of the research has been carried out by peer researchers. The programme employs three full time peer researchers and twenty five trainee researchers. All of these women have experienced disadvantage and the majority have been or are still in custody.

WiW also leads a transnational partnership called MIKIRI which encompasses similar

initiatives in Sweden, Germany and France. Study visits and steering group meetings have taken place between representatives from the partner countries to progress mutual objectives.

A recent audit carried out by the EQUAL team was extremely positive. In the coming year WiW plans to work with a number of EQUAL programmes with similar themes, taking part in a concerted effort across the country to tackle the employment needs of the disadvantaged.

### Extract from the WiW EQUAL Audit:

... Women into Work Development Partnership (that) has progressed significantly during Action 2. The Development Partnership (DP) has a strong team employed solely to work on Women into Work. Its partnership is broad and consists of key organisations that are integral to the DP breaking new ground in work with women prisoners and ex-offenders.

The DP has clearly developed a well structured approach to its primary objective, which has been to conduct peer research on a national level. This has been progressing well. The MIKIRI transnational partnership also has a strong potential to add value to domestic innovation.



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"It might be easier for me to explain how I first got involved in this project. It was advertised within the establishment, I was intrigued and I felt that I wanted to know more. I was invited to an induction session. In the induction session I was told it was about employment, training and education. I felt it was a subject that was dear to me as my education was many years ago, my own training in the work place was before computers were as widely used as they are today.

"Since my incarceration, I have found many different attitudes to education from my fellow inmates, some cannot be bothered to learn, others would do so with help and encouragement and others are keen to benefit as much as they can from what is available. The majority fall into the last category and at Askham Grange, education and training is encouraged.

"The idea of the focus groups is to exchange and contribute ideas about matters that concern individuals both inside and outside of prison, such as education, training and problems with unemployment and housing. I have found that because of the initial training I received from Women into Work, that I am now more aware of the skills that are required to listen effectively, and to be able to concentrate on what is being said and not veer off in a different direction without addressing the initial problem.

"My aim is to see this project to the end, therefore I would feel that something that I was involved in from ground level has been established, enabling other women the opportunity to further themselves with the use of services."

*A trainee with the WiW programme*

### IMPACT (Motivation means Partnership and Community Together)



IMPACT is an EQUAL project working across six custodial establishments (Thorn Cross, Hindley, Risley, Kirkham, Wymott and Manchester) and managed by the Prison Service. SOVA is actively involved in this project, which is researching barriers faced by socially excluded people (in particular, offenders) in the labour market. IMPACT includes peer research

and peer support and the development of relationships with local employers and trade organisations. Within the overall objective of facilitating the return of ex-offenders to the labour market, SOVA is focusing on the stimulation of closer co-operation between statutory and voluntary organisations and the community; and on the improvement of service provision to offenders and young people at risk.

The project has developed an Employment Charter to build links between the private and voluntary sector and has developed an 'automatic link' between the prisons and New Deal to ensure immediate access on release.

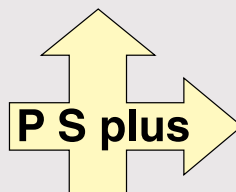
Stereotypical perceptions are a substantial barrier to progress in helping ex-offenders to access the job market. A strand of SOVA's work in this project focuses on the development of strategies to combat these perceptions: offenders and employers are brought together in order to establish a dialogue aimed at breaking down these stereotypes and barriers.

"X (volunteer) was a breath of fresh air, absolutely great for my morale and future hope."



## New in 2002/03...

"I realise the support I have been getting (from SOVA) is a key factor in my progress."



*More Than Just Prison!*

**Prison Service Plus (PS+)**  
SOVA works in partnership with the Prison Service, the National Probation Service, Nacro and Connexions on this large national programme covering twenty eight

custodial establishments from Dartmoor in the South West to Kirkham in the North and Wayland in the East.

As part of effective sentence planning, SOVA provides employment, training and education advice and guidance to men and women in custody and after release. The project offers screening, assessment, referral and a range of intervention activities including job brokerage, interview skills, job club and CV writing, coupled with volunteer mentoring for support, all of which aim to increase the employability of offenders.

PS+ began providing a service to prisoners just before Christmas 2002 and by the end of March 2003 had already commenced work with 1,825 offenders. Even though this is a considerable number of prisoners, it is still below target due to delays in getting the programme up and running. With the last of the twenty eight prisons 'going live' during the summer of 2003, SOVA is hopeful that it will soon catch up.

