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Re-imagining Probation in the Community: An Evaluation of Grand Avenues

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

In 2017 HMPPS started to establish a project called Grand Avenues (GA), which was rolled out from October 2021. GA had the remit to test whether successful and sustained rehabilitative outcomes could be achieved in an innovative community focused project, based in the Cardiff wards of Caerau and Ely. The intention was to create a Probation Service team to supervise men on licence, parole or community sentences, in premises situated in the area and to work with other service providers (either commissioned or with whom local links were made). Female offenders were not included, as they were already supervised under the Wales Women's Pathfinder scheme in non-Probation premises elsewhere. Four objectives were identified as a basis for operation:

1. Demonstrate reduced harm and reoffending in adult males
2. Implement a sustainable approach
3. Develop project aims through engagement with local communities
4. Positively impact on the wider community, especially the families and dependents of offenders, with the longer-term aim of reducing intergenerational offending.

HMPPS commissioned the University of South Wales (USW) to conduct a process evaluation of GA. The fieldwork period was from November 2022 to September 2024. Five specific research questions were developed: these are presented and discussed later in this summary. The data gathered was mainly qualitative, obtained through frequent participant observation by the researcher, combined with in-depth interviews with HMPPS staff who had been involved in the preparation and delivery of GA, probation officers and commissioned partners, men on Probation who had received support from GA, and three peer mentors.

Developing the Approach

GA was situated in the Strategic Support and Administration directorate within HMPPS. The directorate's role was to project manage GA (scope, establishment and delivery). It sat outside Probation's operational line, thereby providing greater opportunity for innovation. However, responsibility for Probation practice remained with the Regional Probation Director and head of the Probation Delivery Unit (in Cardiff). GA did not start with a prescribed structure or strict project management governance but took a deliberately flexible approach to be able to respond to local needs and opportunities. It was intended to take an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach and to be informed by co-production with partners, the community and men on Probation.

Start Up and Scoping

The core elements of GA were:

- Relocation of a Probation Service team to designated venues in the community.
- Identification of a cohort of men who would receive locality-based supervision.
- Commissioning third sector organisations to work with the Probation Service to identify services, opportunities and activities to which the men on Probation could be connected.

Two main scoping exercises were undertaken in the formation of GA:

- *Stakeholder engagement* and co-production workshops with lead organisations, residents and offenders living in Caerau and Ely to gain support and establish what services, organisations and activities were available

- *Cohort analysis of male offenders*, to identify who would be supervised by GA, what the eligibility criteria would be, and the size and designation of the Probation Service team required.

Those eligible would be:

- Males under the supervision of the Probation Service who lived in Caerau and Ely (determined by the post code of their place of residence).

Men who presented a high risk of harm to staff or who were being managed by other specialist Probation teams were excluded, as were women as previously mentioned.

The Probation Service team comprised a senior probation officer, two probation officers, two probation service officers and a trainee probation officer. Third sector organisations were commissioned to work with the Probation Service and men on Probation as follows:

- *Phase One*: A partnership was initially appointed led by a Community Interest Company (CIC) working with a Community Development Organisation (CDO) based in the locality. They were later joined by a Charity which provided its Support Centre as the main local base for GA. The Charity became an operational partner during the period.
- *Phase two*: The partnership consisted of the CDO and the Charity (which continued to provide the main local base).
- *Phase three*: The CDO became the sole local organisation providing local support.

Findings and Discussion

The evaluation was conducted largely in the form of an action research project. Preliminary findings were shared as the fieldwork was undertaken, which contributed to the development of GA. Each of the five research questions is set out and discussed in turn below.

1. *How has the re-location of Probation Supervision into the local community been carried out and what barriers and enablers have supported it?*

Barriers faced:

- The delay to the start of GA due to Covid, the re-unification of the Probation Service and professional skepticism about whether GA was necessary.
- Various changes of venue, in the partnership arrangements and staff turnover within the Probation team led to 'change fatigue' for some.

Enablers included:

- The most productive relationships came from being based in the community.
- There was strong commitment from the Probation Officers (POs) and partners to make GA work.
- The POs responded well to the pressure and changes they continually faced.
- There was a high level of trust and confidence between the POs and support workers. The POs valued their expertise and recognised the difference they could make.
- The HMPPS Strategy Lead successfully established GA, was resilient, solution focused and prepared to make difficult decisions and changes when necessary.
- The men were successfully managed and there were no major incidents of concern regarding those being supervised.
- Each venue used by GA had advantages and disadvantages which could enhance or detract from community-based work. There were continual efforts to overcome operational difficulties.

- The Support Centre (which was the main local base for GA) worked well for a period with the combined presence of the partners and POs. Members of the community and offenders appeared to integrate well.
 - Following the evaluation period, GA continued to positively develop and to implement lessons learned from past experiences.
2. *What changes in interventions and working practices have occurred as a result and how effective are they in supporting a more pro-social way of living?*
- The men attended their appointments; community reporting was not seen as a soft option or non-compulsory. The POs anecdotally reported that compliance increased.
 - It was advantageous to connect the men to services and activities at the same time they were attending their Probation appointments.
 - The additional assistance from support workers (and peer mentors) who could resolve problems added value and supplemented what the Probation team was doing.
 - Good personal relationships were developed between the POs and most of the men, enhancing the scope for engaging them in meaningful rehabilitative work.
 - Community development and co-production were still developing. GA recognised that it needed to assist partner organisations to gain more understanding of what the Probation Service did and how they could work together.
 - Capacity building at the start could have helped to improve partner working practices.
 - There was a need to be realistic about what could be achieved with the resources available and whether community-based work suited all POs.
 - Planning lacked direction at times and it was not always clear whether it was top down or bottom up; ultimately HMPPS set the direction.
 - It proved difficult for the Probation Service to pilot working with smaller caseloads and there was a lack of consensus about what this should look like.
 - There could have been more clarity about whether GA needed a distinct identity and offer to the men.
3. *How have the men (and their families) experienced locality-based working, had their needs met and has this led to more positive relationships with their supervising officer, family and the community?*
- The men preferred being seen in their own community; it removed barriers to attendance such as travel. Positive aspects were being in environments that were open to the public, provided good access to services, and did not reinforce criminal identity.
 - Holding appointments in more relaxed and less criminogenic environments helped the men to build a better rapport with their POs.
 - Some of the men engaged in the enrichment activities provided by the Support Centre and found it valuable.
 - Many of the men appreciated what was being done for them (problems being solved or reduced and support provided) and for some it led to significant life changes.
 - The POs would have liked more support workers to help the men to make local connections e.g. accompanying them to meetings/appointments.
 - Family members could accompany the men to the Support Centre, which helped the POs to learn more about family circumstances, dynamics and problems.
 - GA provided support to several family members, although the priority was focusing on the needs of the men which could improve the circumstances of their family.

- Addressing intergenerational offending may not have been a realistic objective because of limitations in the resources available to GA, the necessary expertise, and the long-term involvement some families require.
 - GA has the potential to build links with local and national organisations which undertake family work.
4. *How have partnership approaches to support the work of the Probation Service developed (through commissioned third sector services and other partners) and what has and has not worked well and why?*
- There were varied experiences of partnership working; dynamics could change positively and negatively. It took time to build the right relationship with the lead partner, which came from a willingness to work through problems, identify how it could best contribute its expertise and better understand the implications of working with the Probation Service.
 - Where partnership relations did not work so well and endure, it was because the attitude and approach of the partner did not fit with GA, because conflicts could not be resolved, the partner was too overt about what it felt GA should be doing and not delivering what was required/disengaging.
 - Multi-agency work required effective communication structures which were difficult to get right, as none of the partners had full jurisdiction over the others and HMPPS ultimately decided what was right for the project (after negotiation and discussion).
 - When the Probation Service was in a shared space with other agencies, decisions had to be made about how the space was used. There were advantages in using venues open to the public (less stigmatising) but this made some risks more difficult to control (who attended). These matters needed to be addressed at the start of relations with partners/venues to clarify working practices and expectations.
 - There were varied opinions about whether the Probation Service should be co-located with other services; some regarded it as essential, others less so. What was important was knowing what services existed and how to access them.
 - GA was continuing to explore how community development/engagement could increase the support available to the Probation Service and meet the needs of individual men and finding the right organisations to do this.
 - GA had no clear blueprint, which was an advantage as it allowed flexibility and responsiveness to change, but a disadvantage as there was no clear format to follow in terms of replication.
5. *How has a sustainable community-focused approach been developed and to what extent have community links and associations for those under supervision in the area been strengthened?*
- It was not possible to say that GA had developed a sustainable community focus, but community development work was being reanimated towards the end of the evaluation period to establish if it could make a difference to the Probation Service.
 - Working with a lead partner which was embedded in the community, had funding from independent sources and could offer its wider services, gave GA more scope to develop and could lead to sustainable connections for the men.
 - GA was establishing links to services which could assist the men with their varied problems, tailored to individual need. POs working on their own could not achieve the same results particularly for those with complex and multiple problems.
 - Sustainability required some dedicated funding from HMPPS which could be provided if there was local commissioning of services.
 - The role and expectations of the community-based PO required further exploration in terms of functions, career pathways and utilisation of the knowledge gained.

Conclusions

GA is a positive and worthwhile initiative which is still developing, although questions remain about what family, community involvement and co-production look like and whether GA needs a particular identity or not. HMPPS was pursuing whether GA could be replicated, and activity was underway in several localities to explore how it could be achieved. The key elements that make it replicable are:

1. Determining what the general intention is for GA and what it looks like.
2. Identifying the right partners could take time and arrangements might need to change as the project developed.
3. Setting local governance and expectations at the start and clarifying the relationship to national governance and decision-making.
4. Co-production and capacity building within the partnership at the outset to support development.
5. Understanding what the local area has to offer and how services and activities can be accessed.

A full set of recommendations is contained in the main report. Future developments should focus on:

- Continuing to monitor the progress of men who engaged with GA and take up of services offered.
- Considering what the links should be with other specialist Probation teams and the Women's Pathfinder which have participants who live in Caerau and Ely, as well as with youth justice and youth services.

Limitations to the research

- It was not possible to determine whether the feedback provided by the men interviewed was fully representative of the GA cohort as whole.
- Despite repeated efforts the researcher was unable to interview family members who had received support from GA.
- The study relates to a single site case study, so generalisation of the findings is not possible.
- A comparison based on outcomes in similar areas of Cardiff was considered but not included because of doubts about the accuracy and comparability of the data.
- The evaluation did not seek to provide definitive evidence of a reduction in offending. This was being explored by HMPPS with the Ministry of Justice Data Lab.

Chapter one: Introduction

In 2017 HMPPS started to establish a project called Grand Avenues (GA). GA was designated a 'Reducing Harm and Re-offending Proof of Concept' pilot, with the remit to test whether successful and sustained rehabilitative outcomes could be achieved by working with individuals (under the statutory supervision of the Probation Service) and their families, in an innovative, community focused and coordinated way to meet their needs and address issues of intergenerational offending. The project was based in the Cardiff wards of Caerau and Ely and rolled out from October 2021 (its development is discussed in the next chapter). The intention was to create a Probation team to supervise men on licence or community sentences, in premises situated in their local community (some of which were used by members of the public), and to work with community-based organisations which were either commissioned to be part of the GA team or with whom other links were made. The direction of the project would be informed by co-production (with the men who comprised the cohort) and it would present an opportunity to re-design the Probation experience to promote reintegration and reduce harm from the offender, for their families and their community.

GA was ambitious as it was intended to have a 10-year lifespan which would provide sufficient longevity to obtain evidence relating to intergenerational outcomes. However, it was not possible to dedicate funding and resourcing for this period at the outset, nor was the intention that HMPPS would necessarily fund for the entire period. The plan was to provide seed funding for an initial two-year period and through the establishment of local connections and improved knowledge of provision GA would become self-sustaining in the longer term. Four objectives were identified as a basis for operation:

5. Demonstrate **reduced harm and reoffending** in adult males
6. Implement a **sustainable approach**
7. Develop project aims through **engagement with local communities**
8. Positively impact on the wider community, especially the families and dependents of offenders, providing **positive intergenerational outcomes**

Evaluation and methodology

Evaluation of GA would be undertaken by the University of South Wales (USW). USW initially intended to conduct the research through a PhD funded by the Knowledge, Economy, Skills Scholarship (KESS), but ultimately employed a part time senior research assistant with temporary support from a part time research assistant and academic oversight from the Centre for Criminology. GA was examined as a process evaluation which looked at how it was implemented, operated and developed. It contained a significant element of action research and took a collaborative approach. Feedback was provided on different elements throughout the fieldwork period which contributed to GA's development. The research plan was approved by the HMPPS National Research Committee and USW's ethics committee. The research questions were:

1. How has the re-location of Probation Supervision into the local community been carried out and what barriers and enablers have supported it?
2. What changes in interventions and working practices have occurred as a result and how effective are they in supporting a more pro-social way of living?
3. How have the men (and their families) experienced locality-based working, had their needs met and has this led to more positive relationships with their supervising officer, family and the community?
4. How have partnership approaches to support the work of the Probation Service developed (through commissioned third sector services and other partners) and what has and has not worked well and why?

5. How has a sustainable community-focused approach been developed and to what extent have community links and associations for those under supervision in the area been strengthened?

The fieldwork period was from November 2022 to September 2024.

Methodology

The methodology had several components:

- A literature review discussing Probation practice and current shifts towards desistance, strengths- and community-based practice.
- A review of documentation and information about how GA was envisaged, formed and developed
- A review of available statistical data from HMPPS to create a profile of the men under supervision and their engagement with GA.
- Interviews with senior leaders involved in the creation and formation of GA, with HMPPS staff directly involved in managing GA, with probation officers supervising men on Probation, third sector partners who had been commissioned to be part of the GA team and peer mentors who were employed by one of the commissioned partners.
- Observation of meetings, activities, formal and informal interactions between the GA staff, men on Probation and others involved in the project.

The researcher regularly attended GA to become familiar with the team working on the project, the method of operation, to meet the men who were attending appointments and to interview them if they agreed. The researcher also attended project meetings with commissioned partners and others as well as case management discussions. There was also regular liaison with the HMPPS Strategy Lead, to keep abreast of any significant changes and developments.

The interviews with probation officers and partner agencies directly involved with GA were planned in two stages. The first phase was mainly conducted between November and December 2022, when most interviews took place, although a small number fell outside of this due to availability. The interviews were undertaken when the project had become established in community venues and team members were able to share initial impressions of what GA was trying to achieve, its development, strengths and weaknesses. This was followed with a second round of interviews between March 2024 and September 2024, to compare early experiences and to explore issues which had emerged in GA's development. Interviews were also undertaken with HMPPS staff who had been involved in the formation of GA and senior leaders who had a strategic perspective.

In terms of HMPPS, the Director General of Probation, Wales and Youth, the Senior Responsible Officer and three team members who had been involved at various stages prior to operationalisation were interviewed for background information (March and April 2023), as were two HMPPS staff directly involved in the first phase of GA's development and the Strategy Lead and a Project Support Officer who were appointed later on. Interviews with senior leaders (conducted in March and April 2024) included two Area Executive Directors for Wales, the Senior Responsible Officer (for the second time) and two senior leaders in the Probation Service responsible for operational and strategic oversight. The purpose of these interviews was to gain their understanding of GA's aims, governance, opportunities, challenges, and thoughts on replication.

Six probation officers were interviewed in phase one, which included the Senior Probation Officer (SPO) who was responsible for the team. The Probation Service staff were of various designations and for the purposes of the evaluation are generically described as probation officers (PO) to preserve anonymity. Apart from the SPO, they were the original team. They had been in the Probation Service for varying periods ranging from less than a year to 15 years and had backgrounds of working in the Prison Service, Youth Services and Youth Work,

Community Rehabilitation Companies, in mainstream and specialist Probation Service teams. A seventh PO was later interviewed (August 2023) when they joined the team as a permanent member. Four of the seven officers were re-interviewed in phase two. The others had left for various reasons.

Over the evaluation period three partner organisations were commissioned to undertake community development work. Members of all three partners were interviewed in phase one, comprising three managers and four support workers. By phase two, one of the original partners was no longer part of GA and one of the support workers had changed organisations within GA (they appear in the evaluation twice with different identities). At this stage four staff were interviewed from the remaining two organisations, comprising two managers and two support workers. The staff working for the commissioned partners had different titles and are described as support workers or partners in the report to protect identities.

In terms of the men on Probation, the original intention had been to interview a cross section of those reporting to GA and to interview them twice to identify what support and assistance they needed and subsequently received. All requests for interviews went through the POs who acted as gatekeepers and informed the men about the research when they attended their appointments. If interested, they would be introduced to the researcher who would explain the purpose of the evaluation, discuss consent and arrange to interview them. The plan was to interview 25 to 30 men; however, it quickly became apparent that it was going to take time to achieve this number, and it was unlikely that follow up interviews would be possible. As a result, the priority became to conduct a single interview with each person and to engage as many of the men as possible. Further, part of the plan had been to ask each of the men to complete the Intermediate Outcomes Measurement Instrument (IOMI) each time they were interviewed. This measures intermediate outcomes that have been shown to be directly or indirectly associated with reductions in re-offending in the long term and may indicate positive changes in an individual's lifestyle in the short term. However, when it was obvious that it was unlikely there would be two interviews per person, it was decided not to use this tool as it was unlikely to produce meaningful information, because it could not be used as intended.

Fourteen men were interviewed between August 2023 and July 2024. Of the 14, four were first time offenders and ten had criminal histories. Eight were serving community sentences (including all the first time offenders) and six were on licence from prison. Supervisory periods ranged from one year to a life licence. The richest information came from those with past experiences of Probation supervision (so there was a basis for comparison), who had reported to GA for several months at its main base¹, had identified needs which had been addressed, and were able to reflect on their experiences and any impact. They are identified as a 'Person on Probation' (POP) in the report. Three peer mentors were also interviewed. All three had experience of the Probation Service; two had been under the supervision of GA and one had been under supervision elsewhere in the past. The feedback from the men is qualitative and their experiences are reflected in narrative accounts and case studies.

All materials used in the recruitment of the interview subjects were ethically approved and were tailored to the groups being interviewed. This included information sheets, consent forms and the interview schedules used in each of the phases. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed, and all interview subjects were given a unique identifier. Thematic analysis was undertaken using NVIVO, using the research questions as the context for analysing the findings.

¹ Of the 14 men interviewed, 13 had been supervised by the Probation team at GA's main local base (see chapter five) and one (POP 16) had only ever been supervised at one of the other community venues.

Data

Data held on individuals under the supervision of the Probation Service is recorded on the nDelius system. Those in the GA cohort are flagged so that their profile and activity relating to them can be tracked. USW requested various data from HMPPS to compare the GA cohort to offenders in two similar localities in the Cardiff area². This included offender characteristics and information about attendance, breach and recall. Information was provided, but further work was required to be confident about the findings, so the data has not been included in the report.

Between March 2022 and January 2023 data on the GA cohort was also held on a case management system³ which had been designed to record information in a multi-agency setting. It was used by support workers in the commissioned third sector organisations to record their activity. This provided information about 64 individuals, their needs and responses to them. However, as the quality of recording was variable and inconsistent, the information was treated with caution. What was recorded gave an indication of the type of difficulties being experienced and how they were dealt with (see chapter nine), but it was not possible to identify how many appointments each person had with a support worker over what period and how they specifically related to the help provided. Additionally, outcomes were generally not recorded making it difficult to identify on a case-by-case basis whether support resulted in action which had a positive impact (such as successful benefits or housing applications or appeals) or any positive lifestyle changes which resulted from involvement with GA.

Limitations

In addition to the limitations of the recorded data, previously described above, it was not possible to identify whether the feedback provided by the men was fully representative of the GA cohort as the target number of 25/30 was not reached. This was a small proportion of the number of men⁴ who had been in contact with GA and impacts on the strength of the findings. Requests were made to the Probation Service team to speak to individuals who had a variety of experiences, but most of the men who consented to be interviewed did so because of positive rather than negative or indifferent involvement.

Despite repeated efforts the researcher was unable to speak to any family members particularly those who had received support over a sustained period. The accounts included in the evaluation come from professionals and the men interviewed.

Most of the evaluation relates to a single site case study, in a small community in Cardiff. Towards the end of the evaluation period, GA had started to operate from different premises as its main base changed. The evaluation largely relates to activity in the main base. It has not been possible to fully assess how GA's operation may have changed in different venues and impacted on the findings discussed here, although lessons learned are potentially transferable to other settings and are commented on where identified.

The evaluation did not seek to provide definitive evidence of a reduction in offending. This was because there was not a large enough sample, there was insufficient time within the project to determine reoffending rates and no obvious, satisfactory control group. HMPPS were exploring whether it was possible to obtain re-offending data and to examine it against a comparison group through the Ministry of Justice Data Lab⁵

² Llanrumney and Trowbridge were the comparator areas, which were also used in the Grand Avenues Cohort Analysis – May 2021, see chapter three.

³ <https://restorativejustice.org.uk/blog/ivstitia-case-management-system-myrrj-formally-endorsed-rjc>

⁴ There were 341 registrations from start up in 2021 to the end of 2024.

⁵ [Accessing the Justice Data Lab service - GOV.UK](#)

Structure of the report

The report takes a case study approach discussing the background, formation and development of GA from inception to the end of March 2024. It discusses early developments, start-up including the identification of the cohort who would be supervised and the transfer arrangements to the GA team. It examines the use of venues from the perspective of the probation officers and the men they supervised, creation of the GA team (Probation Service, commissioned partners and peer mentors), roles and responsibilities, working arrangements, objectives, planning and communication, and the nature of the support provided to the men. It also discusses intergenerational offending and reflections from those involved in GA's operation and ends with final conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter Two: Developing the Approach

Origins of Grand Avenues

The origins of Grand Avenues arose from the recruitment process for a Chief Constable for South Wales Police which included the Police and Crime Commissioner exploring with candidates what their vision would be for policing Caerau and Ely because of the high level of crime (and deprivation). The crime rates were above the Wales average and the localities scored poorly on the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation⁶ in relation to income, employment, health, education, housing and community safety. This led to interest from the Director General of Probation, who covered HMPPS operations in Wales, in developing a project which would reduce re-offending and harm and re-imagine how Probation could work in the community. The mandate was to create a project focused on community development as well as Probation practice and to develop a different model of offender management: a *'systems-based model with a focus on prevention'* (Ministry of Justice 2020:5⁷). This would be through the creation of an improved network of community services which would seek to prevent offending becoming more harmful or frequent and have an intergenerational impact. Statutory and non-statutory partners would work closely together, with co-production with service users at the heart of activity. Key to achieving this was basing the Probation Service in the community:

'By supervising people at [a central location], we were taking them out of the community, which was against what was trying to be achieved'. (HMPPS1).

Strategic alignment

GA fitted with various objectives of the UK and Welsh Governments. These included the 2018 Strategic Objectives of the Ministry of Justice (Ministry of Justice 2018⁸), which were to reform offenders and reduce offending (objective one) and to collaborate with partners across the justice system and government and to put innovation at the heart of improving services (objective four). The HMPPS Business Strategy (HMPPS 2019⁹) set out the vision of working in partnership to protect the public and help people to lead positive and law-abiding lives. The 2021 Prison Strategy White Paper¹⁰ identified GA as supporting Lord Farmer's recommendations to provide targeted support for male offenders and their families through ongoing supervision and engagement on release. This aligned to the joint Welsh Government and HMPPS in Wales 'Framework to support Positive Change for those at Risk of Re-offending' (Welsh Government and HMPPS 2017¹¹), which included making use of the support services provided by all relevant partners for parenting, young people and families. The Wales Reducing Reoffending Plan 2022-25 (HMPPS 2022¹²) acknowledged GA as one of the projects being taken forward to address the priority of assisting offenders to build and maintain family ties, secure and keep accommodation and re-integrate into society. Finally, GA was

⁶ The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation is the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas in Wales:

⁷ Ministry of Justice (2020) GRAND AVENUES Short Business Case Shared Outcome Fund (unpublished)

⁸ Ministry of Justice (2018) *Single Departmental Plan 2018* London: Ministry of Justice (withdrawn from Gov.UK on 15th July 2021 [\[Withdrawn\] Ministry of Justice single departmental plan - GOV.UK](#))

⁹ HMPPS (2019) *HMPPS Business Strategy: Shaping Our Future* London: HMPPS [HMPPS Business Strategy: Shaping Our Future](#)

¹⁰ Ministry of Justice (2021) *Prisons Strategy White Paper* London: Ministry of Justice [Prisons Strategy White Paper](#)

¹¹ Welsh Government and HMPPS (2017) *A Framework to support Positive Change for those at Risk of Re-offending* Cardiff: Welsh Government [framework-to-support-positive-change-for-those-at-risk-of-offending.pdf](#)

¹² HMPPS (2022) *The Wales Reducing Reoffending Plan 2022-25* London: HMPPS [Reducing Reoffending Plan 2022-25 for Wales](#)

compatible with the aims of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and its five ways of working for public bodies¹³ which included increasing system integration between statutory, devolved and non-devolved services and the third sector.

Governance and project management

GA was situated in the Strategic Support and Administration directorate within HMPPS, with a Senior Responsible Officer (SRO), a Strategic Lead and other support staff. The directorate carried out project related functions and wrote the business plan for GA, obtained funding (initially from the Shared Outcome Fund) and was responsible for oversight and assurance. Its ongoing responsibilities were for the functional elements of GA (grants, legal aspects, communications etc). The responsibility for Probation practice lay with the Regional Probation Director and head of the Probation Delivery Unit (in Cardiff) to ensure that statutory responsibilities to the community and people on Probation were met and not affected by different working arrangements:

'So that element is key because what you don't want is that the whole team goes native and forget those boundaries of yes, you know, I'm in the community and all that. We are still a statutory service....and we are now civil servants..... you have to abide by the civil service code of conduct etc'. (HMPPS 4)

A project team was formed in in 2021 when a dedicated Strategy Lead was appointed. There was also a seconded Partnership Manager¹⁴ and the assistance of a Project Development Officer until September 2022 and from March to October 2022 a Project Manager. Other HMPPS staff had been involved prior to this working on the concept and developing objectives, but October 2021 was the point when GA started to operate. The Partnership Manager and Project Development Officer were responsible for initial scoping of local provision, investigating local services and finding a venue for GA. The role of the Strategy Lead was to set the direction for GA, manage it (staffing, relationships, contracts and finances), monitor its progress, and commission partners to enable it to deliver and develop. This gave GA a 'champion' within HMPPS, who was the single point of contact, who could make the necessary decisions, establish and take it forward and had the skills to engage with senior leaders and ministers:

'So whilst what a lot of people see is the delivery aspect of this, the small local project that's almost the tip of the iceberg, and what goes under that is a whole load of work around systems and process, so with our grants team and our commercial team and our lawyers, and then understanding Cabinet Office standards, and ... how budgets are allocated, where we get the money fromhow information-sharing protocols work, and all of that kind of stuff'. (HMPPS 2)

There was some discussion at the start about what GA would look like and whether it was a project or a genuine innovation (for some it was a return to how the Probation Service used to work in the community). It was ultimately decided that re-evaluating the approach was potentially novel, and from the outset getting the right balance between governance, innovation and freedom/flexibility was going to require skilful navigation. Senior leaders in the Ministry of Justice were fully committed to GA. However, there was initially some scepticism in the Probation Service about whether a GA type of approach was necessary because some considered this type of work was being undertaken and regarded multi-agency meetings, (which was part of what the Probation Service did), as community-based activity. As a result, GA was not necessarily seen as a genuine development. There were concerns about operational pressures within the Probation Service, about whether what was being proposed could be achieved. Probation's risk driven culture did not naturally lend itself to locality-based working. The service operated from the Ministry of Justice estate and stayed within its own

¹³ Long-term, prevention, integration, collaboration and involvement

¹⁴ This post was a temporary arrangement

community. For some, Probation was regarded as being *'quite a closed book'* which curtailed wider thinking:

'I don't think we [the Probation Service] get the wider community angle to things, because from a Probation senior leadership perspective probably because of what we have to deal with around risk management ... we're quite risk averse ... when it comes to these things.' (HMPPS 1)

GA did not have a prescribed structure. The intention was to form a team with individuals with the right skills and experiences who could identify the community leaders and organisations GA should engage with and effectively liaise with the Probation Service, mainstream agencies and the men on Probation and offer them genuine solutions to the problems they were experiencing.

'I don't think I could write out a structure now that says, "Anyone wanting to do a Grand Avenues kind of thing, this is a structure that you should have." It's hard to comment on this because everything has been so circumstantial.' (HMPPS 2)

It was also important that the Probation team understood the HMPPS project support function and what it was contributing (which was not always the case). The finance for GA was not channelled through the PDU which made getting it established more difficult and at times there was a disparity between the commitment of senior leaders in HMPPS (who wanted to drive it forward) and the Probation Service (which was more cautious). Project boards and structures operated in 2020 and 2021 but did not help GA to develop due to operational tensions. Ultimately the Strategy Lead disbanded the project management structure and adopted the Ministry of Justice and HMPPS scheme of delegation. This gave them the authority to develop GA and make the day-to-day decisions about its development and to refer to senior leaders if higher-level decisions were needed. Although a less collaborative approach, this started to make a difference. The Strategy Lead engaged directly with the PDU head and made significant progress in identifying what needed to be done. The process moved from that of 'imagining what GA could look like' to starting its incremental development, although it was recognised that what GA became might have been different to what was originally envisaged. There was an attitudinal shift in the Probation Service from the initial position of:

"Do we even need to do any of this stuff still when after reunification we've got a new Target Operating Model? Has this completely superseded Grand Avenues?", to a more committed view of 'This is just the right thing to do. We need to do it.' (HMPPS 2).

GA was in the right place from a governance perspective. An advantage of developing GA outside the Probation Service's operational line was there was more scope to be innovative:

'There were just lots of things that we just couldn't have done if we weren't outside that line.... Grand Avenues should always be the space in which we're trying to develop, we're trying to innovate.' (HMPPS 2)

In addition, the Strategic Support Directorate had the time and capacity to develop GA, whereas the Probation Service did not whilst delivering its normal activity. However, it was acknowledged that GA should ultimately become part of 'business as usual' as it was unlikely to be developed through a project management approach if replicated elsewhere as *'PDU heads or other people in the operational line (would) be having complete responsibility'* (HMPPS 2). From 2021 onwards the working arrangements started to mature, and regular meetings and discussions took place between HMPPS, and the Probation Service. Senior Probation staff had confidence in the leadership from HMPPS and were complimentary about how the SRO and Strategy Lead operated, indicating they had the skills, enthusiasm, expertise and commitment to take GA forward. The relations between the HMPPS Strategy Lead and PDU head were good and both parties respected each other's views. The strong support from senior leaders within the Ministry of Justice and HMPPS, including endorsement from the

Director General, who visited the project (the SRO was also a regular visitor) demonstrated a positive commitment to GA and helped to cement relations.

The more relaxed approach to project management continued. Project boards were not reinstated. Some senior leaders felt it was a strength to start the process with a broad vision rather than a tightly prescribed approach and to allow GA to develop, shaped by initial and ongoing community engagement and to focus on co-production with partners:

'So, at times yeah you want to see a project plan, but this isn't the types of project you have a project plan on. You want to see X, Y and Z because those are the things that are your comfort blankets, but actually allowing partners to co-create something with you without the need for a project plan has probably been... a strength of this but been one of the most uncomfortable strengths of it for us civil servants who like to see all those things'. (HMPPS 1)

There was deliberate flexibility (rather than strict governance) because HMPPS did not want the GA team to be limited to standard ways of working and wanted to be able to respond to local need and opportunities which might present themselves:

'Otherwise, we're just trying the same things we always do just in a different building. And that doesn't seem to be really going to likely change the dial on outcomes. We wanted it to feel embedded in the community, for it to feel different. it's had the freedom ... to work with people and decide how it wants to do stuff in a way that hasn't been so tightly controlled by the machine which has been a really interesting thing to see happen as well, because government's not brilliant at doing that, if I'm honest'. (HMPPS 3)

There were several different versions of what that looked like, which are discussed in chapter six (commissioned partners and their roles) and chapter seven (planning and communication). As GA progressed, oversight became more operationally focused and there were attempts to devolve some of the decision-making to the commissioned partners through various meetings (see also chapter seven). The initial plan was to relocate and establish a Probation Service team in the community, commission services to support its activities and develop community engagement and involvement.

Funding

The project was initially funded by a two-year grant (up to March 2023) from the Shared Outcome Fund (SOF) to the value of £550,000. The SOF funded pilot projects to test innovative ways of working across the public sector, with an emphasis on evaluation to help inform future policy development and programmes (H M Treasury 2020¹⁵). The grant enabled third sector partners to be commissioned to be part of the GA team. It was not intended that funding would be required beyond this period, the aim was to create sustainability by establishing links to local services which the men Probation would be connected to. However, as GA developed this changed as what become evident was that some of the funded specialist support had been extremely valuable in improving the quality of lives and lifestyles (see chapter nine). This led to funding being provided for a longer period, which is discussed in chapter six.

¹⁵ H M Treasury (2020) *Policy Paper Spending Review 2020* on Gov.UK (accessed 1st May 2025) [Spending Review 2020 - GOV.UK](#)

Chapter Three: Start Up and Scoping

Start Up Overview

Two main scoping exercises were undertaken in the formation of GA. The first was to help HMPPS to understand the community, what services were available, how they could support GA's objectives and to find a suitable venue to operate from. The second was an analysis of the offender population to determine the cohort for local supervision. GA was conceived in 2017 but had a relatively slow start for various reasons (including negotiation with the Probation Service previously described). Some preparatory activity took place between 2018 and 2019. Following completion of the co-production phase (described below), it was decided to pause implementation (in October 2019) to allow the reunification of the Probation Service to take place. Activity resumed in January 2020 with the intention of agreeing an initial plan to deliver GA commencing in September 2020. However, this was then affected by the pandemic and GA did not become operational until October 2021.

There was a strong emphasis on co-production with the community and with individuals on Probation to determine what was required and how best to deliver it. The lens through which GA would be delivered was Asset Based Community Development (ABCD), rather than risk-led practice (although that had its place because of Probation's statutory responsibilities). The core elements were:

- Relocation of a probation team to designated venues in the community;
- Identification of a cohort of men subject to probation supervision who would receive locality-based supervision; and
- Commissioning of third sector organisations which would appoint community development workers to work with the Probation Service and the Probation cohort to:
 - identify services, opportunities and activities and connect men on Probation to them;
 - engage with the community to increase local support and activity; and
 - provide individualised support to men on Probation and their families to engage in local co-production activities.

Inception and scoping

Stakeholder engagement

GA started to take shape in 2019 through extensive stakeholder engagement and five co-production workshops, with public and voluntary sector organisations, engagement with Cardiff Council¹⁶, local schools, the Police and the Police and Crime Commissioner and some of the lead organisations based in the area to gain their support as well as residents and offenders living in the area. This exercise identified 261 public and voluntary sector organisations delivering services in Caerau and Ely. Feedback indicated there was a need to change the way in which services were delivered to ensure a more joined up local approach, to foster stronger and more consistent relationships with men on Probation; to find more innovative solutions to address individual needs; facilitate more involvement of the family; introduce greater flexibility and maximise the benefits of the resources available.

The Probation Service was not regarded as an accessible organisation and was difficult to contact by external agencies. Establishing a consistent team in the locality would help to address this. There was discussion of POs having more visibility in the community and being able to meet family members and talk to the local community (possibly schools) about their role to increase understanding of their function. They would need the capacity to explore what

¹⁶ Cardiff Public Services Board's well-being plan (2018-2023) focussing on partnerships with local people and between public, third and private sectors to achieve the goal of Cardiff having safe, confident and empowered communities.

services existed locally and how to access them. This would be achieved by each probation officer in the GA team having their caseload reduced by 20% (see chapter four). The intention was that POs would not simply move their appointments from the central contact centre in Westgate Street (WS) in the city centre and operate in the same way in a different place, but that the role would evolve in a way compatible with the community-based ethos. Whether this could realistically be achieved was questioned from the outset particularly as the Probation Service was facing challenges because of re-settling after reunification, had high vacancy rates and could not attract qualified staff. There were also initial ideas about creating better links with local prisons and how GA could identify men prior to release to start the process of resettlement.

Cohort analysis of male offenders

To identify the cohort of offenders who would be supervised by GA HMPPS undertook an analysis of male offenders who were under the supervision of the Probation Service or Community Rehabilitation Company on 12th October 2020 with a home address in the Cardiff wards of Caerau and Ely¹⁷. The analysis looked at numbers under supervision, their personal characteristics (age and nationality etc), sentence status, offences committed, risk of re-offending, criminogenic need and factors which had specific relevance to GA such as intergenerational offending and the prevalence of vulnerabilities and adverse childhood experiences. Unless otherwise stated the data described here is taken from the findings of this analysis, which is described here as the Cohort Analysis (CA).

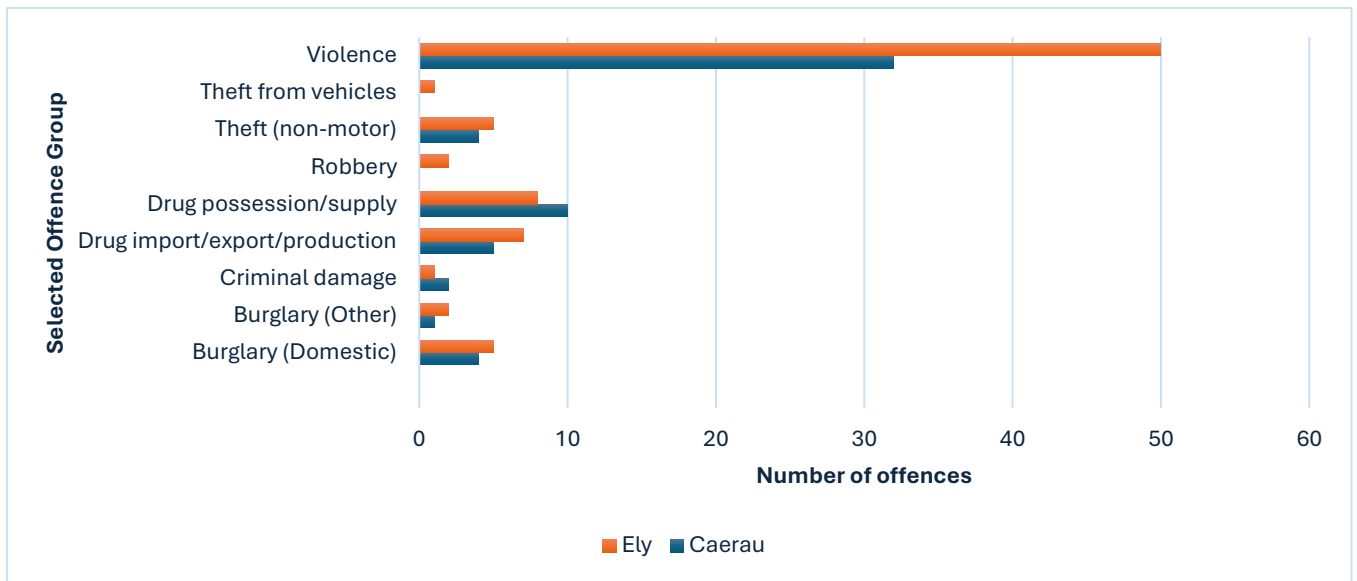
It identified 196 male offenders (79 in Caerau and 117 in Ely) of which 132 were receiving community sentence or post-release supervision. Of these 111 had no flags to indicate they were receiving enhanced offender management, however 38 males, who were not flagged, had a High or Very High risk of re-offending score, as determined by the Offender Group Reconviction Scale (OGRS), which predicts re-offending from static risk factors (including demographic data and criminal history). The predominant age range was 30 to 39 years of age (33%). 91% had an ethnic classification of 'White' and the majority declared their nationality to be British (where identified).

The CA examined the offences most likely to cause the most harm in the community (the offence types were described as the 'selected offence group'). This included burglary, criminal damage, drug-related offences, robbery, theft and violent offences. The most commonly occurring offence type in this group was violence¹⁸, which covered a broad range of offences from common assault to murder, followed by drug possession and supply. The data was drawn from NDelius and showed that in Caerau 57 of the 79 offenders were convicted of a crime from the selected offence group and 79 of the 117 offenders in Ely (see Table 1). The selected offence group made up 70% of all offences committed in Caerau and 64% in Ely by the 196 offenders in the cohort.

¹⁷ HMPPS (2020) Grand Avenues: Cohort Analysis – May 2021 – official sensitive marking

¹⁸ As was the case in South Wales and across Wales

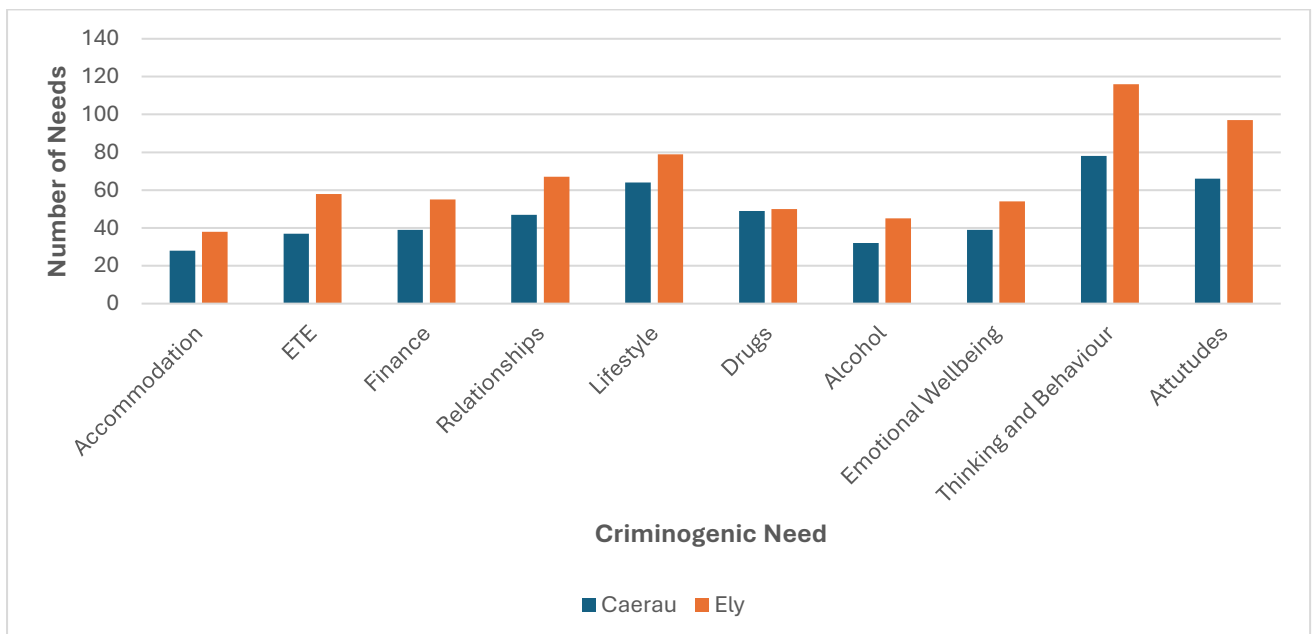
Table 1: Distribution of offence types from the ‘Selected Offence Group’ from the cohort analysis of male offenders in Caerau and Ely (n=196 offenders¹⁹)



The CA identified that of the 196 male offenders in Caerau 45% were rated as having a low risk of re-offending compared to 36% in Ely, whereas in Ely 41% were rated as medium risk (compared to 30% in Caerau). Around 20% of cases in both localities had a high risk of re-offending.

A criminogenic needs analysis was also undertaken from data held on NDelius as part of the CA. ‘Lifestyle’, ‘Thinking and Behaviour’ and ‘Attitudes’ and were the most frequently occurring needs, as Table 2 illustrates:

Table 2: Criminogenic Needs Analysis (n=196 offenders²⁰)



¹⁹ Individuals may have committed more than one offence type

²⁰ Individuals may have had more than one criminogenic need

It also looked at intergenerational offending and the prevalence of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). The Basic Custody Screening question was used to determine how many male offenders resided with children (or resided with children prior to custody). This did not produce a comprehensive picture as there was a significant amount of missing data, and the available data did not identify male offenders who had children who were not living with them. Similarly, data on those identified as 'Vulnerable' or 'Adult at Risk' was examined to give a proxy indication of the prevalence of ACEs. Although the likely picture was under-reported, the analysis identified areas of focus as parental separation, domestic violence, physical abuse, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, physical neglect, emotional neglect, mental illness, alcohol abuse, drug abuse and incarceration.

Eligibility criteria for Grand Avenues supervision

Whilst all male offenders in the selected localities were initially within the scope of GA, the analysis helped to inform the eligibility criteria which were adopted by HMPPS:

- Males under the supervision of the Probation Service who lived in Caerau and Ely (determined by the post code of their place of residence)

Females were not included because the Female Offending Blueprint for Wales²¹ was specifically addressing the needs of women in the criminal justice system as was the Women's Pathfinder in Cardiff²².

Male offenders were not eligible if they were:

- A registered sex offender (because of risk management)
- Receiving enhanced offender management, which included Integrated Offender Management (IOM), Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) Levels 2 and 3, Wales Integrated Serious and Dangerous Offender Management (WISDOM) and Supporting the Transition of Military Personnel.

Although not explicitly included in the criteria, if there was a risk to staff because the offender had a 'high risk of harm to staff' flag on their case record, they were unlikely to be supervised by GA. The eligibility criteria have not changed. The referral process has also remained the same in that individuals with an Ely or Caerau address are allocated to the Cardiff West team. This includes those sentenced to a Community Order from court, or if they are being released from custody (on licence or parole). If they met the criteria, the SPO assigned them to an officer in GA. The first cohort in 2021 comprised 53 offenders (see also Table 3 in the next chapter)

Probation Service

The size of the Probation team (number of staff and grades) was determined from the cohort analysis of male offenders. It was established there would be a SPO, who would work on GA on a part time basis and would continue to manage the entire Cardiff West team (ten probation officers at the time). They were not a case holder. At the time of writing there had been two post holders, the first from September 2021 to June 2022, who recruited the team and put the initial working arrangements into place. The second commenced in June 2022. In addition, the team comprised two probation officers, two probation service officers and a trainee probation officer (all are referred to as probation officers in the report). Once the team started to be formed and venues were identified from which supervision could take place, cases began to be transferred. The composition of the Probation team changed several times over the evaluation period due to various reasons. Probation and the transfer of cases is discussed more fully in chapter four.

²¹ [female-offending-blueprint_3.pdf \(gov.wales\)](#)

²² [Women's Pathfinder \(iomcymru.org.uk\)](#)

Commissioning of partners

A key component of GA was to commission third sector organisations to work with the Probation Service and men on Probation to provide a 'Community Development Service'. This was tendered in July 2021. HMPPS wanted to commission organisations/partners with good local knowledge rather than external agencies which would need to become familiar with the area and build relations. The partnership changes somewhat during the three operational phases, which are discussed in chapter six.

- **Phase One:** September 2021 to March 2023. A partnership was appointed which was led by a Community Interest Company (CIC) working with a Community Development Charity (CDO) (which was based in the locality). They were later joined by a Charity which provided its Support Centre as the main local base for GA from January 2022 to March 2024. The Charity became an operational partner from April 2023 to March 2024.
- **Phase two:** April 2023 to March 2024. The partnership consisted of the CDO and the Charity (which continued to provide the main venue)
- **Phase three:** April 2024 onwards - the CDO became the sole local organisation providing local support.

Finding a suitable venue

One of the issues for GA was finding a suitable venue(s) from which the Probation Service could carry out supervision. The long-term vision was to create several operational bases across the locality in which GA was operating which the men on Probation could report to. The commissioned partners provided some of the venues and others were found by HMPPS. Venues are discussed in chapter five.

Chapter Four: Probation and case transfers

Recruiting the Probation team

An expression of interest (EOI) was circulated in November 2021 to identify POs who were interested in being part of GA. POs described GA being presented more as a concept than a concrete proposal, with basic information about what it could look like. Breaking the cycle of intergenerational offending and family-focused work were at the core. Three POs were selected from this process. They had combined experience of multi-agency and community-based working including detached youth work and Integrated Offender Management (IOM). Two more POs were later recruited who were interested in joining a team with ‘a more community focus’ (PO 5). The POs who became part of GA regarded it as innovative and there was interest in being part of something that was a departure from the traditional way in which the Probation Service worked.

‘And I liked that it was a HMPPS project, so I felt like there was more scope for trying new things and being innovative as opposed to a project that’s managed within [the Probation Service] because I think we get bogged down with pressures of staffing’. (PO 3).

‘It was quite exciting, and it appealed to me the whole coming out of being in WS, which can feel a bit like a goldfish bowl and doing something different and yeah I just kind of wanted to be involved right from the beginning’. (PO 2)

Other aspects that appealed to the POs included the potential for greater flexibility and the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the men they were working with (their needs, vulnerabilities, and the support required). One PO described their usual approach as sitting across a table from the people they supervised and not feeling it was the most effective way to work as it could create ‘unnecessary authority’ (PO 1). A more informal approach had the potential to foster collaborative relationships and better rapport (PO 2). Existing ways of working were constrained by the Probation Service not having the support it needed, which the POs hoped GA would address:

‘It’s really difficult because the things that we need to address, we haven’t got the capacity or the services externally to help us with it. So, we’ve been powerless……’. (PO 4)

Some of the POs believed that Probation should be based in the community which would be better for all concerned:

‘So, you’re more approachable and you’re identified with a community and you’re more visible in the community’. (PO 4)

‘Listening to it, it just sounded like as close ... what I’d come into the service for and the way I would like to practice, it seemed the closest way to having an ideal way of working with the men. That was just the overriding thing that I can remember thinking; that’s how it should be and intriguing’. (PO 6)

‘It just makes sense, especially with with drugs, accommodation and mental health being an increasing problem, and the barriers that I don’t feel previously was taken on board by the Ministry of Justice, that for some people, getting on a bus and coming to Probation is a harrowing experience the person who has got chronic anxiety; they would rather just bury their head in the sand and just not go, because for them, that’s the better alternative’. (PO 4)

Others were interested in how inter-generational offending could be addressed:

‘So, grandad, dad, son, and that continuation, and trying to get in before the next generation of their children, see dad, and again grandad, who have been through the

prison system and all these things that are normalised in that life and to do that by working with a number of agencies....' (PO 2)

Understanding of the objectives

When asked what they understood the objectives of GA to be and how they would be delivered the POs regarded them as being community-focused and family-focused, facilitating engagement, helping to build rapport, reducing risk, re-offending, entry to prison and impacting on intergenerational offending. They hoped locality-based working would enable them to take a more individualised and holistic approach to the men they were working with as they would have a better understanding of them. They saw significant benefits in working in partnership with other organisations, which would make local connections and identify sources of help and support which the men could utilise beyond the Probation period. GA had had the potential to improve access to local provision and remove barriers to accessibility by '*plumbing them [the men] into the community*' and to services which had previously been '*invisible*' to them' (PO 4). PO 5 described GA as having '*a living directory*' (PO 5) of individuals who could assist them. The POs wanted this activity to be enhanced by support workers who would befriend the men and help with some of the practical activity such as taking/accompanying them to appointments, which was to some extent addressed through peer mentor activity (see chapter eight). The POs felt there was more scope for probation practice to be strengths-based and desistance focused:

'And focusing on people's own strengths and their gifts and how they can give back to their community which hopefully in time will mean the risk of reoffending is reduced'. (PO 3)

Further, it was anticipated that by being integrated into the community, the Probation Service would be more visible and regarded in a different and more positive way:

'So, my understanding is that the aim of it is to kind of change the perception of how the Probation Service work with men who commit crimes by working with them in their own local communities, by being guests in their communities as opposed to... I think in the past probation has looked at an area, identified it as a "problem" and become the saviours, "Right we're putting this project in your area because we think there's an issue there". (PO 3)

The Senior Probation Officer role

The SPO was not assigned to GA full time. Dividing their time between the competing demands of managing two teams was difficult: '*It's hard. I wish that it was full time to be honest. But I think it works well. I do two days here, two days [GA], one day home*'. They felt the role could have been full-time because of the attention GA needed, in supporting the POs to feel comfortable in the new operational arrangements, and in establishing relationships with the commissioned and other community partners. The POs had not anticipated the extent to which the spotlight would be on them. GA was a high-profile project which attracted a lot of internal and external interest. Unless GA was extended to manage all cases in the locality (including registered sex offenders, IOMs and those on short sentences), it was doubtful the Probation Service would support the argument for one SPO to manage five members of staff, despite the additional responsibilities.

There was no formal operating guidance for the Probation Service about how to work in a less formal environment. The POs were asked whether it would have been useful to have had guidance which set out the GA ethos, what it was trying to achieve, and how it was intended to be delivered. POs differed in their opinions on this. For some the lack of guidance created challenges:

'So I struggled with there not being an operating model just because of my experience I think of the projects I've been on where it's, "right, you need to give these cases three

appointments a week, one with the police, this has to be recorded,” so was used to following like a strict... and then when I came to Grand Avenues it was just, “Oh this is this agency, this is...” so I found it really hard to figure out who’s who and what they did and who else does practice apart from probation and should I invite these to a meeting, do they need to know about the cases?’ (PO 3)

For others the absence of a prescribed approach had advantages in that they could operate more flexibly. One of the POs felt there was an opportunity for GA to create a distinct identity and blueprint (see also chapter seven), although acknowledged there were differences of opinion in the Probation team about approaches to practice and what it could look like:

‘...people are in different camps, so I’d say [PO 4] is probably more like me all about ACEs and trauma and the individual whereas [PO 1] is more sort of very risk-focused and numbers of cases and all that type of stuff. And [PO 5] and [PO 2] are maybe somewhere in between. So as a team I wouldn’t say we’re unified ... if you were to ask each of us what we want I don’t think you’d have a unified answer’. (PO 6)

For another GA needed time to become embedded and to get a sense of what was working before any guidance was developed. The need for guidelines also extended to the role of the commissioned partners and what it was appropriate for them to do and in what circumstances, for example:

‘Yeah, the home visits all the things that we have to do and risk assess. There was one case that [PO] got allocated and he’s housebound because of the self-harm that he’s done and they wanted him to come on Grand Avenues because [support worker] and people could bring so much, and I said but what are you expecting [them] to do then? [They] can’t go and do a home visit to this person that we know is high-risk because that’s not on’. (PO 2)

That said it was acknowledged there was a lot of team discussion, reflection and joint problem solving to find the best ways forward.

Staffing

An additional challenge for the start-up of GA were staffing issues. The Probation Service was still in the early stages of reunification following Transforming Rehabilitation and there was a shortage of POs. Senior HMPPS staff did not feel this was a reason not to try something new (HMPPS 1), particularly as Wales was better placed than some of the regions in England in reaching the required staffing levels (HMPPS 4) and was regarded as more able to develop a new project/way of working (HMPPS 3). However, dealing with staffing problems was one of the biggest challenges for the SPO. There was the potential for GA team members to be redeployed elsewhere (which happened as standard operational practice for training and vacancy management purposes) and being able to manage sickness and holiday periods. Vacancies could take time to be filled.

In the early stages, POs had a mixed caseload divided between GA and WS. As a result, some felt that it took longer to become established in the community and to develop the new way of working. There were practical issues to consider; two of the team did not work on Monday and some did not drive, which affected the venues they could operate from. There was less resilience if a GA team member was absent as it was not as easy to share the workload, because the remainder of the Cardiff West Probation team was based in WS. A challenge for the SPO was making sure the whole team could cohesively operate. Mechanisms were put in place to address this; fortnightly case discussions, a monthly reflective case discussion and wider team meetings which all the POs attended. There were also twice weekly tasking (allocation) meetings, which were used to examine individual capacity and where assistance was required. WS had a backup rota to ensure there was always cover and if there were problems, staff from GA could be asked to assist and similarly if GA was understaffed, centrally based staff could be asked to provide cover but would not be familiar with GA’s method of

operation. Additionally, in the early days POs were seeing their caseload in two days (Wednesday and Thursday) which as one PO observed, could result in '*eight men coming in on one day*' (PO 2). This reduced contact time, placed pressure on the POs and affected the quality of case management recording. It was anticipated this would be alleviated when more local venues were utilised, and appointments could be spread out (which was the case). A further matter was whether placement in the GA team should be time limited. A senior HMPPS level manager suggested there should be some turnover, and rotation to enable the wider staff cohort to have the opportunity to gain experience of community working (HMPPS 5), which could be explored as part of GA's operating model and assist in managing staff expectations.

Transfer of cases

Once the initial (three) POs were recruited, the process of identifying which men fitted the eligibility criteria and would transfer commenced. Operations were initially restricted as there was only one venue available one day a week in the locality. Although a main local base had been identified (a Support Centre provided by the Charity), it had to be risk assessed as suitable by HMPPS (as were all prospective venues) which was not completed until November 2021. Even though capacity was limited, the aim was to start transfers incrementally and to signal that a different way of working had commenced. GA became fully operational in January 2022, when the Probation team was complete and the POs were principally based at the Support Centre, although some continued to work from there and WS for a further period.

Once the men were identified and the cases allocated, the POs were asked to start contacting them and advise them that their supervisory arrangements were changing, although they could not initially indicate when that would be. One PO described having to transfer 30 existing cases to another officer and to take on 30 new ones. There was no formal process, more a question of each officer working through those they had been allocated:

'That's incredibly intense, because I've got to bridge a relationship immediately ... I think there was a date set above my level. I would have liked a bit more time to do a handover' (PO 1)

The POs engaged with the men to prepare them and described the process as rushed, different to the way in which transfers were normally managed and would have liked more time to prepare.

'There was no official process 'where we all sit down and go right, we're going to do... day one is this, day two is this... It's all very fluid, and it's always been something under discussion you do as an officer, you do what you think is best for that person I guess.' (PO 1)

Some felt there should have been more discussion about suitability to transfer (rather than applying blanket criteria) and a more managed process which involved discussions with the current supervising officer about whether it was the right move at the right time. Had those discussions been held, there might have been a greater understanding of the help the men required, and which agencies GA needed to develop good links with. The decision to transfer was not voluntary and the men were not given a choice of where to report to, but it was important to hear any concerns they had, for example '*Well, I'm very well-known and if I'm seen in the community, and I see this person or that family, that person, I am going to have a problem*' (PO 2). An initial screening exercise also found that not all those identified were suitable for transfer. For example, those who required contact arrangements out of normal working hours as they worked full time, which GA could not initially accommodate (although this changed, and late reporting was introduced on a Thursday night):

'Well, no I can't see you at that time because I work, so I've always been offered late night appointments.' We don't have a venue for late night appointments. We're back in WS then. Well, that defeats that object then.' (PO 2)

In addition, as community venues were generally open to the public, they might not be suitable environments for everyone, which would mean continuing to be supervised at WS. There were a limited number of other exceptions; one man wanted to remain under supervision at WS because he wanted a PO of the same ethnic origin and another found the experience of attending GA too overwhelming, which his PO recognised and managed:

'So, I've got one who suffered with supreme anxiety. He's based in Ely... and I invited him once or twice up here, and he'd stand in the foyer as you come in and wouldn't go beyond the doors, because this was just way too much. It was too open, there was too many faces, it was too whoosh, and he now goes to WS because that's right for him and that's fine. We're not about trying to make life difficult. This is a great project but if it doesn't fit and work, that's okay. It's not for everyone.' (PO 1)

Not all the men needed the support that GA would provide and for some POs using the postcode as the main driver for the transfer was not necessarily the best approach. They felt more attention should have been given to those with support needs who may not have fitted the eligibility criteria. The POs would have liked more input in the decision-making and to be able to use more discretion to ensure those who were transferred would benefit from having a local connection, however the Probation Service wanted a mixed caseload rather than one which was predominantly high need. For some POs this was an opportunity missed:

'We argued as probation officers that we sort of wanted to have a bit more say in who we were given, as in we wanted ones who would take advantage of what was being offered on the project. So, to do a massive generalisation – if they're working and they've got... all these different things in place, they don't need to be on the project. So, there were a few conversations with (the SPO) of, could we exchange some of these? And it was like, "No, you've got what you've got'. (PO 2)

The process of engagement with the men raised other issues. The transfers took place at the same time as transition from Covid restrictions when lower risk offenders had not been seen face to face. There was reluctance on the part of some of the men to re-establish in-person reporting, preferring to continue telephone contact and querying why the arrangements had to change when they had worked well for them, *'Oh why have I got to come in now? I don't feel I need to. Why can't I carry on over the phone?'* (PO 1). For others, it was difficult to re-establish social contact:

'I have had a lot of guys who struggle with anxiety they have been in their bedrooms playing PlayStations and things for months, and all of a sudden you are trying to get them out to add some routine and contact, and its different because the phone's safe, its easy'. (PO 1)

Some did not want a change of PO, and others thought they might have done something wrong and were being escalated to more intensive supervision:

'Yes, because the biggest single complaint I get is, I've now got to explain myself to you as a new person, new face So, I was anticipating quite a lot of kickback But where we were able to say... see them initially in the (their locality) ... it was "oh, you're coming to see me". So, I think it took that edge off'. (PO 1)

'And I can remember speaking to somebody on the phone and going, so I can see you in Ely and him going, "But I don't want to transfer. I've had five officers. I don't want to have to go through telling my story again and I don't want to be part of an experiment." I said no, it's not an experiment. It's a new project; we're going to be community-led. And he kept using the word experiment'. (PO 2)

There was an initial transfer of 53 cases when GA commenced in October 2021 (of note 2021 consists of three months data and 2025 of six months data). There were 337

registrations to GA during the period, as table 3 shows, from information provided by HMPPS. The greatest number was in its first full year in 2022. The data includes 25 instances where individuals were registered more than once at different times, with most occurring in 2024. During the period 169 cases were terminated because their sentence ended and a further 111 were deregistered, because the individual was no longer being managed by GA (n=280). The reasons for this could include having moved to another area, being sentenced to custody for 12 months or more or being taken off the project because their risk to staff has increased.

Table 3: Grand Avenues Cohort Information

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
GA Cohort Registrations	53	97	82	89	16	337
GA Cohort Terminated Cases	17	97	66	76	26	282 ²³

Following allocation, the first appointment was in WS, mainly for administrative purposes. There was an introductory meeting with the PO to undertake mandatory assessments, to discuss the transfer of supervision to the home locality and to explain what that entailed and where to report. It was also an opportunity to assess whether there were any concerns about the individual reporting in the community. There was going to be a signed agreement about community reporting for those who transferred to GA, but this did not happen as it was felt it might be too onerous on top of the standard Probation Service induction. POs felt the process got easier as time went on as the men usually came straight to GA after the initial meeting in WS and were usually happy with the arrangements. As GA matured there was consideration of whether the first appointment should still be in WS, or in the community to fit more with the locality-based ethos. To date no changes have been made.

The men's experiences of the transfer process

The men described their experiences of being allocated to GA:

'Well, I only had to go to WS first because it was the first appointment I saw some guy and he filled in some form and said, 'You've got to come here [WS] first because it's your first appointment, but every appointment after that it'll be here [at GA]'. (POP 11)

'I was at WS for the first and around three months and then I got the opportunity to come over to Grand Avenues'. (POP 8).

Whilst the majority were advised when they attended WS of the change in reporting arrangements, some were told whilst in prison:

'So, I was told by my offender manager in prison that I would have had my first one in WS, that was with [probation officer]. Then obviously my next one would have been here [GA]'. (POP 4).

A few of the men were not transferred from WS, but from another Probation team because they met the eligibility criteria:

'Probation in Barry said that they were doing changes, and they said because I'm closer to the Cardiff branch, I would have to go back to Cardiff. So, they sent me up to WS. I only went there once or twice. I really did not like that. That's when I met [probation officer] said, we're moving to [Ely]. I only live up there, so I thought, it's so much better'. (POP 3)

²³ There is a discrepancy in the data provided by HMPPS of two cases.

Another man who had been supervised by the WISDOM team was referred to GA when his reporting frequency changed to monthly because his risk had lowered:

'And basically, it's for people who have just come out of prison, and they need more supervision, so intense supervision. I did that for a year, and then I was handed down to [probation officer], and [they] said, "oh there's a new centre opening and that's where probation is going to be working from". So, I came down here ...' (POP 1)

The men who were interviewed were positive about their experiences of being transferred to GA, even if there had been initial concerns about attending a different venue and having to establish a relationship with a new PO. They understood the rationale for locality-based reporting and what GA was trying to achieve and were supportive of it. Their experiences of being supervised in WS compared to GA are discussed in chapter five.

Caseload reduction and community engagement

At the outset, it was agreed there would be a 20% reduction in PO caseloads to allow the GA Probation team time to build relations with the commissioned partners and local agencies and to develop knowledge of the community. From the first round of interviews (in 2022) the caseloads ranged in size from 21 for a PQiP, (four of which were being co-worked), 26 for a part time probation service officer and 30 to 35 cases for a probation officer. On average approximately 15% of GA's cohort were in prison at any time. All POs carried cases at different risk levels and frequency of reporting from weekly to monthly and most of the men had complex needs associated with their lifestyles and past traumatic experiences. The 20% reduction was later reduced to 10%. Various Probation staff questioned whether it had been viable in the first place, as they were initially working in dual locations with the normal expectations of participating in other work-related activities such as attending training courses applied. Caseloads were high and targets still had to be met and there was limited scope to do anything other than fulfil their statutory duties:

'You've got non-stop targets the moment they come out here. Five days to do the first appointment, then you've got 15 days to do an ISP, 12 days to get sent to court. You've got non-stop appointments, dates to hit, deadlines, and because I have to do that then some people's appointments have to wait a week, so they're not having the same attention they would normally have because I'm just getting everything dropped on me right now'. (PO 5)

'There was also an adjustment to a lower caseload, which wasn't as low as we would have wanted, especially at the beginning, just because we did not have the staff'. (HMPPS 4)

HMPPS advised that POs in GA carried a lower caseload than those in WS, however this data was not compared. Two of the officers were interested in community development work, but felt it could only be done properly if there was a significant reduction in caseloads, *"there was no way I could do that with 25, 30 cases"* (PO 1), to around 10 men per PO, which they felt would be a genuine practice change and give them the space to do more in depth work with the men they were supervising, take on a fuller support role and undertake community-based work. However, this would also be contingent on what the caseloads looked like (the proportion in prison or under community supervision) and how that related to the time that could be allocated to each individual and their needs. The POs indicated that consideration could be given to what the community-based PO should do and what skills and knowledge were required and how they could become more knowledgeable about dealing with some of the common problems which arose regarding benefits and housing. An inevitable question was whether this would be a good use of their time and skills. If the ambition was to be genuinely innovative and to practice differently, space needed to be found to explore this:

'.. because it's become so robotised in respect of, we're busy, and you churn over, and you do appointments, and you write a report, all this sort of stuff. As someone said, "How

often do you sit back and really think about an appointment, and go, 'Actually, he said this. What does he mean by that?'" Normally you're just sort of thinking, "Are you okay?" and they say to you, "Yeah." They're breathing, they're happy, they're healthy. "Off you go," and you think, "That's not Probation either'. (PO 1)

However, there wasn't full agreement amongst the POs that undertaking community development work was the right thing for them to do. When asked what they thought community engagement should mean they described it as being based in the community; providing a base from which the men could have greater engagement with the community, having good connections with the commissioned partners and local services and being able to address a broad range of needs:

'... that there's the community need, so services that can help with a particular difficulty or a struggle, problem or addiction, all those types of things and then the making constructive use of time, whether that's doing a CSCS Card and getting a job on a building site or going to university, coming to men's groups, so you're learning to make friends with people who are good for you and supportive'. (PO 6)

The POs felt it was important to understand community integration from the perspective of the men. They tended to know each other and generally had an idea of what was going on (through a Facebook community page). Community integration was not lacking rather it was the form it took:

'So, I think maybe we're not giving people credit for understanding that even though people may be integrated in their community and offending at the same time, it doesn't mean that they're not integrated in their community. Just because the integration may be negative it's still there'. (PO 6)

So, keeping the focus on what GA was trying to do was important:

'I think the difference is it's not really community integration, like people aren't going out in their community. It's more about the support, so about addressing like the childhood trauma and the difficulties and the struggles that people have had integrating into that support, not necessarily free events or... Do you know what I'm trying to say?' (PO 6)

There wasn't full agreement amongst the POs that undertaking community development work was realistic for them due to their capacity and pressures of the role, previously discussed. For some it was whether it fitted with the Probation remit, what it would entail and whether Probation would be accepted in that type of role:

'But then what do you want me to do? Go down fairs and stuff like that, when you have the stalls? You have people employed for that, not a probation officer. You'd have someone who is specialised in that kind of area'. (PO 5)

'I'm sure we'll never be fully a part of it because of what we do, our role. We're very much seen parallel with police, and we are kind of people in authority as such'. (PO 2)

Working alongside organisations and individuals which were fulfilling the community engagement function was regarded as the direction to go in and was not dissimilar from the type of role undertaken by Lifestyle Workers which supported WISDOM. Links between the Probation Service and the community could give individual officers more capacity to deal with the problems the men presented with, but they felt working arrangements had to be collaborative, partners needed to understand what Probation did and how community-based work could contribute to preventing offending:

'Whereas I don't think it's always that easy when you've got a full caseload, trying to give more of yourself ... when people are asking for one thing or the other. Can you do this?' It's like, well, I'd love to ... but I'm up to my eyes ... I've got this report to do,

.... whereas a lifestyle worker ... can go, right, I'll tell you what, this is what we're going to kind of do together'. (PO 3)

When asked about the caseload reduction in the second round of interviews in early 2024. POs advised that it had not occurred and again questioned whether the Probation Service had been fully committed to it. As a result, none of the 'additional' activity that had been identified took place and a senior Probation leader queried whether a reduced caseload needed be a key element of GA going forward (HMPPS 4). Ultimately the reduction was not part of the pilot and not one of GA's unique features and neither did the PO role extend significantly into 'community engagement'.

Conclusions

Despite some of the initial challenges in getting GA established, transfers successfully took place, albeit with POs wanting more input to some of the decision making and to ensure that those who transferred were likely to benefit the most. As GA became established and there was a better indication of who it worked well for, revisiting discretion and combining it with more case discussion could be a future option.

Basic guidance on how to work outside of the Ministry of Justice estate and what the arrangements were with non-Probation partners (particularly as ethos and perceptions of practice could be different, which proved to be the case) could have been useful, been refined as GA developed and provided to new POs as part of their induction and integration into the team and its way of working or to those providing temporary cover. Getting the timing right for this was also important.

Reducing caseloads proved to be challenging because of what the Probation Service was experiencing at the time and although some POs saw this as one of the ways GA could genuinely innovate the reality of implementing it was somewhat different. It would require further exploration of whether the Probation role should look different and be more of a community development type of role and whether this would fit within the organisation's statutory obligations.

One of the original ideas for GA was to do more than simply alter the location of Probation appointments. It was intended to provide greater support to the men on Probation to help them to overcome their problems, develop resilience against negative influences, increase self confidence and self-esteem and encourage pro-social lifestyles. Caseload reduction was regarded as one of the means through which this might be achieved. However, community development work (and ABCD), was also one of the original priorities and intended to underpin what GA did and be one of the ways in which the resources and support provided to the Probation Service could be enhanced. For some of the team (POs particularly) this needed to be accompanied by support or Lifestyle workers with the remit of providing the men with the additional support they needed to capitalise on the connections being made. The priority remained for GA to try and develop community engagement activity and retain its initial focus rather than enhance this aspect.

Chapter Five: Venues

Introduction

This chapter discusses the venues used by GA as contact centres for Probation reporting. It considers what type of premises were used and how they operated. It explores the experiences of the men on Probation and POs of community reporting, including some of the advantages and disadvantages and concludes with future plans. An on-going priority for GA was to find venues from which GA could operate. Considerations were whether the venue(s) should be an existing community hub/centre where services were already located or to develop a base for Probation with selected services providing support in a 'One Stop Shop':

'When I started the idea was, we were working towards having like a one-stop shop where we'd have everybody here and people would be able to access the different services on a different day like a drop-in'. (PO 6)

The venue had to be a setting from which the Probation Service, statutory and other services could safely work and interact with each other and with the men on Probation. It had to be risk assessed and approved as suitable by HMPPS. As one of those interviewed indicated, the Probation Service did not have a tradition of working in informal environments or working outside of 'approved premises, so identifying the right premises was crucial:

'You just can't say I will meet you in a coffee shop or whatever... we just can't offer that to people. It's just not legitimate... we have still got to think of our own safeguarding as well. These things are set up for us here [central contact centre], because POPs can and do sometimes kick off and present us with issues and stuff....' (PO 1)

One of the organisations which was initially under consideration was a Council run Hub which provided a range of services and from which several external agencies operated on designated days. However, there was some concern (from the venue) about known offenders attending so this was not pursued at the time. Ultimately, the first venues from which GA operated were a Local Hub and a Support Centre which were run by two of GA's commissioned partners. Both venues had similarities in that they delivered services and activities, had informal café-style seating areas, drop-in facilities, provided advice and support on debt, housing and other problems and had staff who were experienced in engaging with and supporting people in challenging circumstances. The intention had been to secure venues in Caerau and Ely and although there were several suitable and potential venues in Ely, there were none in Caerau, which confirmed the importance of scoping local provision to ensure the vision could be delivered. The venues used were:

- From October 2021 GA offered Probation appointments at the Local Hub (run by the CDO) between 9.00am and 2.00pm one day a week (Friday). The Probation Service was given a room for three POs, and they established a rota of how it would be used.
- From January 2022 to March 2024 the Support Centre, run by the Charity, became the main operational venue for GA and was used two days a week (Wednesdays and Thursdays). It was used three days a week for a short period of time in 2023.
- Two other venues, both churches were also used to expand the range of bases to ensure that all appointments could be accommodated. Both were utilised on Mondays. Church one from January 2023 to February 2024 and Church two (Bethel) from December 2023.
- From April 2024 other arrangements were made when the Support Centre ceased to be used:
 - use of the Local Hub was expanded to Wednesdays and Fridays.
 - HMPPS had the option of using a room in the Council Hub on a Thursday.
 - A new venue (the Pavilion) was found which would be solely under the control of HMPPS and the Probation Service and was under development as the

evaluation period was coming to an end (see future plans at the end of the chapter).

There was a shift in thinking as some venues proved to be more suitable than others for various reasons. The original intention was not to create a single base solely associated with Probation activity but to utilise several local venues which had other associations (for example as community centres), although having a base which the Probation Service and HMPPS had full control over ultimately became one of the preferred options (for part of the working week). This was because HMPPS could set expectations about use and who reported there (it would not be open access to the public, which the other venues were). The POs were in favour of being based in a venue which was used by members of the community and not solely and exclusively for the Probation Service. This had the potential to give the men they were supervising a connection in the community (which they may not previously have had) and the option of going there at times other than for Probation appointments if they were lonely, wanted something to do, someone to talk to or needed help from one of the agencies which were present. This would be sustainable beyond the Probation period.

The Support Centre

The following section looks at the experiences of men on Probation and the POs in working in community-based venues. It focuses on some of the issues and benefits which arose from being in a more informal community-based environment compared to WS. This is followed by some of the observations from the POs about the benefits and challenges of working from a base not controlled by the Ministry of Justice and how it impacted on their working practices. The comments made largely related to working from the Support Centre which was the main operational base for two years. Some of the observations are relevant to the use of any venue HMPPS and the Probation Service would consider using in the community.

The Support Centre was a light, spacious, open plan space, which had a relaxed and informal atmosphere. There was a main table where the POs sat and smaller tables in a café style area which could be used for Probation supervision (depending on the nature of the discussion), as well as three side rooms of varying sizes where private meetings could take place. Support workers from the commissioned partner agencies sat at some of the smaller tables where they undertook individual consultations (as well as using the private rooms or sat with the Probation Service). The café area served as an informal waiting area, in which the men could wait for their appointments. The informal and non-stigmatising environment was conducive to family members or others accompanying the men, which was not possible in WS due to limited space, concerns about risk and the general ambience of the waiting area. Free tea and coffee were offered on arrival and were available to all those visiting the Centre throughout the day. It was open to the public five days a week.

There was no formal reception area controlling entry and exit, simply a signing-in process for those attending appointments. Members of the GA team greeted people on arrival which helped to create a welcoming environment. As arrangements progressed peer mentors (see chapter eight) were also given this responsibility, offered refreshments and directed those attending to the person they had come to see. This contrasted to WS which had controlled entry with engagement with reception staff through a Perspex screen. Those attending sat in a large waiting room with others until called for their appointments. Appointments took place in small rooms behind the waiting area (with a security presence) and generally lasted for around 15 minutes. Interview rooms were booked in advance and operated on a tight schedule. One of the POs described the process:

'Having worked in WS for a good few years we'd have a phone call that somebody's come in for us, we'd go downstairs to reception. There's a whiteboard on the wall with the interview room numbers. You've got to put your name on and go into the room. You'd literally be in a queue waiting for rooms. You look out through the glass and the

reception area is rammed. It kicks off. And it's an awful building. It's not fit for purpose. It just treats people so badly here. It's very cold and clinical. Metal chairs that are bolted to the floor in reception'. (PO 2)

Reporting to Westgate Street

The most powerful testimonies about the change of venue came from the men who shared their experiences of attending WS and compared it to GA. The environment, travel and transport were key themes in their accounts. The atmosphere at WS could be intimidating and unpleasant for various reasons. One man who had no previous experience of Probation described it as like '*stepping into another world*' (POP 8). It was acknowledged it was designed to serve its purpose as a functional place to hold Probation appointments:

'Quite grim. Reminded me of job centres from the early '90s, that's what I thought ... I understand why it's meant to be that way because it's not meant to be a pleasurable experience, that's what I thought'. (POP 7).

'First experience was rather harrowing, like I said, first offence, never been in trouble before. The waiting room feels like a custody cell within a police station. I understand it's not supposed to be the Ritz, but it's harrowing sitting in there. You've got people coming in, shouting, swearing, being aggressive. It's the complete opposite end of the spectrum to what it's like here at Grand Avenues'. (POP 8)

'Its very sort of time slotted ... It's not sort of their fault. They're just inundated'. (POP 13).

Some of the men did not like who they were having to associate with, particularly if they did not regard themselves as having a criminal identity and from a professional standpoint it could reinforce it:

'Didn't like it. It was full of waifs and strays. I know I'm on probation, but I'm not a criminal. I don't normally associate with those sorts of people'. (POP 10)

'You have to report there every week or every fortnight, because you're dangerous, because you're a criminal and the messaging of all that security and everything, I think of course it's going to reinforce that identity'. (HMPPS 2)

Others felt anxious because they did not like mixing with other people, preferring to keep to themselves:

'The only thing I didn't like about WS was sitting with everybody else in the waiting area, because I'm one of these people who prefers to be... I like to keep myself to myself. I don't fit well around everybody else'. (POP 9)

Another factor was encountering people in the waiting room or outside the building who they wanted to avoid because of tensions, negative relationships and being triggered into behaviours they were trying to avoid:

' a lot of people there are people I don't really want to see from my past maybe ... when you're in jail sometimes you can't avoid confrontation.... if you're both on probation, somewhere down the line you're going to bump into each other, which has happened to me and I know other people who it happened with, a lot...'. (POP14)

'When you go to WS, you're bumping into him, him, him, him and you end up in the Wetherspools.... The Wetherspools, pint for £1.80 and a burger. Get your bus fare from probation and then go and spend it'. (POP 6)

Travel and transport were significant issues for some because of the cost, physically being able to get into the city centre, managing the journey and then having to confront an uncomfortable situation and try and engage with their PO. This was relevant for one man who

was suffering from post-Covid anxiety and struggling to get into a routine of mixing with others after periods of self-isolation. The anticipation of having to take public transport and to navigate unfamiliar spaces and people made him feel unwell. He relied on his mother to take him, because it was an overwhelming experience (and he did not want to be breached):

'Because with my anxiety, I get panic attacks in the morning, and if I knew I'd got to jump on the bus, go to [the city centre], it could make me sick sometimes, it really can, it's that bad. Yeah, it's just the public transport and then sitting in a room full of people you don't know. I didn't really like it'. (POP 3)

For another it was about having the financial means to pay for petrol and parking:

'I went to WS the first day I got out [of prison], drove into town, went to go in a car park, didn't even know it was card not cash, so then I had to try and get back out of there, drive back [home], find somewhere to park, then just to walk all the way back to (the city centre)'. (POP 11)

Reporting to the Support Centre

The men contrasted their experiences of attending the Support Centre to WS. The overall sentiment being that the Support Centre provided a more supportive, and favourable environment for Probation supervision. It was described as relaxed, friendly, welcoming, less intimidating and stigmatising:

'Coming here is totally different to reporting down there. No one's behind the glass, talking to you through an intercom, pressing buzzers to open doors. You know that kind of thing.... This place is more laid back, and it's so local, and it's not in probation. To me, probation is too straight-and-narrow, too oppressive. I don't know if that's the right word'. (POP 10)

*'... it's not like it's an effort to come to probation, if that makes sense. Before I used to be like, "Oh **** that, I've got probation again," but it's not like that. Even the people who are in here they're all really polite to me. I'd say it is a more relaxed atmosphere. Probation in town, I never liked going there ...' (POP 14)*

'..... everybody is happy, everybody is friendly. Everybody wants to help here. You get a warm welcome. There's no animosity, there's no tension, nobody coming in under the influence, there's nobody shouting and screaming and kicking off. It's a nice dynamic, it just works'. (POP 8)

Some commented on the greeting they received when they entered the building which made them feel more relaxed:

'... If someone comes in through the door, they are approached and made to feel comfortable and welcome ...' (POP 1)

'...this is more friendly ... You feel a lot more comfortable. I have'. (POP 2)

Being offered refreshments contributed to this (of note drinks could not be taken into an interview room in WS):

'You always get a welcome when you come in here. Do you want a cup of tea? Do you want a drink? How are you doing?... Very different'. (POP 10).

One of the POs noted that men attending tended to form a good relationship with at least one person in the GA team, which could arise from their initial exchanges and greetings:

'And just because they sign them in, they have that interaction, how was your day, how was Christmas, whatever it might be, and it just goes a long way, because they didn't

quite get that level of attention, not deliberately from WS it doesn't lend itself to people to do that'. (PO 1)

These factors made the men feel more positive about attending Probation appointments as they were not concerned about what else might be going on as there was no negative behaviour at the Support Centre:

'I've never seen any trouble here. I've never seen any arguing here. I've seen so many scraps outside down in town. I haven't had a scrap, but I've had confrontation myself there. I've seen people who I haven't got on with there, and it's sort of like, "You're lucky we're in probation." "No, you're lucky we're in probation." You know? I haven't had any of that here'. (POP 14).

'When you walk into that one in town, you've got all kinds of people, haven't you? Alcoholics, drug... heroin addicts. At least you can come here, everybody seems to be on the same level sort of thing. It's a cleaner environment than going to the one in town'. (POP 11).

The legacy of interactions with others were unlikely to occur in the same way as they would in WS. Potential tensions could be managed outside the Support Centre rather than escalating within it:

'If you're in your area, you know everyone in your area. Me bumping into anyone I see here, none of them would be a surprise. It's sort of like usual suspects; you know what I mean? I know them all anyway, so there's never no animosity. If there was any animosity, you'd see them on the street before you see them in here so it would already be resolved'. (POP 14)

For some of the men attending the Support Centre could initially be a daunting experience as it was a busy environment with a lot of people in attendance (POs, GA partners, visiting partners and members of the public). Some of the men were initially uncertain about who to talk to or how to present themselves, but this was generally overcome:

'Coming into a building full of people that are looking at you But now it's just like water off a duck's back, because I know everyone'. (POP 1)

'No, nothing bad about this, just at the start when I didn't know anyone, but then when people started talking to me more, I was fine then'. (POP 3).

Although GA team members and peer mentors were present to make everyone feel welcome, being approached by multiple people could be difficult:

'Well yeah, every time you come in here, there's always somebody jumping up and trying to get you to sit down with them... but normally I don't do one-to-ones. Anxiety and all that... ' (POP 11)

The POs were also good at recognising when people needed help and reacted accordingly:

'One of the chaps I was thinking of, he came in and it's a little exaggeration to say that he was so nervous, it was pouring down his face, the sweat as he came in, and he was practically against the wall. I said, you in the room now, because I thought, you're going to be in a real bad way if I don't get you away from this setting. And now, he says that he's fine, cups of teas, coffees, doing the day trips and stuff, he's a different person'. (PO 1)

For most, the location, accessibility and convenience of the Support Centre were significant advantages and positive features of community reporting, as it made it easier for them to attend appointments and to access support services (see chapter five):

'...I only live across the road, so if I've got any problems, I know there's going to be somebody here from probation, it's a two minutes' walk across the road.....' (POP 2)

Further, it removed some of the problems associated with travel:

'If [name of partner] can't bring me down, like if she hasn't got petrol or something like that, it's easier for me to get here... just take that little walk down'. (POP 9)

'So, I thought that's happy days because even if you haven't got a car, you can just walk here, can't you? So, I only live by there'. (POP 11).

The ability to attend more easily was discussed in several of the interviews, with one man stating that it had made a difference to his ability to comply:

'Ten-minute walk, two-minute bike ride... That made all the difference, because if I'd had to have go to down to WS all those 18 months, every week or whatever, I don't think I could have coped, to be honest with you. I think I would have been breached, at least once'. (POP 10)

However, although GA was a nicer environment and more convenient, it did not make a significant difference for some as they knew they had to attend Probation appointments and would have reported wherever instructed:

'Well, I thought it was a more pleasant place to meet in the local community, but personally ... it didn't really make a lot of difference to me (where I meet)'. (POP 7)

'.... both the same isn't it? It's only the fact that I'm told to come here but – it don't make no difference really, I suppose. If you were told you had to go to WS, you would have to go to wouldn't you?' (POP 11)

Probation Officer Views

Room layout

One of the issues which the POs grappled with whilst based at the Support Centre was getting the layout of the room right so that it was not intimidating or off-putting for those attending their appointments. The intention had been that the POs would sit at a large table at the back of the room for a briefing at the start of the day and then separate out. However, the POs tended to remain working together at the same table and could be joined by other professionals. This was not always desirable as some viewed partners as unnecessarily taking up Probation space, questioned why they were intruding, and it was problematic to maintain confidentiality, see further on.

The cafe area meant that the Probation appointment could take place in a more informal way, which was in keeping with the community-based ethos. This was sometimes appropriate when offender management change work had been completed and supervision was more about 'checking in', which did not always require a private room. However, if the PO was working with a high-risk individual, which required in-depth discussion about sensitive issues it was not appropriate to do this in a communal area. Having the combination of communal space and private rooms was necessary. The available space was managed in various ways, depending on how the men were presenting, what they wanted and as indicated the likely content of the appointment:

'Obviously sometimes you can see when somebody comes in, it's kind of like oh they look stressed. I think yeah, we need to go in the room because potentially they're going to be getting upset discussing something'. (PO 2)

'I think we were pretty good otherwise at asking the POPs for permission. Because what we would say, for instance, is, "Let's go to a room," or they might say they would rather sit outside. Depending on what you were discussing, so sometimes it

was very specific around risk, sometimes it was about intervention, sometimes it was checking for various reasons... It might be that they wanted to talk about their family, their health, and things that they don't mind talking about. If it's their choice and they really want to sit there, the communal part of it becomes interesting then, because they're choosing to talk. We're still very careful with it, but I didn't mind that so much. I thought, if you're happy to and this is where your preference is and it's going to make you more comfortable, fine'. (PO 1)

If the nature of the conversation changed, for example if a risk issue came up, it could create an interesting dynamic of what to do; whether to stay in the communal area (where the conversation had started) or find a room, which may not be immediately available. If one of the men was experiencing anxiety because the environment was 'busy', appointments could be made at quieter times when there were fewer people in the building.

There were advantages to communal working, as the men could see their PO when they entered the building and go over to them, and similarly the POs got to know each other's cases and would talk to men they didn't supervise, which helped to reduce anxiety (which would not have happened in WS) and created resilience if they had to cover for one another:

'When someone comes in and if one of the probation practitioners is in an appointment or going into another one, they might say, do you want me to have a chat with him? If someone is away or on leave and someone pops in, the rest of the team know about their circumstances'. (HMPPS 2)

The informality of the arrangements meant the person waiting for their appointment could be spoken to by any of the professionals based at the Support Centre, who might join them when they were waiting, so they were not sitting alone. Professionals and partners who had been involved with them could have a casual discussion, catch up or make an introduction to someone else. Informal exchanges frequently took place, including what the Support Centre could offer them. One of the benefits was that it had outside space (as did the Local Hub) which the POs also used. For example, when difficult discussions had taken place, there was the option of going outside and taking 'time out'. This was not possible in WS where demand for rooms meant there was continual pressure to keep to time:

'I had one guy who was coming in. He was already on an order. He got transferred to me. Lives over the road. A big crack user and then you have the anxiety and the paranoia and stuff that goes with that... I think somebody was in the (private) room. So I went, shall we just pop outside? So, the first time I just saw him out the front and then the next time I saw him round the back... we're sat there, there was a squirrel ran past and ... he was like, "This is lovely." And then we got onto chatting about do you want to get involved in outdoors type (of activity) ... and it was great. And again, how would this have worked in WS? It would have been a "come in, I can see you're anxious. Everything alright? Bye". As opposed to having a really nice, long chat about how are you feeling today?' (PO 2)

It was recognised that the Probation team (and its partners) needed to think about how they presented themselves which continued to be a work in progress. However, it was also apparent that some of those attending appointments would struggle no matter what was done. This raised the question of what a supervisory base in the community should look like, how it came across to the people using it and what first impressions should be conveyed, all of which were likely to vary from venue to venue. The role of the peer mentors in welcoming visitors was particular to GA and intended to alleviate the initial concerns people might have about walking into the building as they were positioned close to the front door and would interact with visitors as soon as they arrived. What was important was finding ways of helping people to feel comfortable in whatever environment they were in and having private rooms which could be used when necessary. Despite some of the challenges, the POs advised that once reporting became established the men liked the

environment and preferred it to the central contact centre (as their own testimonies confirmed).

Managing the working environment

There were three themes which arose from discussions with the POs in relation to the venue which were confidentiality, distraction and managing risk.

Confidentiality

Maintaining confidentiality could be a challenge in a shared workspace. There was a continual need to ensure that sensitive information and the detail of individual cases was not openly discussed when other workers, men on Probation or visitors were nearby and occupying the same space. This also applied to the outside areas which were near local housing and neighbours, in case conversations could be overheard. When project or partner related meetings were held in the communal space the risk of breaching confidentiality increased. At one of the morning briefings (which were attended by the POs, partners and peer mentors), one of the men attending a Probation appointment heard his name being mentioned and made a complaint. Because there were strong community associations, *'with everyone knowing everyone else'* (PO 1) there were sensitivities about what information was shared with non-Probation staff, particularly the peer mentors, this PO became reticent about sharing names in open discussions because of these concerns and wanted case-based meetings to be held in private. The POs were diligent about managing confidentiality, briefed new team members about how to operate, used side rooms when necessary and always conducted certain meetings in private (see also chapter seven for further comments on confidentiality) A further related point from the PO perspective was having suitable arrangements for keeping and printing confidential information. This was never fully resolved at the Support Centre but needed to be addressed when working in (multiple) community venues that the Probation Service did not have direct control over and was reliant on partners to help them to accommodate their needs.

Distraction

Working in an open plan area could be distracting as there were on-going interruptions from others and a lack of awareness that POs had other work to do apart from conducting appointments. Time management could be a problem because of disruptions, and some POs commented on updating case management records and writing reports at home because they needed a quieter environment in which to do so:

'Like in the open space there. It's not the same as doing it at your desk and doing it in quiet space time. Doesn't work.....You're linking up, you're seeing your appointments, you're doing stuff, but you need to have the balance between going to a quiet space and office space to do some stuff. It didn't exist. I struggled terribly with that. I used to have to hide behind the fridge in one room to try and get stuff done, because to do a risk-informed OASYS in good depth when you've got the world going on around you in the communal area, it doesn't work. You need to have some head space. You need to be able to think and analyse and do stuff, and that was a struggle for me'. (PO 1)

Further, there needed to be a system of booking private rooms, so they were available when required for interviews or administrative work. That said, it was recognised every workplace has its imperfections and despite this, the Support Centre allowed the POs to practice in the way they wanted:

'Yeah. You're not clock-watching for... If somebody's in a room they're in a room and no one's knocking for somebody to come out. So, there's no distraction so you're more focused in the moment. You can hear the hustle and bustle but there's no doors going or Tannoy going off or anything like that'. (PO 6)

Managing risk

One of the POs felt that the working environment was not as safe as WS. At the point of this interview (in 2022) there had not been any significant incidents in the Support Centre, but the potential was always there. The Probation team were good at working out who the riskier people were, which did not prevent something negative and unexpected happening (see chapter six). In WS, there was a camera in every room, reception was linked to the police station, there were alarms that could be pressed, side door access and established processes. These arrangements could not be fully replicated in all community-based environments, and any procedures would depend on whose premises the Probation Service was in, what could be done (and was already in place) and the host organisation's attitude to health and safety. Any concerns about risk would be identified in HMPPS risk assessments of potential premises and their suitability for Probation Service staff which also had an important bearing on working practices.

Other venues

Two of the POs commented on the use of churches and faith-based organisations. They were not in favour of using working churches as they were not neutral spaces.

'Now for me, I don't find this place works at all (Church two) and I never went to (Church one) because at that time I wasn't working on Mondays, but... So, the only time I went there was when there was a community event in the summer.... So, when I walked in this big (religious message on the wall). I don't know how somebody thought this was appropriate for probation.... I would prefer not to be in a church anyway. It just feels quite judgy'. (PO 2)

It also became apparent that one of the venues (not a church) was 'imposing' faith-based views on others and this caused concern:

'Some people don't have a faith but are put off by just going in a church anyway. I think part of the problem speaking to some of the men that I've worked with, they've come to some of the groups that are put on here and they've felt that religion was forced on them. That is obviously a blocker straight away'. (Partner 2)

This view from a partner was echoed by some of the men, with one expressing mild discomfort with the religious aspects of one of the venues and while they did not find it overly intrusive or alienating, they did not identify with a religious faith or share the same beliefs or want to engage with them:

'Well, I'm not religious you see. Even though I think it's a great thing and I've benefited from it, I'm not religious myself, so a lot of the people who come here are, so maybe I've got less in common with them than they have with each other'. (POP 7)

It was not a problem for others:

'At first I did not realise it was a church, but that's no bother to me'. (POP 9)

Some of the POs felt that diversity should be considered more in venue selection to be inclusive to all and that venues should be neutral spaces which would enable the Probation Service to accommodate different beliefs and backgrounds.

'From the beginning we could perhaps have thought about neutral venues where you're not going to have that venue, for instance, saying, "Actually, we can't operate in that particular way because...'. (PO 1)

A balance needed to be struck between providing a supportive and engaging community environment and respecting individual autonomy and preferences, particularly when organisations and individuals did not share the same beliefs. As it stood, *'it does not feel like*

we are very diverse aware' (PO 2). The POs wanted to ensure that any new venues were fit for purpose, that neutral spaces were considered and venues which were co-located with other services were welcoming to the men.

There were also some practical issues with some of the venues which did not make them ideal places of work e.g. cold unheated rooms, the presentation of some of the rooms '*feels like a gymnasium*' (PO 7) (a room in one of the venues), which were not appropriate for one-to-one interactions or felt comfortable to work in, and the availability of WiFi and confidential storage space. HMPPS were aware that not all the venues were ideal for different reasons. The reason for using them was sometimes about more than simply providing a base. The minister in Church two was the chaplain at a local prison and wanted to provide a venue for GA and to be actively engaged in what it was doing. Fewer Probation appointments were carried out there as it was not entirely suitable although it did provide a quieter place for those who needed it:

'So, some people who have been a bit more anxious have preferred that space because it's a very calm, quiet place. The (other venues) might be initially difficult to go into because there's a lot going on. But all of this depends on having choice.' (HMPPS 2)

HMPPS was not trying to do the same thing in every venue but thinking about what each was best suited for. The extent to which external partners should be present or not, depended on the space available and what the intentions were. Longer term plans for Church two included HMPPS using it as a well-being space and drop-in on a Monday when most Probation staff worked from home. A Project Support Officer (PSO) employed by HMPPS would be based there to assist the men if needed. Whilst the rooms in Church two were not ideal for one-to-one work they had potential for engaging with families, which the PSO was exploring.

Future Plans

Plans included basing the PSO in the Council Hub one day a week (Thursday). It had attractions as it was a neutral venue, a type of 'One Stop Shop', with an established infrastructure of mainstream organisations in attendance on various days (including the Citizens Advice Bureau, Housing Advisers and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)). The aim was to build relations with these services, particularly the Housing Advisers to improve access to support as well as the neighbouring Fire Station which was planning a car crime event which the Probation Service could be part of.

The other significant development was the development of The Pavilion, which would be the Probation Service's own space for two days a week (Tuesday and Thursday). It would become operational in December 2024. The plan was for some external services to be present on one of the days, and for the second day to be quieter to strike a balance between conducting appointments and undertaking administrative functions. The Pavilion had outdoor space which could be utilised for appointments (which had been helpful elsewhere as previously described) and the potential for gardening or other activities to be developed.

In terms of the long-term vision, if GA was replicated elsewhere the intention was not to suggest a variety of different venues were necessary in every locality. That may not be possible, due to the availability of premises and the capacity needed to build relationships with the venue providers to ensure the needs of the Probation Service could be met:

'... I might find one venue and it might be all singing and dancing, and I might think that that's incredible, but someone on probation might come in and say, there's too much going on here. ... So, I think if we want to tailor how we work to better meet the needs of people on probation. We probably are going to need a series of options and choices.' (HMPPS 2).

However, GA's experience of using different venues helped to identify what worked best and would provide the right environment for the Probation Service and men being supervised. A consideration for the future was whether some of the Ministry of Justice estates budget could be diverted into developing more rehabilitative and less criminogenic environments for supervisory contact or reconfiguring some of the expenditure on programmes and interventions to develop community bases.

Conclusions

GA went through an incremental process of finding and utilising different venues. Lessons learned were incorporated into how the venues would be utilised in the future depending on their capacity, layout and what the Probation Service required. The HMPPS Strategy Lead identified several challenges which took time to work through, including developing a relationship with the venue providers, making the administration arrangement, getting the local PDU to undertake risk assessments, engaging with the trade unions and financing the cost of hiring the venues.

Whatever the approach, consideration needed to be given to how the Probation Service's relationship with the venue would be managed, particularly in a shared space, as well as determining how the venue would be used, and recognising that different cultures, approaches and practices needed to co-exist. This required negotiation with venue providers as they might not like some of what the Probation Service did, what it required or the implications of working with people with a criminal record. For example, service users could be arrested on their premises, which the organisation may not agree with, or their health and safety practices could be very different and as discussed in the next chapter there may not be agreement on who did and did not have access to their premises and what risk looked like.

Venue management also meant dealing with practical issues such as ordering the right type of chairs for staff, but the venue not having anywhere to store them and finding a place for a secure cabinet so that resources could be kept on site. These problems were likely to arise in any venue in which Probation worked and needed to be addressed. GA's Strategic Lead undertook this activity, which raised the question of who would do it if the Probation Service expanded into community-based working, without the same infrastructure of support.

Overcoming these challenges was regarded as worthwhile as the benefit of finding the right type of setting was that the men under supervision responded positively, liked less criminogenic environments and despite the informality attended their appointments as required. The use of community venues also provided the opportunity to provide better, less stigmatising alternatives and not to congregate people with a criminal record together:

'When you go to a community venue, you might be there alongside other members of the community, and so it should feel like you're there just as a member of the community. You could be going for your probation appointment; other people wouldn't necessarily know that is what you're doing'. (HMPPS 2)

Chapter Six: Commissioned partners and their roles

Introduction

GA's structure included commissioning third sector organisations. HMPPS's intention was that they would take an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach and have local knowledge and experience. The organisations appointed were a Community Interest Company (CIC) as the lead, with a Community Development Organisation (CDO) based in GA's locality. They were awarded funding from September 2021 to March 2023. Their role was to provide a 'Community Development Service'. The third organisation which became part of the arrangements was a Charity which provided the venue from which Probation supervision could take place and activities the men on Probation could take part in. It later became a full partner in addition to being a venue provider in January 2023.

Partner Ethos

On the surface all three partners had the same broad ethos of wanting to help and support those in some form of difficulty and to assist them to achieve an improved lifestyle/standard of living. They stressed the importance of being in the community, of working through a community-focused lens and of concentrating on the needs of individuals and their families. The CDO had its roots in ABCD and community engagement and provided a broad range of services designed to help people in the community *'it looks at everything within the community and within a person's life that they may need support with'*. The organisation aimed to holistically support service users and their families, to 'unpack' what had brought individuals to it and its services and to help them to receive their entitlements. It regarded everyone as having the capacity to change whether they took the opportunity or not. The CIC believed that individuals and communities could be empowered to make sustainable changes to avoid dependency on external services. It had a strong restorative ethos and wanted to *'break the cycle of harm by working with everybody who matters in the family or community'* and to *'build, maintain, and repair'* relationships to create social capital. This could be achieved by working across a range of agencies and settings including families and schools to prevent intergenerational problems. It believed that professionals needed to change their practice, including the Probation Service (a view which was not expressed by the CDO) which later caused tensions:

'I was very aware what if Probation are going in with traditional probation which is quite risk averse, sanctions, breathe the wrong way and you know, breached and we're talking about a holistic, whole family [approach]'. (Partner 1)

The Charity wanted its role in the community to *'be of service'* rather than *'to provide services'* (in contrast to the CDO). It wanted to work with people who were 'hard to reach' and its Support Centre to be a friendly environment in which people felt safe, secure and potentially receptive to new (positive) influences. The Charity was established for the community and had developed a variety of activities which were free and open to anyone who wanted to drop in or needed help (as was the case in the CDO).

Although there were similarities in their thinking, there were also differences. The CIC sought to influence practice and deliver all its activities through a restorative lens and wanted to encourage the Probation Service to do the same (which was not the aim of GA). The Charity was a faith-based organisation and although its premises did not look like or function as a church (which is what the building had previously been), personal beliefs influenced actions at times, which conflicted with how HMPPS and the Probation Service managed decision-making (notably risk management). The CDO appreciated there could be differences in the way the third sector and Probation Service worked but respected and worked with it.

Understanding of the objectives of GA

The organisations viewed the objectives of GA in a similar way. They felt that establishing a community-based Probation team was a positive way to help men on Probation to (re)connect with their communities and local services to reduce re-offending. It was of benefit to bring *'partnerships closer to them [the men]'*, making it easier to access what they needed, helping them to integrate and *'find a new direction, not offend and do whatever that looks like for the individual'* (Partner 3). Helping individuals to make positive lifestyle changes was something they all aspired to and envisaged this would be achieved by providing practical support, advice and advocacy and empowering the men to make their own decisions, rather than *'doing it to them'* (Partner 3). One of the support workers described some of the men as being anxious as they hadn't had the autonomy to make decisions and defaulted to believing they could not do things for themselves, because they might make mistakes or get punished:

'So, for me, the Grand Avenues project is about really helping people to empower them to make decisions, but also to support them and to try and change and break all that intergenerational crime, harm and impact that they've been left with as well, because they're very much victims of their own circumstances as well, but also giving them the tools to build on their strengths to be a community, to be able to just be out in that community and invite others into a place of safety, a place where they can get health and support and building on what they've already got.' (Partner 2)

The partners also felt that GA *'offered the opportunity to meet people in their own space and to break down the barriers'* (Partner 4), to improve engagement and to gain a better understanding of the men as individuals, their circumstances and the wider issues that were going on in their lives and those of their families. Similarly to some of the probation officers this was seen as a strengths-based approach:

'I believe the purpose of this programme is to try and acknowledge the strengths within these people that we're supporting because perhaps there's been not a lot of that in their lives. Just some of the chaps that I've spoken to have... were written off at a young age, going through education, ending up in PRUs or special schools.' (Partner 4)

The motivations of the partners also influenced what they felt practice should look like. One of them felt that GA offered the opportunity to transform the way in which Probation worked by introducing restorative practices. For others (including some of the POs), Probation work should encompass having greater recognition of the difficulties some of the men had experienced in childhood and when growing up, which resulted in unresolved trauma and undiagnosed needs. It was hoped that if the men built a relationship with GA there would be an opportunity to recognise and *'interrupt'* these experiences and to address feelings of stigma, shame and blame, which often prevented them moving forward and led to reverting to old habits. GA offered a safe space to talk, to not be judged or experience a punitive response; *'You're still a human being and you still should be treated with respect, and you've got the right to access services and be treated kindly and compassionately'*, (Partner 2). Some of the support workers saw the potential for a more therapeutic approach, which reflected their backgrounds, experiences and interests. This came from their own lived experience and translating what had been positive for them into similar opportunities for the men. They recognised the importance of developing a network of support around men who were isolated, had no-one to talk to and were *'stuck in a lifestyle of crime and criminal justice and just going around and around'* (Partner 7).

This could start from experiencing a welcoming environment and having an interest shown in them which could encourage them to be open about what was going on in their lives and be receptive to discussing what could help to build up their confidence and self-esteem:

'When somebody's coming over and asking them if they want a cup of coffee, and asking them... Even if they say no, just taking an interest in them. Getting to know them, inviting them to different places, trips, or the men's group, or whatever. Taking an interest in the people that they come with, their family members of whatever. I think that goes a long way They start telling us about an issue they've got in the background, or a relationship that's been broken, or their kids that have been taken off them, or the addiction that they want to be free from. Whatever it may be'. (Partner 7)

There was a collective ethos amongst the partners of wanting to assist, complement and add value to what the Probation team were doing, but their motivation and how they went about it varied, depending on their beliefs, experiences and backgrounds and how they felt they could contribute to GA's objectives. It was recognised it would be challenging for the Probation Service to do things differently and whilst the POs might want to take a more strengths-based approach, there was an inevitability about reverting to risk. That said, one of the POs regarded GA as being '*more protected*' (PO 3), because it was HMPPS led, which suggested there was the scope to try something new, to operate differently and to work with partners to achieve this.

Phase One (from start up in 2021 to March 2023)

Community Development Service

The CDO and CIC were responsible for developing and delivering a Community Development Service. The expectations were to:

- Improve support for men on Probation by developing connections and working arrangements with local services.
- Set up new ways of working with families of service users and promote this across the community.
- Contribute to the development of a strategy for GA, including co-produced activity with men on probation and engaging with local schools and the community.

The development at this stage was complex and, at times, appeared to lack clear direction but GA was still testing and developing its approach. The intention was to recruit two workers (one in each organisation) with experience of community development and co-production and a good understanding of the locality. The community development worker would produce a directory of local services, identify needs and gaps in provision and lead on family focused work. It would be an 'outward' facing role concentrating on community engagement and identification of local services to support GA. As GA developed this changed (which is discussed further on) and the initial plans did not work out as intended (both positively and negatively), partly due to recruitment, role confusion, emerging developments at the Charity and challenges in realising the vision.

To support the community engagement focus, training was provided to the GA team (POs and partners) by a Social Enterprise Organisation (Nurture Development) on Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) to introduce the principles and to create a common understanding. Whilst there was some utility in this, it was possibly not delivered at the right time, as it was unclear what the purpose was or the next steps. There was discussion about developing links with different services, but it was not apparent which organisations/individuals would take the lead on this. Despite some of the participants feeling unsure about the training and the philosophy presented, the language used had resonance and appeared in their narratives (references to 'gifts' and 'strengths') when discussing the men and what GA was doing. HMPPS regarded the training as influential but ultimately felt that promotion of ABCD was better placed with the CDO (because it was based in the locality and directly delivering services) and for the Social Enterprise Organisation to work with the strategic leaders, responsible for vision and change. As a result, in phase three of GA, the CDO provided an introductory session on ABCD for the partners. This worked well as it was clear at the outset

that the purpose was to introduce what it meant in practice and was timed to coincide with the recruitment of two community development workers and newer members of the Probation team. It was followed with further sessions on developing a vision and plan for GA.

The appointment of the community development workers had mixed results, as one proved to be unsuitable. The CDO reflected that it should have appointed someone from within its organisation with knowledge of its services which would have been a more effective way of connecting the men to them. There was also confusion about the community development function:

'I didn't have a clue what they wanted from me or what it was going to look like. So, very much I've just gone at the pace of the project along with the men and the families and the community really, so on that journey with them'. (Partner 2)

The initial understanding was that men on Probation would be asked by their POs if they would like to be involved with the CDO and the CIC. If the need related to a restorative matter they would be put in touch with the CIC (which would focus on relational work with families), otherwise they would work with the CDO. The community development worker would then find out more about them and connect them to what interested them or what they required. However, the lines became blurred in terms of who was referred where and for what reason and which organisation undertook what work. This was partly because the CIC started to undertake community development work and to discuss the creation of services which the CDO knew were in existence which GA should try and access and would be a more sustainable approach:

'[Partner] kept trying to say we want the worker to go out and set up a five-a-side hasn't got the resource to keep that sustainable beyond the project. There's already enough going on here'. (Partner 3).

The CDO was grounded in ABCD which formed the basis of how it developed its interactions with the community and felt that more could be done to draw on its organisation expertise than was the case. This led it to question its role in GA, whether its skills were being used to best effect; *'we were not in the game in the first year'* (Partner 3). This was because:

'... we felt more swayed by the criminal justice or restorative justice side of things thinking that the other partner had more knowledge. When really what it's come down to is really basic stuff that is making all the difference without all of this convoluted training and different approaches'. (Partner 3)

The CDO understood at the outset that it would undertake the co-production work with the men (as part of the community development role) and set up groups and discussions to find out more about their needs. HMPPS stressed co-production, but the setup of GA did not allow for it. What evolved naturally was staff from the Charity holding discussions in a men's group (Men Changing Lives), which it had established as part of its community activity. This paved the way for the Charity to become a partner as a distinct role was emerging for it, but at the same time it was becoming less clear what the CDO could or should do, as there was little point in forming separate groups for the same purpose, which made the asset-based approach and co-production infrastructure confusing for them. The CDO produced a report for HMPPS and recommended that the Charity should take the lead on asset-based approaches, which was agreed:

'It didn't work out in the way that the original partner thought that it should work, that we'd go out and we'd develop all of these new things, or that the men will come in and be really strong in telling us, "I want to do this, that and the other," and then within a year they're leading a group for themselves. It just takes so much longer than that. And we were very clear that the asset-based stuff wasn't sitting well with us. We knew we didn't want to develop anything more and didn't want to be responsible for sustaining anything more, but it naturally started happening down in [the Charity]'. (Partner 3).

It was also felt that all parties needed to be realistic about what to expect from the men who were often dealing with challenging circumstances and how they could best contribute:

'It's like - a person who's just coming out of prison and you're expecting them to come out and know that they want to set up a community group and have the skills and abilities to do so. No, they're not ... But you might find a few months down the line being a part of an already ... established group, that they might start to say, "Can I help a bit more? How do things work? What might I be able to bring to this? I'd like to have these ideas." Now that's the way in which we would work, and I think we weren't given the opportunity because of circumstance to do that'. (Partner 3)

In retrospect the CDO reflected there should have been a period of capacity building which was more akin to an ABCD approach and would have enabled the GA team to collectively identify its skills and abilities and how they could be used to take it forward. In parallel to this, there was a vacancy for a community development worker so the opportunity for a restructure was taken. The CDO identified it could undertake a financial well-being role and support men (and their families) with monetary issues, tackling hardship and improving income. Debt, the need for benefits advice and requiring support with a variety of financial difficulties were common problems. A support worker in the Charity had a similar skillset (and wanted to undertake this work), so it was agreed that the CDO would focus on the 'higher level cases' for example when benefits sanctions were in place or which required a Complex Needs Alert²⁴ and the worker from the Charity would deal with lower-level support needs (although this did not entirely work out in practice). The CDO had good links with housing officers and could '*bring strong conversations to the table*' (Partner 3) when advocating on behalf of others, which it would continue to do. It would not undertake any ABCD work, despite it being one of its strengths, but felt that what was agreed was right for GA.

The CIC made its community development officer full time and changed the function to that of providing support to the POs, the men and their families (reflecting the skillset of the worker), which brought more clarity to the role. The worker had been getting to know local services, building relationships with them and identifying which ones were right for the men (from their feedback), which helped to ensure the men and POs were getting the best advice and consolidated working relationships:

'They're rich in services in [in GA's locality], but who do you go to if you've got a housing problem, or if you've got a mental health problem there can be about twenty people that you could refer into'. (Partner 5)

The intention was that the support worker would make the initial links and encourage the men they were supporting to ultimately take responsibility for maintaining the contact:

'For example, yesterday, working with a few of [PO's] cases, so what I'm doing is finding out who his housing officer is, who is his point of call for mental health? And yesterday I was able to find that out and then link [the PO] into the worker. So, I might be that first point of call who finds them, but then my hope is to empower probation to make that communication directly to the housing officer if they have any direct concerns or anything like that. So, very much finding it, linking them in, the right person, and then they can be empowered to raise any concerns on behalf of them moving forward'. (Partner 2)

The CIC also employed part time restorative workers to undertake relational family focused work, and there were plans to recruit peer mentors (as part of the original specification for GA). It was intended there would be one full time mentor; but three part time posts were created to accommodate those who were receiving benefits to enable them to apply. There

²⁴ A safeguard to protect individuals from having their benefits suspended if they are struggling with the system, which involves alerting the DWP and Local Authority that they have complex needs.

were several individuals in the staff group with lived experience who were very good at relating to the men which would be strengthened by recruiting mentors with similar experiences.

What emerged as most helpful during the first year of operation for the POs (and men) was having partners and support workers who worked closely with them to provide prompt advice and support about how to get help, made enquiries on behalf of the POs and the men, talked to the men about their needs (and followed up with them on subsequent visits) and co-worked with the POs by accompanying them on home visits and finding solutions when the POs were experiencing difficulty. The staff from the Charity could also meet some of the support needs, although their main function was to befriend and engage the men in social activities and introduce them to what their Support Centre provided:

'Meet and greet is one of our favourite parts of the day. Somebody new comes through the door, it's normally a race of who is going to speak to them first. Yeah, basically, you've just got to build that trust and continue to build it I think that's what we're about here, is build people up'. (Partner 6)

The Charity did not intend to deliver services itself and established a rota of external agencies which came to the Support Centre on Wednesday and Thursday, which could assist anyone who attended (see chapter eight). The Charity regarded its expertise in being able to provide well-being support, assisting the men to become involved in positive activities and building trusting relationships:

'We probably came to the realisation that we're very good with wellbeing support. We have all got experience from varying degrees, some of us have been in prison, some of us have just been in trouble with the police some of us have been homeless, some of us have been in care, so we realised we were in a unique position where [we] just had an understanding and an empathy, and the ability to build the relationships to encourage people to grow and develop'. (Partner 5).

GA's focus on practical support for the men was being assisted by a range of specialists who had in-depth knowledge of a variety of services and how to access them for benefits, housing and employment advice, could make the right connections and take appropriate action for the men. The locality had a good range of services which were being identified. A partnership event was held in July 2022 by HMPPS to introduce GA to different services and to discuss how they could be involved, which led to further associations being made, for or example, with *Shape Your Future*, a local employment initiative which assisted individuals living in the locality which went on to provide significant support to GA.

There was less emphasis on developing an outward facing community development function and more about incoming support to GA, which was not what had originally been envisaged, but was needed at the time. The Probation Service operates differently to either youth offending teams which are multi-agency organisations designed to address a range of needs or the Prison Service which has access to a variety of professional disciplines in-house. The PO has an assortment of needs to deal with but is a lone worker with responsibility for covering the breadth of problems which might arise but lacks the capacity to give them all the full attention they require or the knowledge to do so. As one PO described it, they moved from having to deal with a range of men on Probation and their difficulties and *'almost fighting the world of services and agencies and trying to get all these things done'* (PO 1), to becoming part of a team which provided the necessary resources and support, which gave the POs more space to focus on other important issues with the individuals they were supervising:

'I feel like instead of probation staff feeling they have to do everything, they have to be a housing officer, they have to be a counsellor, there's all these other amazing professionals and peer mentors and just members of the community that can help'. (PO 3)

Because of the change in operation, some of the activities identified for the community development workers did not occur. Compiling a directory of services was abandoned as it proved difficult to develop, would have limited utility as a resource for the Probation Service, would not enhance practice and there were uncertainties about how it would be maintained. In its place the CDO did more to promote its services and held several information sharing events for the POs and others to explain what was available and how it could be accessed.

At the outset it was envisaged that repairing relationships within the community might be key to preventing further offending and this work was to be led by the CIC. A decision was made early on that planned engagement with schools would not take place as they were still struggling post-Covid, so this element of the work would focus on providing training in restorative approaches to the GA team (and then the men). The CIC wanted GA to adopt common principles and to introduce new and different ideas to Probation practice. This would be achieved by the GA team collectively adopting practices which had a restorative basis, which would enable the Probation team to change what rehabilitation looked like and would give the GA team a common base to work from. The rationale being that it would be positive for the Probation Service to be more aligned to the restorative approaches being adopted by local authorities, schools, social housing providers and community safety. Training would encompass restorative approaches, trauma-informed practice, strengths-based practice, ABCD and shared reflective practice.

The CIC also planned to introduce Restorative Circles as a means through which men on Probation could take ownership and deliver some of what was required themselves and talk directly to professionals outside of GA about their needs. However, it recognised that Probation was a hierarchical organisation (with statutory obligations) and was not able to change the way it worked whereas some of the organisations which had adopted restorative approaches were able to do so. This created an impasse in how the CIC wanted Probation to work (take more ownership of and responsibility for decision making) and what was possible. It acknowledged that having the aspiration to make changes and putting the vision into practice was somewhat different, particularly when it related to significant culture change.

As GA progressed, partners became less receptive to these ideas and elements of delivery were problematic. The training sessions were not fully delivered, and Restorative Circles were not liked as a means of communication, nor was it felt they would work for men with chaotic lifestyles. Some of the POs did not feel that restorative approaches suited their caseload as opportunities for mediation were limited *'a lot of my offences are like drug dealing and stuff, so I can't really get a victim in and mediate between them, there is not a direct victim in a lot of mine'*. (PO 5). The activities were seen as peripheral, the rationale for them was not always clear or were not what was needed at the time. The POs wanted GA to concentrate on addressing the practical difficulties the men on Probation faced, getting the 'basic services' in place and building from there as this was likely to have the biggest impact on preventing offending:

'This is the thing. If you're depressed, let's go and get you some medication. If I'm telling you, "Oh, let's talk about your offence," but you're spending the whole time sat there thinking you're going to kill yourself, you're not taking anything in. This is the thing. You just need the bare, basic standard that the men want. This is why we talk to them and ask them, and we do surveys of what they want. But I don't think anyone's going, "I really want to talk to my cousin twice removed because we argued." That's not something they care about at the moment'. (PO 5)

GA responded to what the POs wanted and where they felt the focus of its work should be, which was to provide supportive services and enhance the wellbeing of the men.

Phase two (April 2023 to March 2024)

At the end of phase one it was apparent that the Charity was positively engaging with the men and providing more than a venue. As a result, HMPPS made the decision to re-direct some of the grant funding to the be-friending and enrichment activity it was undertaking and to give the Charity the lead on it. Further, one of Charity's strengths was that it was based in the community (which the CIC was not) and was well-placed in terms of local knowledge. HMPPS wanted it to take on more of a project management role and to work closely with the Probation team so that activities were aligned. As a result, the decision was made to end the arrangement with the CIC in March 2023.

Going forward, the CDO and the Charity would be the primary partners. In the 2023/24 HMPPS provided a grant of £136,000 to fund four part-time support workers, three peer mentors, and some administrative costs. The CDO continued in its existing role of providing financial advice and support. The Charity's role was to take the lead in befriending the men, offering them enrichment activities and encouraging them to participate in the activities it provided (attending the gym, boxing, the Men Changing Lives group, developing a community podcast and being offered the opportunity to go on trips it organised). The Charity also took over the management of peer mentors who had initially been recruited by the CIC. This arrangement remained in place until March 2024. For several months from June 2023 the use of the Charity's Support Centre was extended to include Tuesdays as well as Wednesdays and Thursdays (but reverted as it was mutually agreed that it was too much Probation involvement for the venue). In addition, one of the workers who had previously been employed by the CIC was recruited by HMPPS as a Project Support Officer for GA. There was a significant period when these arrangements worked well, however over time problems emerged.

The Community Development Organisation

The CDO consolidated its role in providing financial advice and support to the men on Probation, which played to its organisational strength and expertise:

'So, my role is to support the men with income, whether that be through benefit income or earned income. My objective is to stabilise their income, so it doesn't contribute to offending behaviour. It's also around just making sure that they're able to effectively engage with the job, the universal credit claim, and reduce the likelihood of sanctions and the hardship that arises as a result of those'. (Partner 4)

It continued to promote the services it offered to the GA team, by providing periodic information sessions for partners. This comprised a Crisis Hour once a week on a Friday morning and various welfare and wellbeing related services, including access to GP services, medication and social prescribing. The CDO had a partnership with a cluster of GPs and the NHS and was able to use this network to support the men:

'It's also to ensure that the men get access to GP support upon release, or once their order has put them on the Grand Avenue's project. So, it'll just be about making sure that they're engaging with their GP services, and any medication will follow through. But also, if there's anything that we're identifying through the men on the project, it can be addressed with their GP'. (Partner 5)

It was also developing a wellbeing service (derived from a Health Board initiative) open to anyone registered with a GP in the Southwest Cardiff (with plans to extend beyond that). Wellbeing Connectors would work with individuals to identify what would improve their health and welfare and help them to make the right connections to external services, provide initial support, and encourage independence and the ability to engage on their own. The POs were made aware of this so they could use the Connectors as a source of support for the men:

'... so the men might come out and say, "I'm really lonely. I want to be able to connect ... I want to be a part of a group. I really love walking, but I don't know what to do. I

don't know where to go." But the connector knows that there's a walk every week in [the] park. The Connectors know that the probation team have actually started their own walking group and they're going round the park which the men could be a part of'. (Partner 3).

HMPPS project support worker

The HMPPS Project Support Worker (PSO) was a new role, which was intended to occupy the middle ground between policy and operations. The HMPPS Strategy Lead considered that GA operated in a grey area, and this role occupied the 'greyest area of that grey area'. The PSO role had several different elements which included assisting GA's partners and external agencies to work effectively together and to cement partnership arrangements. The worker was skilled at building relations and helping organisations to understand the Probation Service and its requirements and to find mutually acceptable ways of working compatible with what GA was trying to achieve:

'[PSO] is really effective at ... translating between a risk management organisation and probation and other organisations that might be less familiar with how we work and community groups and others, and what we've seen in the past is that there can be quite a lot of conflict and tension between those approaches. On the one hand, other organisations look to probation and think, it's this terribly risk-averse organisation. They don't treat people as individuals; they just see their offence and all of those kind of things. Then on the Probation side, can sometimes look at some of these other organisations and think they're not taking risk seriously, they're perhaps not only assessing or understanding risk correctly, but perhaps even generating risk and often we're at cross-purposes and using a different type of language'. (HMPPS 3)

The PSO described their job as 'meeting people, linking them in, listening, building up relationships', making community connections and working with the Probation Service to identify what the men needed, helping to break down barriers (with external agencies) and translating needs into actions, which could be challenging at times, because of the agencies already involved and the need to navigate what was helpful or not for the men.

The PSO did not hold a caseload but undertook a support/mentoring role with specific individuals they met through GA to help them to identify their skills and strengths and what they wanted to do or needed. They also assisted individuals who were not part of the GA cohort, but who had been introduced to it (by one of the men) for example because of difficulties they were experiencing (including sexual violence and cuckooing). Whilst there was no statutory obligation to these individuals, it was recognised they needed assistance. This led to the PSO liaising with an organisation which dealt with domestic abuse to identify what support they could offer GA. The PSO also undertook family support work and spent considerable time over several months assisting the wife of one of the men in the GA cohort with complex difficulties. Furthermore, the PSO was involved in setting up activities which some of the men engaged in. The HMPPS Strategy Lead acknowledged that defining the PSO role in a job description was difficult as it was not prescriptive, was intended to respond to needs as they arose but should not duplicate what others were doing. A continual challenge was knowing when to pull back particularly when GA encountered individuals who were not receiving the help they needed.

The PSO was directly involved in helping some of GA's activities to develop, particularly those which had originated from the men on Probation. They saw their role as an initial facilitator who would help to get the activity underway and then ideally hand it over, although identifying when to withdraw was sometimes problematic and their involvement could last longer than intended. A further aspect of their role was to maintain the focus on co-production. They consulted with some of the men who had been involved with GA (in a focus group) to identify what was important to them and explored their ideas. The group was co-facilitated with one of the men. This resulted in several recommendations being made including the need for better links to domestic violence services (it was hoped that the individual who raised this could

assist with making this connection) and whether anything could be done to improve the appearance of some local landmarks. The intention was to hold further focus groups and report back on progress as well as developing new ideas and ultimately encouraging the men to run the group themselves. HMPPS wanted to investigate any issues the men raised to determine what was possible and to demonstrate that GA was genuinely listening to them:

'I think the challenge now is that all of that stuff doesn't get lost. "We asked, we spoke to you, you gave us a couple of things, and we've now forgotten it because there's loads of other things to do." I hope, I really hope, that the men, whether they went to a focus group or not, that they feel as though they're listened to'. (HMPPS 2)

The PSO was involved in developing activities, with the local adviser from the Council's Into Work Advice Service (which worked in conjunction with *Shape Your Future*, a local employment initiative, which assisted individuals in employment to progress), The Into Work Service organised several different training sessions which the men could take part in. The PSO negotiated with the Local Hub to run a 'cooking on a budget' course for members of the community which was successful, and all participants received an Air Fryer. The PSO facilitated one of the men running a pop-up café once a week at the Local Hub which assisted him to obtain catering skills and resulted in further training and a more advanced cookery course being provided. The PSO was also involved with the Into Work Advice Service in assisting some of the men who were volunteering with GA to improve their mobility and ability to engage in activities outside of Caerau and Ely by being able to cycle. A cycling proficiency course was arranged for around eight individuals with a local organisation (Pedal Power) at the end of which participants would receive a reconditioned bicycle:

'We were trying to get them into volunteering roles, build their confidence, self-esteem, get them different little qualifications, training along the way, and then hopefully we can signpost them into work or further education, training. Some of these men had never had a certificate in their life, so just getting them into... Being able to celebrate something and not letting them feel ashamed or embarrassed. Trying to just develop those things for them'. (Partner 5).

Other plans included exploring whether more support could be provided to the men on Probation at weekends and developing family focused work, which were starting to be investigated towards the end of the evaluation period (as previously mentioned this included whether Church two could be a base for the latter). In addition, the CDO was interested in re-animating a men's group, which two of the men who had previously been involved with GA (one as a peer mentor and another as a recipient of support) were interested in co-facilitating alongside one of the CDO's staff; the HMPPS PSO was supporting this. These activities would help to strengthen the co-production element of GA which were under development toward as the evaluation period concluded.

The Charity

The organisation that went through the biggest change in this period was the Charity. This was connected to its view of how services should be delivered and organisationally what it aspired to. The activities it provided continued as before and aligned to its ethos of recognising the interconnectedness between mental health, physical well-being, social support, and personal development and offering activities and opportunities to improve well-being. There was a blurring of boundaries regarding the activities which the Charity had established which became intertwined with GA. Some were initially developed to support men on Probation (because the Charity was funded to do this), but all were open to members of the community, which was considered to work best:

'Yeah, so that's why we were so entwined, that's why we were so linked, so like the boxing and the gym, we said right we're going to prioritise men on probation, the gardening we were working with Unpaid Work. Then I had a change of heart with the

boxing, we'd get two or three people, there's not many people that are going to leave at ten (o'clock) because they want to go boxing. So, then we opened it up to the community, and then people were like it's much better, and the numbers were going up and more people from Probation were coming because it's normalised.... It's a boxing wellbeing group different people from communities, different abilities, it's not mainly men from Probation, it's a real mixed bag'. (Partner 5)

Whilst this was positive, the Charity regarded it as problematic when HMPPS asked it to account for its time as the interrelationship between what was set up for the community and what was specific to GA was difficult to disentangle.

Partnership working

In terms of partnership working in phase two, the CDO and Charity felt that it started well, albeit as a 'slow burn'. They discussed what was and was not working and made plans. The Charity was asked to develop workstreams for GA to give it structure and direction and monthly partnership meetings were put in place with HMPPS and other partners. (discussed further in chapter seven). Although the organisations got on well, the differences in the scale of what they provided was very different, one being much larger and more established with multiple sources of income. The Charity felt its organisational identity was emerging which was to focus on well-being, and this was shaping what it wanted to do. As a result, its ethos was not fully compatible with its current partner (despite regarding it as a very good organisation):

'But I would be more inclined to go into partnership with someone whose ethos and values are very similar to ours... We want to be of service; we are going to create projects around wellbeing. Now the centre's got more of an identity so, we're like wellbeing, isolation, loneliness, fighting emotional poverty if that makes sense'. (Partner 5)

Despite having designated roles and functions, a cross-over remained in the skills of the support workers in both organisations which at times caused tensions despite attempts to resolve them. This was mainly because one of the Charity's workers did not adhere to the agreement which had been reached about who would provide benefits and financial advice in each organisation.

In terms of working with the Probation Service, the Charity did not share the same values. It regarded Probation as risk-averse, with POs being limited to doing their job in a particular way. Tensions started to emerge and there were disagreements about working practices. Some were minor matters about the use of rooms, location of and access to equipment and others more major differences of opinion with little space for compromise. From the Charity's perspective the Probation Service had not changed the way it operated despite being in the community and its integration was limited. It felt that Probation always got its way whatever the issue and this affected how the partnership worked (POs had initially been very positive about the Charity and what it did). There was also a difference in ethos with HMPPS, which the Charity regarded as wanting to help 'the masses', whereas the Charity wanted to support those who really wanted or needed help on a much smaller scale:

'..... I don't want to create something that works okay 'Ish for 100-odd people. I want to work and create something that is brilliant for 10 and then another 10' (Partner 5)

A further matter was the prominence of faith-based beliefs in day-to-day interactions with the men on Probation. The Charity was a faith-based organisation and employed staff with lived experience, which motivated them to help others; for some faith had entered and changed their lives. Some of the men on Probation indicated that religion was prominent in some of the discussions with them and strong opinions were being expressed that they were not always comfortable with. The staff saw it differently and indicated they would only engage on the subject if led into it by others:

'So, ... if someone asks about God, I'm going to tell them about God. But I've never initiated a conversation I'd like to just tell them because of what's happened in my life. But I don't, I respect it and if they ask me, I'll speak'. (Partner 5)

'We're not here to preach that, but we are here to demonstrate that ...but you're demonstrating the heart of Christ in our community'. (Partner 3)

Attitudes to managing risk and staff safety

Matters came to a head over the management of risk where there were very different opinions. The Support Centre was a community space which anyone could use; it did not appear there were any checks on who was attending and whether they posed any risk:

'We've just got to deal with it at face value, and then if something comes to light about them that happens to be true then I think we have to act on that information. I'm not naïve in that way, that everyone who walks through the door has got to be risk-assessed. That's not the case at all, because you can be anywhere in life and you don't know who's stood next to you. When you've got information about someone that can potentially be dangerous or a risk, something needs to be done and that needs to be shared. That hasn't happened'. (Partner 5).

It transpired that a man who was well known to the Probation Service and other public services and a high risk to staff had been attending GA (as a member of the public). At a monthly operational meeting, a GA support worker raised a concern that this individual had been enquiring about a professional who regularly attended the Support Centre. It emerged that one of the Charity's staff had been aware of this for some time but had not discussed it with the Probation team or with colleagues. A PO had attended a gym session with the person of concern and was alarmed about the lack of safeguards, when the risks became known:

'I thought this person was a volunteer here that had been checked out, safeguard checks appropriately done, so I was safe to work with him'. (PO 7).

The lack of information sharing ultimately led to a breakdown in relations which became irreparable. From the Probation Service standpoint, it was recognised that the Charity wanted to support individuals in need, but the decision to protect the person of concern, rather than considering the Probation team and their safety was unacceptable. The Probation team were withdrawn from the Support Centre (for two weeks) as it was regarded as an unsafe working environment, until a way forward was found:

'It eventually got handled. We couldn't come here for two weeks because we didn't know what was going to happen. Nobody even thought to tell the [professional] about it, so I had to phone her outside of work to tell her, "Don't come here, and you're right, it is that person." Then she went on to explain a bit more about this person's issue which, you know, we could have found out about all this a long time ago and put the proper measures in place'. (PO 7).

It later transpired the person of concern was under Probation supervision elsewhere and was deemed too much of a risk to manage through WS and was only seen at home with a police officer in attendance. It was ultimately agreed with HMPPS that the individual could not attend the Support Centre on the days when the Probation Service was there but could at all other times. Despite this, the Charity failed to communicate the situation to its own staff, and some remained ignorant of the risk this person posed. It did not explain to staff what was happening and ultimately one of their staff members was left to deal with a situation they were uninformed about when the person of concern came to the Support Centre on a day when the Probation Service was present:

'The person in question was told they were still allowed to attend the Centre but not on Probation days. That was the compromise, and that's fine. This person likes to push

boundaries so, on a day where he knew the staff that knew him ... weren't going to be here, he came into the Centre and stood and just stared at Probation..... We said he's not allowed to be here on Probation days, so [support worker] asked him to leave. He kicked off and caused a scene. [GA support worker] had to take him into an office, and ... was in there for ages, he glared at us and made us feel really uncomfortable. He eventually left upset and angry, and little did we know that [support worker] didn't know anything about him. So, after all of what had gone on, we assumed that everyone involved with him knew the risks involved.... We felt awful that we put [them] in that position because we thought that [they] knew, and [they] didn't have a clue. Even after all that had happened, the communication was still absolutely shocking'. (PO 7)

From the Charity's perspective HMPPS and the Probation Service were not consistent in their approach to risk, as other incidents had occurred (although very few and different in nature) and been handled differently. The Charity had its own risk assessments and processes to ensure that staff were not at risk from individuals attending its premises, but continued to indicate that the person of concern did not pose as much of a risk as the Probation Service suggested and HMPPS was wrong in its approach and reasoning:

'I do an individual risk assessment with someone and if they fall into any of those categories or the safety plan ... I will let them know about it. Not many people have hit that threshold, that we have come across most of the time, or if they do it's just a case of putting that in, I wouldn't look to exclude or ban or whatever'. (Partner 5).

The Charity worked with people who were 'falling between the cracks' and had seen some significant changes in individuals who were regarded as problematic, whereas public protection was overriding for HMPPS and did not allow for exceptions. The decision to ban individuals was re-victimising and it was difficult to explain the rationale when it was not understood; *'they know something about you that I don't know about you'* (Partner 5). The Charity wanted to determine who used its premises and not be dictated to by another organisation (HMPPS). If they had known this was a possibility, they would have questioned whether the partnership was the right thing to do as they did not want to deny anyone pastoral care and support. They felt there were different standards of tolerance and acceptance and although there was a solution regarding the person of concern attending the Support Centre, they had no choice but to accept it and were not happy about limiting the number of days an individual could attend or that they could be excluded from the premises:

'I think it came to when they were banning people or asking to ban people. That became an issue for me then, so they would ban three out of five days, and I was like I am okay with two, three it just didn't sit right'. (Partner 5).

This issue highlighted a misalignment of ethos and working practices and the different way statutory and non-statutory agencies looked at risk and whether the GA partner who took the stance on risk was representing the position of their organisation or reflecting their own views. Ultimately the Charity and HMPPS had very different red lines which could not be crossed, and the Probation Service could not hand risk over to an agency that did not manage it or operated differently:

'We cannot operate outside these parameters too much because otherwise, with serious case reviews if something really bad goes wrong, we say we've handed this risk over to an agency that doesn't manage risk. That's a really difficult thing for the community to swallow and the public to swallow, understandably... the other way around, we don't need people telling us that people who pose an incredibly tangible risk to others, whether it be staff or whoever, don't because you believe in the better part of their nature. That's not a risk management plan. That's a really dangerous way of managing people, and naïve'. (PO 1).

The Charity felt that to avoid this type of conflict GA needed its own space so that the Probation Service could operate as it wished. It was difficult *'being told what to do in your own building'*, particularly when some of the actions taken by HMPPS were in opposition to the ethos of the Charity wanting to provide *'warm and welcoming'* environment (Partner 5). HMPPS needed to be able to control who used the premises when the Probation Service was present, which was non-negotiable and would influence future arrangements with venue providers. The POs felt there needed to be guidelines about how to deal with these matters as GA had been learning as it was going along. A plan needed to be in place if similar circumstances arose and conversations needed to be had with partner agencies, as attitudes to risk management were at different ends of the spectrum. This led to a loss of trust between the Probation team and the Charity which was not regained and ultimately contributed to the end of the partnership:

'...Probation have obviously got their values, and they've got all the rules and regulations and the safeguarding risk assessments that they've got to adhere to as an organisation. [The] Charity have got their own vision and their own values, and we've clashed a couple of times this year in terms of risks to staff, risks to other members of the community, where we've both seen it from a totally different view and it just hasn't worked. We've reached a compromise in the end, but it's not one I don't think that both sides were particularly happy with. That's part of the reason why we've had to decide to part ways and look for another venue, so that's a big lesson learned this year'. (HMPPS 6)

When HMPPS was considering what the next stage of GA's development should be, a decision was made to terminate the arrangements with the Charity, and they ceased to be a partner in March 2024. This was regarded as the right decision by the Probation team. Some of the POs felt there had been too much reliance on the Charity as it had not grown or developed its offer to the men (tending to rely on the Men Changing Lives group). It had not thought about progression and was content to work with the same small cohort. If the men were not interested in what was on offer, there wasn't any alternative for them. The POs would have liked the Charity to provide more one-to-one time with the men and to use its local knowledge more (although what it did was determined by what was agreed with HMPPS). There had been some discussion about what the Charity could have done, although it was acknowledged this was never explored as fully as it could have been, possibly because the right communication structures were not in place.

There was some reflection on whether the arrangements could have worked out differently, with the conclusion being that it might have been possible to rescue the relationship, had it not taken so long to resolve the risk situation or it might have been different if a longer-term partnership arrangement had been in place as the impetus would have been to solve the problem. The change initially created an uncertain impact:

'I think all the issues that have gone on at [the Charity] and the fact that we're leaving there, it definitely has impacted the project. It's impacted our working relationships with staff and as we were just saying earlier, we wonder if it's impacted the people on probation and their feelings about the project coming in the room'. (PO 2)

There was the loss of what was regarded as a very good venue (the best GA had available), and some of the extra activity the men could be connected to, although by the time the arrangement came to an end, it was also not quite what it had been. One of the biggest losses was the immediacy of access to other services, what that would look like in the future and whether new venues would operate in the same way:

'.... but I always liked that of being able - when somebody's identified a problem, that you can go, right, come over here with me, let's talk to so and so and I don't quite know if that's still going to be the same'. (PO 2)

By the time the arrangement came to an end, the Charity had lost impetus and was disengaging. One of their biggest challenges for it had been continual change, which was a

constant feature of the way in which GA operated. There had been a significant turnover of POs in mid-2023 and repeatedly having to establish working relationships was difficult. The Charity did not have the authority to implement some of the actions that HMPPS wanted, although tried, for example, equipping a back room that could be used as a communal working space for the Probation team (which they did not use or was reinforced as a requirement). As a result, the Charity questioned whether the relationship with the Probation Service was right and should continue because of the various challenges of working with it. Further, the Support Centre was becoming recognised as ‘the probation place’ which did not fit with the identity the Charity wanted.

For HMPPS, the arrangements had worked best when the Charity had not been part of the commissioning (apart from supplying the venue), ‘*when there were no expectations, they were exceeding them*’ (HMPPS 2). Further, it was questioned whether the Charity had the skills required to do some of the work which had been expected. Although an agreement was reached about what one of its staff would do, they continued to do what they wanted, which created conflict with the CDO and strained the partnership relationship.

Observations from HMPPS regarding phases one and two

HMPPS had wanted the arrangements with the partners it commissioned to be a genuine partnership and did not want a highly prescriptive purchaser/provider relationship. It wanted partners to contribute their specific skills and strengths and to provide challenge. This proved more problematic to achieve than envisaged; it was difficult to establish a genuine partnership with short-term arrangements (determined by the length of funding); mutual trust was needed between the commissioner and partner (which ebbed and flowed), resulting in the phase one arrangements not feeling like a partnership, as HMPPS had to mediate between the organisations and deal with issues and conflicts they had individually or between themselves. A further factor which prevented the original partnership from working well was the dominance of the CIC which caused the CDO to question its involvement. This was problematic for GA because from the outset it had been an organisation that HMPPS wanted to work with due to its expertise in ABCD and local knowledge.

There were some significant differences in approach and what the partners felt GA should be doing. Not all partners were trying to achieve the same things. One was ‘*trying to shoehorn everything through a restorative lens*’ (HMPPS 2), with little flexibility, which ultimately became limiting and alienating to other partners and the POs and was not the primary focus of GA:

‘We thought we could see how that mixture of knowledge about community development, plus that restorative approach, how that could be welcome and a good combination of expertise and skills’. (HMPPS 2)

Risk management highlighted differences in approach; one of the partners was used to working in the criminal justice system and had a good understanding of risk management and what was required; another had limited experience of the criminal justice system, but had its own risk-related processes and procedures and understood why HMPPS made decisions that might differ from its own; but there was disparity with the third partner and it was not clear whether the views expressed were that of the individual or reflected the national organisation’s policies and practices. In the future HMPPS would be clear with any partners about what the operational limits were and what was non-negotiable:

‘There will need to be red lines, and those red lines will be things like, “If we are hiring a space from you on a given day, we need to be able to say that any given individual can’t be in that centre’. (HMPPS 2)

HMPPS saw its role as helping partners to understand why there might be concerns and to work through them, which could be mitigated by early discussions about respective positions and any differences of opinion; ‘*It’s given me clarity about what conversations we need to have at the very beginning*’ (HMPPS 2). When considering the use of Church two, there was

a frank discussion with the pastor about what each organisation was (and was not) comfortable with, to be clear about expectations and to avoid problems occurring later.

Phase three (April 2024 onwards)

In April 2024, GA entered another phase, building on the learning from phases one and two. The plan was to work exclusively with the CDO and to recruit community development workers, who would be employed by HMPPS. The CDO would receive an annual grant of £50,000 for two years, to provide a specialist resource to enable it to work with offenders and the Probation Service to access existing services and activities. This provided the partnership with more stability and certainty. The funding paid for: a support worker (three days a week) to provide advice and assistance about finance; leadership time (half a day a week); and a senior operational manager (one day a week) to develop the CDO's offer for the men on Probation, to link in its staff and services and identify other sources of funding which could enhance its work with Probation and community safety more broadly. HMPPS had no concerns about its attitude to risk and risk management, as it had robust policies around safeguarding, keeping people safe and de-escalating conflict, was open to discussion about what needed to happen and understood why HMPPS might make risk-based decisions that could affect its own working practices. HMPPS felt there was an opportunity for the CDO to lead more and to *'equalise the partnership as everyone was now 'on the same page'*.

There had been a shift in the GA team which now regarded the CDO as a valued partner. This was significantly different from the CDO feeling doubtful about its utility in phase one. It moved from questioning its involvement in GA and being prepared to walk away from it if operational changes had not been made, to regarding GA as one of its successful endeavours. As an organisation it had gained in confidence in working with the Probation Service and began to regard work with offenders as an organisational priority. which was a significant shift from its starting position of thinking it did not have expertise in this area. It had a good understanding of the challenges of managing people with difficult behaviour, knew how to interact with people in crisis and realised that what it did for members of the community was broadly the same as for people on Probation:

'They might not talk about risk quite so much, but de-escalating conflict – all of their staff are trained in that. They get far more people who are angry and frustrated going to crisis hour than people that come to their probation appointments. They know how to engage with people who've been let down by every service going. They know how to take a strength-based approach. They know how to provide holistic support and all of those kinds of things'. (HMPPS 2)

Going forward, the CDO would provide the Probation team with its own room at the Local Hub. The POs would have access to it on Wednesdays, where they could work with any visiting agencies, and to two interview rooms for private conversations (which had to be pre-booked) and could use the café style area (with free tea and coffee) for less private conversations. This was in addition to continuing to use the Hub on Fridays. The arrangement was flexible and if an appointment was needed on a different day efforts would be made to accommodate it.

As a partner the CDO felt that its increasing involvement had grown in the right way. It was committed to GA and its development and wanted it to feel a sense of ownership and not just provide a space in which the Probation team sat. Some of the approaches and activities provided were not dissimilar to those at the Support Centre; being welcoming to visitors, offering a café facility and providing services that men in Probation could engage with. The CDO reflected that it should have led the project from the start, which partly came from the realisation that what it offered the men was what it offered to everyone, and it did not need to be a criminal justice expert:

'I guess with partnerships you never really know how they're going to pan out. So, we have the lesson learned in the negative, we should have been the lead but also learning from our ability to adapt and to grow and to put solutions in place'. (Partner 3)

The CDO's aspirations for the future were greater cohesion with the GA team, establishing an agreed direction, which would be a '*shared driver for us all*' and stability within the Probation team. The CDO would continue to provide quarterly networking events with Probation, partners and others to raise awareness of their services and activities and was supportive of the decision of HMPPS to recruit two community engagement workers. Monthly meetings were established with HMPPS and the Probation Service which were reflective as well as forward looking (see chapter seven). The CDO did not try to impose an ideal or to challenge fundamental aspects of Probation work, rather it identified what it could do to support the men and POs and provided it. This reflective approach was essential to its success as a partner in GA.

Community engagement workers

A new approach was taken with the appointment of community engagement workers (CEW), which would be employed and managed by HMPPS (as opposed to the commissioned partners as in phase one). This was in some respects a return to what the original vision had been for GA, with the CEWs working alongside the Probation Service, the CDO, other partners and directly with men on Probation, their families and members of the local community, although they would not be case holders. Their role was to develop good links in the community to further the aims of the Probation Service, engage with the community to understand local provision and opportunities and to build a network of links and services which the men could be connected to, to meet their needs and interests. The CEWs would be expected to develop a confident working relationship with the POs and to be informed about risk and for the POs to share information with them about motivation and readiness to engage and anything else of relevance to determine the best course of action for everyone.

Conclusions

One of the original visions of GA was that it had a community focused lens, but that had not initially worked out as intended as the need to put specialist provision in place to meet the needs of the men became a priority. Providing practical assistance had been easier to establish than undertaking community development work, but the intention to develop community engagement remained as did empowering the men on Probation to be part of and ultimately able to contribute to their local community:

'To build the associational life to become parts of more groups and activities and networks, to be leading those groups, to become the person who's not just got out of prison, but the person who runs the community allotment or X, Y, or Z? That's what I wanted to happen at the beginning, and that's still what I wanted to happen now this is what Grand Avenues is about. In my mind, it's very core. It's about, what's the role of local communities in reducing reoffending? That's why we have the Grand Avenues pilot'. (HMPPS 2).

HMPPS concluded from the partnership experiences that it was important to consider what type of organisation to partner with, as the voluntary sector was not culturally similar or necessarily representative of its community, with wide variance in thinking and approaches at an organisational and individual level. There was no ready-made organisation, it took time to build trust with a prospective partner and to develop a shared understanding of what was to be achieved, how to operate and what was non-negotiable. This had been a graduated process with a lead in time which went beyond simply agreeing the finance and expecting relationships and operations to work from the start. Further, the right organisation might need time to find its feet and all parties needed to be committed to working through the process of

finding the best way of working together, which was ultimately achieved with the CDO. HMPPS regarded the partnership experiences as formative and helpful in determining what the operational arrangements should look like and ultimately resulted in GA having a strong, trusting partnership, a good relationship with the commissioned partner and arrangements which made a difference to people's lives.

Chapter Seven: Planning and Communication

Introduction

This chapter discusses what the broad intentions were for GA and how they were developed. It includes some of the planning processes which were explored, communication across the partnership and views on project management. Initial thinking about how GA would deliver its objectives came from the early stakeholder engagement undertaken by HMPPS, which informed what the operating model would look like and reflected the original objectives (HMPPS 2019²⁵):

- A more local approach to service delivery.
- A more consistent and strong relationship with the offender.
- Greater flexibility and more innovative solutions to respond to the individual needs of the offender.
- More involvement of the family in the offender journey.

Developing GA

When GA started to become operational in 2021, several activities were identified to form the work programme for phase one:

- The development of a joint strategy with the community, co-designed by those living in the locality. Partners would sign up to the GA concept and to working in a collaborative way, with shared objectives and outcomes.
- The design and use of a GA 'life plan' specific to the needs of the service user, which all organisations involved with the individual would contribute to. The plan would be owned by a lead professional who would take responsibility for it beyond the period of involvement in the criminal justice system.
- To provide a consistent community caseload and team of individuals (comprising statutory and non-statutory partners) who would strengthen Probation's local links and increase the likelihood of service users finding lasting sources of help and support
- Identify where digital solutions could be employed e.g. App development.
- The Community Development Service would work with HMPPS and local stakeholders to bring together service users, local services, HMPPS and the wider community to improve support for the men and their families and continue to support co-production activity.

Also included was supporting the development of volunteer-led community responses (which ultimately led to the appointment of peer mentors) and continuing to facilitate co-production activities and events, including in schools. There was not a detailed plan for how the activities would be developed, as HMPPS wanted the process to be 'iterative' (HMPPS 2). Some felt more structure was needed:

'Yeah, and then even the partnership would bring people in, and it was never really explained to us how it was supposed to marry up, how we work with them. It was always just organically, go with it and see what happens. Reflection, they'd have been better having a little bit of guidance, I think, at the time. I'm not being too critical because I think we all thought, see how it goes'. (PO 1).

'I always thought, well that's the beauty of this because we develop as we go, which I agree with to some extent, but also then that can become quite confusing'. (PO 3).

²⁵ HMPPS (2019) *Grand Avenues: Update Strategic Support Assurance and Administration Away Day 5th April 2019* (unpublished)

When interviewed at the end of GA's first year it remained unclear to some of the POs where GA would be in a year's time and what it should have achieved. PO 5 gave the analogy of there being steps in a ladder to the roof, but none of the rungs being in place with the question being 'how are we getting up?':

'Yeah. It's our project, but there doesn't seem to be a set definition of where... I don't know where they want to be in a year. I don't have a clue. I don't know what they expect in the next month. How are we meant to help them achieve that, if I don't know what's going on?' (PO 5)

Expectations

Partners had different expectations of what they could contribute to GA. One assumed they would be contributing to a change in Probation practice and shaping what it looked like, but felt their involvement was limited and ad hoc because they had not been asked 'what the agenda should be' (Partner 1) and were not always consulted (or consulted enough) in the early stages:

'So, like oh let's have a bit of restorative, let's have a bit of that, but not persevering with anything. It's like let's have a listen to [name of consultant]. And the sessions [provided by a social enterprise organisation] I was thinking I love the idea about getting the stimulation going and then what? So what?' (Partner 1)

The partner wanted the GA team (and some of the men on Probation) to jointly develop a plan and felt it mattered less if there wasn't a clearly mapped out strategy if all partners were engaged with and listened to. They questioned whether the relocation of a Probation team to a different environment was sufficient in what they understood to be an innovative project and suggested that GA should have a concept or theory of change which partners were aware of and were working towards, which would help to develop its direction:

'If you're going to test something you need an assumption, you need a concept, don't you? A test of... a concept theory. Proof of concept.' (Partner 1)

They were concerned that if there was not a concerted effort to look at what could be done differently Probation would continue its normal way of working and the potential for innovation would be lost (a view that another partner also expressed – see further on in the chapter). They also questioned whether the Probation Service could or wanted to change:

'I think because they've [probation] been in such a silent bubble, probation only really listen to probation still. There's not the professional humility and there's been quite a kick back sometimes when we've tried to do something without persevering with it.' (Partner 1)

These opinions contrasted with the Probation Service's position (in phase one) of wanting to focus on becoming established in the community, ensuring it was fulfilling its statutory obligations, transferring eligible cases and settling the men into the new arrangements. This raised the question of whether the expectations of the commissioned partners about their role in the project's development were realistic in the early stages of GA's development and being proposed at the right time. It was unlikely the Probation Service could depart from its normal method of operation because of the challenges it faced at the time (Covid and Reunification) and of the need to establish GA before considering introducing new practices. The views of the partner were not commonly shared and ultimately HMPPS as the project lead had to set the parameters of how GA operated.

Some of the POs felt there was more they could do (if their responsibilities and caseloads were reduced). There was a sense amongst the POs and commissioned partners towards the end of phase one GA had 'plateaued'. The move from WS had been achieved, and it was a question of 'what next?' and what could be developed further. One of the POs suggested they

could engage in activities and interventions with the men rather than simply supervising them, but it was not clear whether this was explored or possible:

'At the moment, I just feel like it's not going anywhere, and we could be doing more but we just haven't got somebody there saying come on guys, what do you want to do? But yeah, there's so much we would like to do'. (PO 4)

Further, whilst the commissioned partners understood there was a 10-year lifespan for GA and were clear about its broad objectives, they regarded the timeframe for practice and cultural change as ambitious and too brief, in part hindered by short term funding (initially 18 months). They found it difficult to identify what would be possible:

'As much as I think I know in terms of where it's going, this is my concern, is if you've got a ten-year vision, then you can't expect after an eighteen-month project ... that it is going to continue post that. My experience shows that even though your communities are strong, and they can take things forward, they still need that driver'. (Partner 3).

There was concern that if GA was to have a lasting impact, sustainability needed to be considered at the outset. This was on a structural level, *'pulling together meetings, coordinating what other people are doing'* (Partner 3) which the partners were doing as part of the commissioned activity and would discontinue if the arrangements changed. The Probation Service did not have the infrastructure or capacity to acquire and maintain knowledge about the community and what it had to offer in the same way as the partners which were embedded in it so tended to refer to the same organisations but, over time, the intention was to develop that knowledge and expertise:

'In terms of from Probation's perspective, I believe they do want to stay out in the community, and I think that's probably the biggest change for them, having them still in the community keeps them linked and so they are continually, I hope, abreast with the community that they're in. Their knowledge stays and they continually know who best to refer to.' (Partner 3).

It was also unclear how GA would sustain activity without designated funding as this would be a barrier to Probation becoming rooted in the community. Third sector organisations did not provide free services to government bodies and the withdrawal of funding often had damaging effects on relationships in communities which had been beneficiaries:

'I don't know if they have a vision in terms of the two consistent sides and the cohort that is referred in remains the same, or if they have plans to grow that, and if they were to grow it, how? I don't know what that looks like'. (Partner 3).

Without considering sustainability the Probation Service would end up on its own without the extra support which GA brought, and expertise would be lost. One PO estimated that 99% of their caseload had some form of benefit-related difficulty and if the Probation Service was not working with agencies which had the knowledge to deal with these problems, it would revert to not knowing what to do, which raised the question of how GA would become self-sustaining.

Review of initial activity

There were several efforts to develop plans for GA which took different forms. In the early stages HMPPS, commissioned a Social Enterprise Organisation (Telescope) which assists organisations from different backgrounds to work together to find ways of addressing common objectives and challenges and to put policy into practice. It ran six half-day workshops between August 2021 and September 2022 to facilitate discussions in the GA team and produced an 'evaluation' highlighting how GA was progressing, how it could develop through collaborative activity and what the next steps should be. Priorities were co-production and finding ways of involving the men on Probation, setting up peer mentorship, making more of the local

connections which had started to develop, including bringing in representatives from external services to the Support Centre. Areas which required attention included how GA's multi-agency team would manage safeguarding to ensure public safety and providing adequate support and supervision to POs working in the community. Actions which did not progress included: developing a 'holistic talking circle', which would have involved the men speaking directly to other professionals (including doctors, housing and local politicians) about their needs; and developing a digital App which was not feasible as most of the men did not have a smart phone. In terms of aspirations, it was hoped that GA would become a blueprint for future pilots of a 'hub' where different agencies and the Probation Service could work together, informed by lessons learned from the project.

There were mixed views about the workshops, with some finding the sessions very helpful in discussing the challenges, building relations and understanding each other's roles, whereas others felt that as the GA team was getting to know each other, networking was not a priority, and time would have been better spent on improving communication across the partnership:

'I think Probation being... there's a big gap between... we've got us and [the SPO] and [the HMPPS Strategy Lead]. There's a big gap that we can't see into, and I think that more Grand Avenues probation focus meetings with... we're a small team. Some of that strategy and policy is being fed down to us and we are being asked to then feed up. That's something that could quite easily flow and happen I think, but it doesn't, I think. That would be far more productive'. (PO 6)

Although the workshops generated ideas about what GA needed, they did not appear to be wholly connected to HMPPS's vision and enablers (for example the development of a community strategy, life plan etc) or fully reflect partner progress and milestones (which may not have been the intention). It was not clear whether the identified next steps were agreed by HMPPS and would be taken forward and if so, who would lead on them. It was also unclear whether some of the actions which occurred e.g. recruitment of peer mentors arose from these sessions or were being planned anyway (as this appeared in the work programme for the commissioned partners). Other actions did not seem to progress, for example managing safeguarding, until a specific incident occurred around risk to staff (previously described in chapter six). Although lots of interesting ideas were being generated, they were not captured in a plan that was evident to all or addressed with any priority.

Five Pillar work streams

Following the change in partnership in March 2023 (phase two), there was a re-focus on planning to align with the new partnership and funding arrangements. At this stage HMPPS asked the Charity to produce a plan to take forward with the CDO. This resulted in the identification of five pillars or workstreams:

- upskilling probation (in community engagement-based work);
- work with families;
- community development;
- work with men in prison awaiting release; and
- identifying gaps in provision.

The pillars were not developed with the CDO or the Probation Service. The CDO thought the concept was good but doubted whether the Probation team had the capacity to deliver what was intended. The pillars came as a surprise to some of the Probation staff, *"I had just come back from holiday I'd no idea that we were even creating pillars"* (PO 3). It was unclear where they had come from and what they were supposed to be about, what role the POs were expected to play, and who was responsible for what:

'... I felt like for a while a lot of things just fell with the probation officers to do and maybe that's just because I work on the probation side, and I think we need to be a bit

clearer on who's responsible for certain things to help move things along rather than just saying family work and be done'. (PO 3).

The suggestion that Probation should be 'upskilled', which was intended to be in community engagement related work was regarded as 'insulting' by the POs. The intention was to help POs to work in a different way in the community, but was not interpreted as such:

'That's why I caused so much offence when I said upskilling probation. They were like, "What do you mean?" I was like, "Well, you need to do your job differently if you want to work and be part of community. You can't just have appointments and sit on a computer'. (Partner 5)

The rationale for creating the pillars was to take forward some of the ideas which had been discussed, but where little progress had been made. The justification for selecting them was based on the personal observations of one of the commissioned partners (the Charity), which felt *'this was the way to go' rather than HMPPS 'setting up cooking courses'* (Partner 5). It felt GA had lost its direction and the pillars provided the opportunity to re-focus on what it should be doing, *'these got created to give us some sort of direction'*, but there were doubts about whether and to what extent the pillars would progress:

'... I thought I really want to narrow this down.... we could really be concentrating on upscaling Probation or integrating probation into communities, integrating the men back into the community, and creating activities and things, and then identifying gaps in provision, directly or community connectors or whatever.... We could have really refocused it, but I didn't feel or believe I had the backing that this was a meaningful...' (Partner 5)

A workshop was held in September 2023, at which the pillars were presented, and partners were asked to sign up to a workstream and to work together to develop it. There was no discussion about whether they agreed with them or whether there was a preference for anything else. HMPPS did not appear to disagree with what was proposed as they asked for periodic updates on progress from the lead partner. However, without collective buy-in, the process stalled, and GA staff abandoned the work. Staff turnover, competing priorities, and the summer period contributed to this and none of the workstreams gained any traction. The partner (who created the pillars) felt that the workstreams did not progress because they did not have the authority (as a third sector organisation) to direct the Probation Service. This had not been possible on more straightforward matters, so anything more complex had little chance of success. They commented on other plans which had been determined but not implemented. For example, there were discussions with the POs about putting an arrangement in place to identify whether any of the men on Probation needed assistance with finance and agreement that the Charity's staff would do this, but it quickly petered out:

'... In the November we were going to concentrate on finances. Just finances, we're going to have a focused month.... We discussed how we would do that. Then we spoke to the whole team and Probation obviously. Didn't happen at all. Why? Because they didn't listen. There was no authority behind it ...' (Partner 5)

HMPPS's account differed. They understood there would be a monthly financial well-being check on everyone attending appointments which would be conducted by the Charity's staff, with the CDO carrying out any actions required. If it worked well, other areas of need would be examined in a similar way. This was discussed at a team meeting with the POs, and it was understood that everyone had signed up to it. However, the Charity's staff did not carry out the initial checks, which led HMPPS to question its ability to carry out some of the functions required.

Developing a mission statement and values

Some of the POs felt that GA should develop a distinct identity, in the way that IOM and WISDOM had one, supported by defined operating procedures:

'For instance, if you talk about IOM or you talk about WISDOM, people know more about what those teams offer and do because they're very stringent around what they have to do and what that means'. (PO 1)

This might not have been as necessary for GA as it was not dealing with the same levels of risk and intended to be a locality-based initiative, rather than a project or service which managed specific types of offenders. At the start, there had been a strong emphasis on preventing intergenerational offending which had been part of GA's identify and despite some activity with families (see chapter ten), some thought that emphasis on the intergenerational aspect had been lost quite quickly and eventually become non-existent. Discussions had taken place which did not progress into tangible actions, which was a source of frustration:

'We seemed to be talking about it for such a long time, and we have never done nothing with it. I was sick of going into meetings about it and talking about it and doing this. The prison gateway, I wrote a thing about it to say this is how we are going, we have got a timescale, a procedure, so I wrote all of that on why, I don't even know where it is now'. (Partner 5)

As a result, POs were not sure what GA was presenting itself as and there was not much discussion beyond having contact with men in their own community. It was felt there was a missed opportunity not to be more definitive:

'Oh, I can see you in my community." Positive. Lovely. Yeah, and I think that's great, but that's it. That's always what they refer to. I think that's really interesting. That's telling. That's the part that's discussed rather than anything else we've ever achieved there. I've always noticed it's the same thing. Oh, I can come to see you'. (PO 1)

By the third year (phase three) the focus was on developing a mission statement and values for GA and looking at what made it unique. The CDO facilitated two workshops with partners in 2024 to explore this and to develop a vision statement, what the aims of GA were (as it was now in a different place to where it had been on inception), project values, outcomes, what the partnership did and how it worked. At the time of writing this was under development, however whether and to what extent it would pick up on the identity issues and what made GA unique remained to be seen.

In some respects, there was a permanent plan for GA to provide a suitable range of venues from which Probation could operate, which was under continual development; to maintain a full complement of POs in a stable and consistent team; and to engage with external services and agencies to increase GA's network of support. However, actions did not appear to fully or partially relate to the overarching objectives and it was unclear what had happened to some of the sub-objectives such as developing a community strategy, and 'life plan' (although the sessions provided by the Social Enterprise Organisation addressed this to some extent) or whether new ideas replaced the original intentions, what their status was and whether they had greater or lesser priority.

This raised questions about how the original vision was shared and communicated, what the priorities were for GA (at different phases and stages), whether and to what extent they progressed and how the project's development could be assessed in terms of what was and was not working and what was required. It was not apparent where these discussions took place, as the feedback from different individuals across the partnership were similar about lack of clarity (commissioned partners and POs alike):

'It's about the direction of the project; things not being fed through to us and communicated so we don't really know who is doing what and why they're there. That can be really off putting because it doesn't feel like there's a direction sometimes.' (PO 4)

Tensions within the partnership contributed to this as not all shared the same ideas about how the communication and decision-making processes should operate or who should be doing what. Different individuals had their own aims and objectives which were not necessarily what the project was about. Whilst some partners had ideas about what they would like to see, this did not reflect collective agreement or result in tangible plans:

'..... we were always commended for it being messy, not just us, everyone said it's a messy project, but it works. Then when we tidied it up, I think we were tidying things up in the wrong order, in the wrong priorities, so let's tidy it up, objective, aims, and then what are the three or four or five, hopefully three things we are going to concentrate on'. (Partner 5)

For HMPPS the intention had been that the GA team developed the plan rather than having it imposed on them and then questioning why certain things were not included:

'There's that need to go from that plan to then think like, "How does this work in practice?" Just because we've said something to do with families on a plan, it doesn't mean that the family engagement just follows naturally'. (HMPPS 2)

Communication

Communication throughout all phases of GA was problematic for various reasons and was a source of frustration. A PO characterised what it looked like:

'Last week [support worker] said to me, and I think somebody else "Oh, I've got funding from Save the Children and if people have got a child under the age of six then they can have like £340 worth of vouchers and if we do it now it will come in time for Christmas." It's like that's amazing, that is huge. But then [another support worker] didn't know about that'. (PO 2)

'At times we seem to go through phases of - we have a meeting about having a meeting and then other times it's like I think we need a meeting because I don't quite know what's going on. Somebody's thrown cooking classes in. Where have they come from? Where do we sign people up for those? I don't quite know'. (PO 2)

The communication problems arose for various reasons. One of the original commissioned partners did not communicate with all the POs consistently, which caused conflict as they appeared to treat the qualified and unqualified POs differently. As a result, team members did not know who they should be sharing information with and by what means (group email or to selected individuals):

'[Partner] sent an email about the peer mentors starting, bearing in mind one of them was one of my cases and I wasn't included in the email, nor was [PO 4], nor was [PO 5]. And it kind of very much felt like [Partner] comes across to me as somebody who very much divides the probation officers, you are probation service officers, so you're a lower grade. And it's the three people who are the lower grade who weren't included on the email and the email was, the tone of it was kind of like they've done wonderful. And it's like it was my person'. (PO 2)

Information was not always exchanged about the men who were being worked with, which could be problematic for the Probation Service:

'I had no idea who's doing what, what's going on. I had to find out that one of my guys was seeing someone here to do something else very randomly a month later. I was

thinking, "How did I not know about that?" That to me was very odd. It's not about micromanaging it, but remember, I manage risk. If something's happening, it would be nice to know that, if they're engaging, "Oh, that's brilliant." Working together and stuff. It's not that people didn't want to. There was no forum to discuss that, never was, whereas now there is, and that's powerful. I think, from the feedback ... they all really, really valued that, the staff'. (PO 1)

Different ideas were introduced at different times, but it was not obvious where they originated from, how they linked to GA or what the expectations of partners were. In phase one, a partner described hearing about GA being modelled on a One Stop Shop (co-location of Probation and other services) and on another occasion about expansion to another venue (Church two) which raised issues about the reporting arrangements, whether additional agencies would be present, whether the venue would operate in the same way as the Support Centre and whether training would be provided to staff to ensure this happened:

'Yeah. I don't know what the plan is ... I don't even know the date it's going live. We're having [project] meetings... [but] It's we're kind of hearing it second-hand'. (Partner 1)

Some felt there was a hierarchy of communication, firstly, gaining the agreement of the POs as they were the most directly affected and then advising partners, rather than collective decision-making (although the POs did not necessarily see it this way). It was also difficult for the third sector organisations to operate as equals because any proposals had to be agreed by Probation and the purchaser/provider relationship with HMPPS, meant they did not operate as an equal partner, *'I think we've ended up a service partner rather than a partner at times'* (Partner 1).

The POs commented on plans being made or changed that they were not aware of. They were not sure how some decisions were made and where they had been discussed. Some found out about something that was going on because they were in the room at the time, but there was no automatic follow up if they were not. Ideas were described as *'coming out of left field'* and *'sometimes it comes out of nowhere and ... I just think where this has come from'* (PO 4), but it was difficult to see how communication could be improved:

'Something new would happen, or there'd be an introduction or something. You're thinking, well, where's that come from? What does that mean? Even the introduction of people in new roles. There was no explanation'. (PO 1).

'So, for example, say [support worker] might go and have a meeting with [an external organisation], come back and whoever's on that table there will find out what's happening. An email might go out - not always. but I honestly don't know how to improve it'. (PO 3).

This also applied to some of the activities which were developed (notably in phase three), with different POs hearing different things at different times. An example of this was the cookery courses which were being arranged (cooking on a budget and food hygiene). It was understood that HMPPS was taking this forward, but the rationale and intentions were not explained. Whilst none of the POs disagreed with what was going on, it was felt that GA should not be doing activities for the sake of it but having a clear idea of why and who for and that what was being planned and initiated was fully reflecting what the men had asked for and wanted to do:

'However, the cookery - there's been various things that have turned up and you're kind of like, yeah, where did that come from then? Why are we doing this?' (PO 2)

Whilst the activities were of benefit to those who participated (one of the men received considerable support to develop catering skills), the POs felt this was a relatively isolated

example of what was possible, and the development of activities needed an infrastructure so that everyone could benefit and be given the opportunity to participate.

Establishing a communications structure

It proved to be difficult to get communication right amongst the partnership and most of those interviewed felt that it needed to be better. For the arrangements to be cohesive, there needed to be an agreed communication structure on different levels. For example, between HMPPS and the lead partners, between HMPPS and the Probation Service, partnership meetings to keep everyone informed of and able to contribute to GA's development, case discussions with the Probation team and partners and within the Probation Service so that the men continued to be supervised appropriately. Regular meetings were put in place as GA developed to ensure that the right issues were discussed in the right place which improved matters.

Morning briefings and fortnightly case management meetings

Morning briefings were established at the outset (in phase one) and took place on the days the Probation team attended the Support Centre, with commissioned partners, support workers and peer mentors to check who was coming in that day, whether anyone might benefit from a conversation with one of the support workers or peer mentors and to be aware of any conflicts which might arise. Some of the POs felt the briefings worked well when certain peer mentors were involved (having the right peer mentors in the role was key) as they could be involved in the activity Probation was planning for each man. The POs sometimes felt that the staff at the Support Centre were more concerned about what time the last appointment would be because of the locking up the building. However, this was a valid consideration as late appointments were offered on Thursdays, and staff cover and access to the building had to be arranged. Overall, the briefings were regarded as working well.

Fortnightly case discussions were introduced by the SPO in 2023 (later in phase one) on a Tuesday afternoon with the POs and partners. This provided the opportunity for everyone to discuss the individual needs of the men. It worked best when all the support workers were present and was useful for sharing information amongst the team and agreeing who did what:

'I think it's quite - for us probably the biggest thing is again if there's like a crossover. Somebody mentions a name because they want to talk about it, particularly if it's a new case or whatever, and you can go oh that's - because obviously they're all related or offend together. I kind of go, I've got the co-defendant just to give you a heads up or, I know this about them. Again, then you've got (team members who live in the locality) ... have all got the local information ... so they throw bits in. So, yeah, they are useful the discussions'. (PO 2)

There were also criticisms; some thought the case discussions were more useful for the support workers than the POs as the decision about what to do with the men on Probation had already been made, which could make them *'a bit pointless'* (particularly if it was mainly Probation staff who were present), as *'nothing gets discussed beyond the obvious'* (PO 7). There could be duplication with discussions which had been held elsewhere and with the SPO who might suggest the case was brought to the Tuesday meeting as well. The intention was that all GA cases would be discussed even if it was to note that no action was required. This did not happen, as POs generally brought what they thought was relevant because the case was new, or a conversation was needed about support. The SPO acknowledged that *'the team are bringing things as they are coming live'*, but the whole cohort needed to be reviewed to ensure nothing was being missed.

There were differences of opinion about which meetings worked best; some thought the fortnightly case discussion could have been part of the morning briefing when all the partners and agencies were likely to be together. Others thought that the fortnightly case discussions worked better although that was partly a reflection of the morning briefings becoming less

focused and less well attended (towards the end of phase two) to the extent that only the POs attended due to the impending move from the Support Centre. It was difficult to find consensus about what suited everyone or to get the meetings to operate consistently. Despite differing views both meetings were valuable when they worked well and improved communications across the partnership:

'There's a way to go, but it's better than it once was when those things didn't exist, and you'd come in and you were so none the wiser'. (PO 1).

The morning briefings discontinued at the end of phase two as the partnership had changed as did the need for them in the same way, although the fortnightly case discussions remained in place throughout phase three.

The presence of peer mentors in professional meetings

The presence of peer mentors in both meetings was raised by some POs, without agreement about what worked best. One PO did not feel it had been particularly helpful at the morning briefings, because they did not consistently attend and could easily be distracted by other things (this may have been due to how they were managed and what direction they were given):

'No. I think asking when someone's coming in made no difference at all, because the greatest respect they were then pulled and told do something else. The fact they knew that my guy Joe Bloggs was coming at 11:00 and they weren't at the door anyway, what difference does that make to anyone? Do you know what I mean?' (PO 1)

There was a need to carefully manage what information was being shared with the peer mentors as it could relate to people they knew well which ran the risk of them being aware of information they should not be:

'There's also the interesting dynamic of them on probation, still on orders, having a lot of information about people that we're managing. I found that really... I don't mind admitting ... but I didn't know the peer mentors were still on actual licenses and orders'. (PO 1)

Another PO suggested that (subject to confidentiality) it would have been useful for the peer mentors to attend the fortnightly case discussions to identify which men they could be connected with particularly at the start of Probation supervision to begin the process of building a relationship and network of support, to find out what they needed and to encourage and assist them to attend necessary appointments (it was not clear whether this proposal was put forward):

'There's a thing about certain confidentiality.... but it would be useful to have a peer mentor, a support worker as such, on board as well. That's what one of the missing links is at the moment, because we've got all these agencies that can do, let's just say, bits and bobs. We as probation can only do so much because of our caseloads and time restraints. There are some people who will happily engage with the project straight off and come on leaps and bounds. There are some people who are sceptical about it, but I think with a bit of extra push at the beginning or more support at the beginning they could eventually come on board. We need people to accompany people to GP appointments. It's okay if one agency can do that, but then they can't do another... You need someone that can just be a constant support'. (PO 7)

The function of peer mentors is discussed in the next chapter, but it is of note that their role did not continue into phase three (from April 2024 onwards). Their attendance in professional meetings had benefits because of their local connections and knowledge but also challenges (for the same reasons). This raised the matter of how they could be integrated into professional

arrangements if they were to become part of any future arrangements without compromising confidentiality.

Contributing to developments

Whilst these meetings addressed the need for collective case discussions and information sharing, they did not address where the development of GA was positioned with the Probation team and how they could provide input. The POs wanted to be involved and felt it was feasible because they were a small team and there was the potential to influence what was going on which was not the case in WS. They felt there was an ad hoc approach to discussing some of the more important issues and no shared plan. Sometimes significant items were added to the end of the fortnightly case management meeting, when they should have been a main item. This was recognised as an attempt to locate the discussion somewhere, but it was not necessarily in the right place.

There were plans to introduce monthly operational meetings on Thursday mornings with all the partners and to keep everyone informed about what was going on but these were infrequent (often cancelled) and were not established and sustained as intended. Difficulties arose because the partner (the Charity) which was tasked with convening them became demotivated by the lack of support from the POs and found it difficult to direct what they did, which made the meeting hard to embed in GA's structure. The partner observed that if the POs did not like what was being proposed or did not see its value (particularly if it detracted from case management time and meeting their statutory obligations), it did not happen:

'I can't tell Probation what to do. I'm quite skilled at it, but after a certain amount of time you need that backing a bit. I can influence people without being in a position of authority. That's not a problem. I can shape things without being the lead on things, but ultimately it needs the head. Who's the head honcho, do you know what I mean? No one's the head honcho until something gets set or funding needs to change, and then there's a head honcho. But day to day it's...' (Partner 5)

The partner did not feel they had the autonomy or authority (over the Probation Service) to make the meetings happen. They were also developing negative attitudes towards the Probation Service, which may have influenced their views about what was and was not possible. HMPPS regarded some of the meetings as working better as time went on and wanted to resolve the monthly operational meeting to make it more effective:

'I think there's still the monthly ops-type thing that's missing, and I think a bit of a quick discussion at the end of the case discussion, like the AOB of the case discussion, seems to be becoming the substitute for that. that's a poor substitute. It needs to be a proper conversation. I think if we reinstate that properly, whether it's fortnightly, whether it's a monthly ops meeting, whether it's a half an hour, I think that will help to get everything in the right place.' (HMPPS 2)

Not feeling fully informed would always exist to some extent, because there was a degree of spontaneity in how GA operated:

'...because someone will come in and say, "There's this service," or one of the social prescribers will come in and say, "Oh, do you know about this?" That does just depend on who's in on that day.' (HMPPS 2).

Whilst a monthly operational meeting would help in sharing information with the team about contacts made, it was dependant on someone organising the communications and there was a challenge in not repeatedly telling people what they already knew:

'I mean, the Pavilion is a good example. Desperate to get in, and every couple of days I have a message or a call with a person and it's like, how often do I tell the probation

team that the kitchen is going to be fitted at the end of this week? It's really hard'. (HMPPS 2)

The SPO agreed that having a monthly/six weekly meeting which was not case focused and included partner updates was needed and should in the future include the Community Engagement Workers being employed by HMPPS to ensure they were part of the communication structure. Mechanisms need to be agreed about how the relationship with the men, the POs and other partners would work and what information they needed from each other. HMPPS considered that some of the problems experienced were unique to GA because of the third-party role it had. If GA had been under the direct control of the Probation Service, some of the communication problems would have been less likely to occur. For example, if there were *'a Community Connector type role, that sits under the SPO or whatever. I think that makes it a much neater, smoother process, and then that person is fully embedded in that team'* (HMPPS 2), but this would rely on the SPO understanding the role and the Community Connector being able to carry out the function.

HMPPS and partner meetings

A further strand was the communication that HMPPS had with the partners and what that looked like in terms of monitoring progress and discussing developments. In contractual terms partners submitted regular progress reports to HMPPS (which were not examined as part of the evaluation). Partners were asked about the efficacy of the meetings which took place with HMPPS. In phase one all the communication had been through the lead partner (the CIC) which led to them instructing the CDO which did not have a direct voice in any of the discussions. This was rectified by introducing joint monthly partnership meetings. These carried on in phase two under the new partnership arrangements with one of the partners being tasked to organise the meetings and agendas which had mixed results. The partner (the Charity) was sceptical about the meetings and felt their purpose and intention was not always clear, that they operated more as an information exchange than a planning forum and eventually started to disengage. They considered there were too many actions which were not completed, it was not always evident what the discussions were leading to and there was a disconnect as the meeting did not address what was important to the men (it was not apparent whether these concerns were shared). The CDO thought the meetings initially resulted in more structure but became less effective and had similar observations about their efficacy. By phase three the monthly partnership meetings were taking place between the Probation Service (SPO), HMPPS and the CDO. A more focused agenda (with 'structured standing items') was introduced which examined the workings of the project, venue management, staffing matters and workloads, grant administration, planned activities, a forward look and action log. HMPPS took responsibility for arranging and chairing the meeting:

'We've got [administration support] doing minutes and following up with an action log and various things like that and putting a proper agenda I think it's working because we've got the right partners around the table, because we trust each other, and we can work through some of these knotty things'. (HMPPS 2).

Engaging with the probation team

Despite these improvements some of the problems previously described continued. The POs continued to feel they lacked a voice in some of the big decisions that were made. Comments persisted about *'you had to be there at the time' or you don't find out or hear it on the grapevine or see it when it's advertised on the Ministry of Justice portal'* (PO 7), which was a specific reference to plans to recruit two community engagement officers in 2024. This PO said they were not asked for their views, was not sure the role was needed or what it would entail and had found out about the plans from a colleague sitting at a communal table within GA:

'Yeah. That's mind-boggling, and I'm still not sure what the role is going to entail. We've been told that it could be just someone that's obviously employed by HMPPS that can

build links between probation and different parts of the community but because they work for HMPPS and not an outside agency they've got more control over what they do.....' (PO 7).

'Yeah, and there's two of them. We're not even sure that we need one, let alone two. No one's actually asked us what we feel is missing or what we'd like that role to look like, or how they can work well with us. We've just been told that these people are.... going to be recruited, and I suppose we'll just find out in April how they fit in'. (PO 7).

'I'm still not sure what the role is and how it's going to fit in with us. It's decisions like that that we're just not involved in. There's no discussion. There might be a discussion, but it might be a one-on-one discussion with someone. It's not a group discussion. It's not a Grand Avenues discussion'. (PO 7).

The decision-making was regarded as very 'top down' and although the SPO was consulted on the big decisions, the team felt they were included after the decision had been made, not in its formation and did not feel they had any real investment in what was being decided:

'I don't remotely feel like we would have any involvement in the actual decision making, but yeah just sort of communication coming down has always been pretty bad'. (PO 2)

The SPO viewed this differently. Although the ultimate decisions lay with HMPPS, POs were consulted when changes were under consideration. The team had been involved in weighing up the options of whether to stay at the Support Centre. When a new venue was identified (the Pavillion) which could be a permanent base, the POs were invited to visit and discuss its operation. The SPO could not think of any major changes the team had not been involved in. There was regular supervision, conversations about what was happening, and the team were asked whether they wanted to raise anything with the HMPPS Strategy Lead. A possible reason for the different views was expectation and what the POs wanted (in the same way as the partners had views on involvement). There were differences of opinion about how they saw GA and what they believed it should be doing. Views on involvement also varied depending on what the decision was about. Some felt there could be more discussion about what they needed on a day-to-day basis, all felt there could be a better flow of information and specific GA Probation focused meetings. Communication could be complicated and sometimes convoluted, but this may have reflected trying to get the arrangements right.

For HMPPS some of the issues raised were more about trust, because '*everyone was on a different page*', particularly the commissioned partners. There had been a lot of attempts to work out what needed to be done which affected what happened and sometimes there was a lack of clarity about how things were going to progress:

'I think there's been a lot of figuring out, "What are we doing? Then if this is what we're doing, who's responsible for doing that thing, and then who's role is it to communicate some of those things, and then how do we communicate some of the things that where there's an impact?" Recognise it's been really challenging'. (HMPPS 2)

GA had been in a process of almost continual change and communication could possibly have addressed the uncertainties more; '*We don't know. We've not done this before. Here are the steps we're taking, or here's what we're doing to explore that'.* (HMPPS 2). One of the challenges was that although GA was a team, it was also teams within a team. HMPPS had grant oversight of the commissioned partners, but did not line manage the SPO, and each organisation had different ways of working. There were also different decision-makers within and outside of GA (some of whom were not based in the locality), who made decisions which impacted on the project:

'One example was the new PSO, one day ... I was sat in the centre, and she said, "Oh, bye, I'll see you in about a month," and I said, "Oh, where are you going?" And she said, "I've been posted to [another team]." As the person who is supposed to

be responsible for this, I had not been told that we were going to lose a probation service officer'. (HMPPS 2)

The consequence was the Probation team asked the Strategy Lead about matters they didn't necessarily know about or have a response to. For example, when senior leaders visited GA, they suggested that the team would be given a dedicated case administrator, but this did not transpire and resulted in the Strategy Lead being asked by the Probation team what was going on, which they could not resolve. Despite these difficulties by phase three there was a more positive trajectory, although some still felt that GA could have benefitted from project management and needed a specific operational meeting which concentrated on the development of the project and sharing information of interest to all partners.

Project management

The POs commented on the decision-making in the early days of GA. They understood the direction of the project came from HMPPS (and the Strategy Lead) but were unclear at times about the role of other HMPPS staff. For example, a project manager had been appointed at the commencement of GA who did not act in that capacity and was more of a data analyst; *'we all thought he was a leader because of the title, but he wasn't.... but he did not seem to have a direct impact on telling us, sharing any'* (PO 6). Further, they did not feel that a HMPPS project support worker had contributed to the early development of the project despite what was being presented, found it difficult to question and later were initially unsure of what the role of the HMPPS PSO was (in phase three). The POs felt that some of the HMPPS staff who were close to the operational side did not fully understand Probation's functions. It was also unclear in the early stages of GA what the relationship was between HMPPS, and the Probation Service and who was providing direction:

'We just didn't know if it was [the Strategy Lead's] role and then when we first started, we would have emails back and forth when [SPO] was our manager. So, you'd have an email from [SPO] and then you'd have an email from [HMPPS], and it felt like there was a big power struggle going on And then you'd have emails back and forward and then there would be a, "I'll email you separately...." and things like that'. (PO 2)

'If you asked who was in control out there, you don't have a clue, do you?' (PO 5).

Despite these comments, there was agreement that one of GA's strengths was HMPPS's involvement and the appointment of the Strategy Lead who was willing to listen, address problems as they arose and made changes when needed. The POs felt that if there had been a more consistent presence from a full-time SPO, some of the communication problems might not have arisen (particularly in the early days) as they would have provided guidance about what operational changes could be accommodated by the Probation team. The POs thought this would have helped to make sense of some of the decision-making and provided them with a better understanding of what was going on, particularly some of the initiatives and activities that were being developed. They felt the SPO was empowered to some extent and had made a big difference in improving communication, but they were not responsible for the partners. GA needed someone who had the authority to manage the entire team:

'There is a senior Probation presence at times, but they have multiple responsibilities and as they are not present all the time, its difficult to go to them for guidance. As a probation officer [they] also do not have jurisdiction over everyone else. 'Then again, as a probation officer, why would they be in control of everyone? There needs to be some sort of a project lead here, I think, more often that has, "Well, these are the goals for today. This is what we're going to do. This is what we're trying for you. This is what we want in a month." You know? It seems like everyone's winging it'. (PO 5)

'But yeah, I do feel that's the main weakness, the communication and we do need somebody here for us that can give us some direction and give us a little bit of autonomy to say, "we could do that, go on'. (PO 4)

Some of the partners felt that GA could have benefitted from an independent project manager with a background in multi-agency working to work with the team to determine how the vision could be developed, to be responsible for communications and keeping everyone informed. This required an individual who understood Probation and its functions who would have authority over the entire team including the POs. These views were interesting as HMPPS's position was not to appoint a 'qualified project manager', whereas some GA team members thought the role was necessary and would have brought clarity to planning processes and improved communication. This reflects partners wanting to work in a familiar way which contrasted with HMPPS wanting to develop something more unique and co-produced. A period of capacity building at the start may also have helped to define direction and responsibilities more (a point made by the CDO).

Conclusions

GA demonstrated the complexity of working with different teams and individuals and the challenges of trying to find effective ways of getting planning and communication structures right when engaging with agencies and individuals with diverse opinions and expectations of what should happen. HMPPS leadership was resilient in trying to find solutions, particularly in relation to communication to get the right discussions in the right place, which improved matters and may also have got easier with fewer partners and changes in team members.

Developing plans about what GA should have been doing regarding its objectives had also been problematic. The proposal to relocate Probation to the community, develop a supportive team which benefitted the men and POs and increased the network of support for GA remained constant. Where complications occurred it was due to expectations about what GA should be doing to transform Probation practice because of its original branding as 'an innovative project'. On reflection innovation in addition to relocation and the establishment of community working may have been too ambitious. Where the project appeared to struggle was in systematically addressing the original objectives and determining what the plan should be for each objective.

In part this relates to what GA was intended to be and whether it should have been doing more. GA went through three distinct phases and at the end of the evaluation period was moving to a fourth with the identification of a new venue and the recruitment of Community Engagement Workers. This suggested that consolidating arrangements and finding stability and consistency were more pressing priorities (than innovation) and needed to be achieved before further change could be made. GA strengthened its team with additional project management support from within HMPPS which gave it more scope to investigate areas of interest. Exploring how activity could be co-produced with the men on Probation and the community was still an area for development.

Chapter Eight: Visiting Support Services/Partners and Peer Mentors

Introduction

As indicated in previous chapters GA was made up of several different components. Support was provided from different sources which included partners commissioned by HMPPS to undertake community development work and provide support to the POs and men on Probation and the activities and befriending which was undertaken by staff at the Support Centre. There were two other elements when GA operated from the Centre:

- Mainstreams services (Visiting Partners) which had been invited to attend the Support Centre on Wednesday or Thursday either by HMPPS or staff at the Centre, which included the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Citizens Advice, the Council's Into Work Advice Service, a Drugs Agency and a Housing Association.
- Peer mentors who welcomed men on Probation to the Centre, built relationships with them and supported them with agreed activities.

GA operated in a unique way for a period through these combined activities. This chapter focuses on the role of the visiting partners, Probation's views of the support provided by them (as opposed to the commissioned partners) and the role of peer mentors.

Visiting partner support

The DWP was regarded as helpful for individuals who were already in the benefits system, (those new to it still had to make an initial claim online). Those who had benefits sanctions did not always understand why they '*could not get to grips with all the commitments*' (PO 7) and could end up with significant periods without any money. The DWP worker was able to look at their case, establish the situation and provide advice and guidance. This helped individuals who struggled to make the enquiries needed because they did not have a phone (or one with sufficient credit), did not know their log on details and did not have anyone to assist them:

'I had one who he was street homeless, he didn't have a phone, but he was going to be coming into [Support Centre] every week and [the DWP worker] was like, "I can catch up with you here," and then that takes that bit off you because obviously he's got no access to his journal'. (PO 2)

The POs and the men on Probation felt they had a good service from the DWP. When the worker was absent from GA for several months the service was missed. Although GA had support workers who helped with financial issues, they did not have access to the DWP system, which was sometimes what was required. The involvement of the Council's Into Work Advice Service (which provides free and informal drop-in sessions at local hubs and community buildings for individuals looking for work or to upskill their employment), was helpful in addressing vocational needs, and could assist the Probation Service to meet its employment targets.²⁶ However, not all agencies which attended the Support Centre were regarded as the right partners. The Housing Association only dealt with people living in its own accommodation. A representative from the Local Authority Housing department would have been able to assist with housing assessments, homelessness and tenancy support. The input of other agencies was variable, for example referrals were made to an organisation for additional peer mentor support, but nothing came of it. In all instances, the effectiveness of the visiting partners, depended on the individual worker and how committed and pro-active they were in supporting the men:

'We've got [name of service] that are coming in here. They've been coming out throughout the whole of the time I've been here, but the people that have worked for them beforehand that I've referred some of my men on to have been hit and miss in

²⁶ [Community Performance Annual, update to March 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

terms of engagement. We've had [name of worker] in the last few months and she's brilliant and does her job really well. It doesn't matter that it's [name of service]. It matters that it was [name of worker]'. (Partner 5)

A positive connection was made to a local initiative called *Shape Your Future* which assisted individuals to improve their employment prospects (and worked alongside the Council's Into Work Advice Service). The POs felt the worker was empathetic, invested in what GA was trying to achieve and provided timely support which helped the men to progress. For the Probation team it was essential that any agency they engaged with did what it said it would and employed knowledgeable and committed workers, who engaged the men and were interested in helping them. They considered that the Community Engagement Workers also needed these characteristics. Some questioned whether the right agencies were present and what the rationale was for them being in the Support Centre, as it wasn't always clear what they were offering or doing. The POs did not feel that a relationship with a Drugs Agency had worked particularly well, as there was not a clear plan of how they would work with the Probation team and what the mutual expectations were.

'So, I think [Agency] came prematurely. I don't think it was planned out, so we didn't even know half of us that they were going to be here, but there was no sort of urge from them to try to work together'. (PO 6)

Gaps in services

The agencies which were present at the Support Centre had generally been invited by the Charity as they did not want to be a service provider (the exception being the DWP which was invited by HMPPS). The presence of various services at the Centre was a way of attracting people to it (the arrangements were not put in place exclusively for the Probation Service). The identification of which agencies should attend and why was not assessed in a systematic way. There had been a suggestion in the early stages that Probation should do this, but the POs felt it was unrealistic (see also chapter four):

'Like, at one point they asked who we want here, and for us to contact them. What? When do you want me to fit that in? I don't live in Ely for starters. I commute to here. I don't know what local services are here. I'm not going to start phoning them'. (PO 5)

The POs had various ideas about what they felt was needed and what the support should look like. This included GA having its own counsellor (ideally a psychotherapist), who could help individuals with substance misuse problems (particularly those who needed ongoing support). An effective arrangement with the right Drugs Agency could have provided assistance with this. There was a gap in psychiatry and advice and assistance in signposting to health services. A psychiatrist was based in WS, but one dedicated to GA was also desirable. The POs wanted improved links with the Health Board regarding sexual health, psychiatry, psychology and a local community Mental Health Centre to be able to better address mental health concerns. Those leaving custody required improved access to Adult Mental Health Services and assistance in obtaining medication. Links could have been made to an organisation which dealt with prisoner resettlement, the St Giles Trust²⁷ which had been identified as a possible activity for the commissioned partners in phase one but did not progress, possibly because of the differences of opinion about the direction of the project at that stage. There had been a gap in relations with local GPs and the understanding was that this was something GA would address. The CDO improved the situation because of its work with a GP Cluster in the locality (Clusters aim to develop the quality of care and services to local communities). POs felt this had enhanced the relationship with local GPs and led to better and easier access to appointments (within a week) and for a mental health crisis on the day.

²⁷ [St Giles Cymru and South West - St Giles](#)

GA secured the attendance of a clinical nurse practitioner (a Community Psychiatric Nurse who attended on a fortnightly basis), so some progress was made regarding access to health services. More focus on trauma-informed approaches could assist those involved in domestic violence because of the link to intergenerational violence as could closer connections to Victim Support, domestic abuse units, the Drive Project²⁸ (which tackles harm in relationships) and any other local services which could be identified. The POs also felt that GA could be enhanced with support workers (for example a WISDOM Lifestyle worker type of approach), to accompany the men to appointments to reduce some of the attrition which occurred and to activities they were interested in to help them to take the first steps and become more confident in attending on their own. As they did not have enough of this type of support, at one point, one of the POs was regularly attending a community meal outside of working hours and inviting men who they knew might be interested. However, there were limitations in what could be achieved with the finite resource GA had and how it functioned.

Co-location of services with the Probation Service

One of the early ideas had been whether GA should be a 'One Stop Shop', with the Probation Service based in the same location with different agencies. POs described frequently dealing with people in crisis and not being able to give them the (prompt) support they needed was one of the biggest barriers faced:

'Mental health I've been in probation for quite a long time so I've seen the resources going into community mental health just getting less and less and less and I did a home visit with [another PO] this week to [Hospital] for one of hers ... he doesn't need to be there, but he's gone to housing and they've told him that they haven't got anything for him and the hospital morally can't discharge him until he's got somewhere to go'. (PO 2)

'I've had a guy come in yesterday and Universal Credit are now threatening to sanction him unless he provides a sick note... I can't get hold of the doctors. If you don't ring at eight o'clock the appointments for that day, the appointments have gone. And that doctor opens them back up at quarter to two. You're never going to get an appointment for that afternoon when you're ringing at quarter to two. They gave me an appointment for next Thursday'. (PO 2)

In addition, it was uncertain whether the person concerned would follow up on agreed actions:

'Half of the time I send people away to go somewhere else they don't do it. I'm having a six-week battle with someone at the moment to get them down the library. It's not hard. Walk to the library. You know you need to do it. You know you need to register. You know you're going to be homeless, but he won't do that'. (PO 5)

'We'd be like, "Okay, yeah, you've got some issues with your family, give this number a call," ... and then they'll never ring that number because they might have anxiety, or they might feel like they've not been listened to'. (PO 3).

'There are people that you talk to, and you can be blue in the face saying, "I need you to do this job or whatever today," and they leave Off they go, and then they're off to chaos. And I understand it's a choice'. (PO 1)

When located with other services, the men were more easily connected and there was immediacy of access (see also chapter nine):

'So, when you come here, trying to connect people to services is a lot easier, being part of Grand Avenues, where you have them sat across the table to you, whereas I

²⁸ [The Drive Project – The Drive Partnership](#)

guess with WS you've got to send an email to an email address with no face, no name, and then wait a few days. It's a lot easier to do it here'. (PO 5)

By its nature, GA changed the way the POs practiced, as they could directly approach one of GA's support workers or Visiting Partners and ask for assistance and/or introduce them to the person concerned, so problems were getting immediate attention, and the men could see progress being made on their behalf. This reduced the need to make referrals which could be time consuming, and the POs did not have to 'constantly ask people' for advice about what to do, (as they would in WS):

'Here, I can call them in I don't have to arrange three different meetings'. (PO 5)

However, expert knowledge and assistance did not guarantee better outcomes, although it did mean expectations could be better managed:

'There's no magic pathway to getting someone a house. I'm in that queue the same way that they're in that queue on the phone, and stuff. The magic that they think we have, the power to do these things, is non-existent. We're just doing the best we can with the resource we've got rather than, "I will get you a flat." It's, "No, this is going to be hard work, but with this support we're going to look at the opportunities and get you in the best place to get one." Very different thing to be saying, and they take it very differently'. (PO 1)

One of the consequences of having multiple agencies involved was there was duplication. The decision of who was best placed to provide the support needed was that of the PO. For PO 2 it was determined by which service was available on a particular day (*'it depends on who is in the room'*) and whether the problem was pressing or not. If a particular GA support worker was available, the preference was to go to them because they had a consistent presence, and less so to another as they worked part time.

What should engagement with external services look like?

There were differences of opinion about whether being co-located with other services in a 'One Stop Shop' was the right approach. In some respects, the Support Centre had established one with different services in attendance on different days alongside the commissioned partners. Having close connections to the most relevant and helpful services was valued. Others felt that better awareness was needed of existing services in the community and how to access them. It was a challenge to secure the presence of multiple agencies in several different venues, due to partner and venue capacity and sufficient footfall of service users to make it worthwhile. The services of some of the Visiting Partners were not well used and despite their presence it was not always possible to receive help on the same day. For HMPPS it was a matter of getting the arrangements right, to ensure the service would be well used as this could impact on future requests for assistance:

'If they're seeing one person a day. It's just not good value, and if we were to make further requests, they might look at it and say, "It's not worth our time'. (HMPPS 2)

The degree to which agencies integrated with the Probation Service was variable. Some came in, set up and were not introduced to Probation and vice versa. Other agencies agreed to attend the Support Centre without considering whether their service would have sufficient take-up. GA needed to ensure the need for the service was there and was utilised in the best way. For example, there had been pressure to accept a smoking cessation service, before establishing whether it was needed or not and how many people would realistically want to engage with it (this did not progress). It was not a priority when there were more pressing needs (around finance particularly). Similarly, a request was received from a Self-Help Addiction Recovery Service, but before agreeing to progress, the SPO was going to determine the level of need and whether it was the right agency to engage with.

Future plans

HMPPS wanted GA to be outward looking which could be achieved through effective community engagement work and making bespoke arrangements for each of the men. It did not want GA to *'turn into a kind of a service-land where you've got all of these different providers on laptops. We were keen to try and reduce that'* (HMPPS 2). The criteria had to be that the service could meet the needs of the men and support the Probation Service. Going forward the aim was to co-locate with fewer agencies, to engage those regarded as critical and to develop better community connections. It was limiting to say that a community-based approach could only work if *'we can take people across the room'* (PO 1), accepting the drop-out rates for external appointments when not supported were (anecdotally) high. There was value in making initial introductions if situated in the same building, but that could be achieved in other ways. It was not essential for services to be in attendance every day, it was a matter of having an agreement about a named contact and knowing how to access the service:

'... I said to the [name of organisation], "Do me a favour. Can you come up on Wednesday, and see the two guys we work ... with, I'm going to invite them down and we can see both.... That can be achieved'. (PO 1)

It was questioned whether more could have been made of connections with the Council run Hub, which had a long-standing arrangement with different agencies in attendance on designated days and offered appointments on a drop-in basis. HMPPS recognised this, was trying to develop better links with the various agencies to access the available support and to avoid duplication and the necessity to be in each other's spaces. Irrespective of who was part of the arrangements, the main consideration was ensuring the working environment was right for the Probation team and to build from there.

For HMPPS, the key agencies were the DWP, the community psychiatric nurse and the Into Work Advice Service. Regarding the latter, it was as much to do with the worker as the agency, who was regarded as a Community Connector. They had good local knowledge, could access resources and had helped GA (not only in working with the men) but in finding a venue (the Pavilion) through their local links. From a support worker perspective, it was essential to work with services which could meet basic needs. In this regard, the DWP (for benefits support) and Local Authority Housing Advisers (access to the housing list, emergency accommodation, temporary accommodation etc) were important as they were able to alleviate hardship, but it was accepted that efforts were also needed to maximise access to the services provided by the commissioned partners, notably the CDO. When GA moved to the Local Hub, the DWP was part of the arrangement and the Council's Into Work Advice Service was based there on one of the days as part of its usual activity.

Peer Mentors

GA employed three part time peer mentors, with lived experience. The role was created in the first year (phase one) and became more refined in the second year (phase two). They were employed for up to 16 hours a week. Three peer mentors were interviewed and asked what had attracted them to the role. All three had previous experience of Probation supervision. For one it was some time ago and the other two had been reporting to a PO at the Support Centre (which changed when they became mentors). All commented on enjoying spending time at the Centre and the opportunity to mentor became a natural extension of this:

'I would turn up like ten in the morning and I wouldn't leave until like three or four in the afternoon. I'd just spend all day there. I just loved it'. (Mentor 2)

Two of the three attended the Men Changing Lives group and the third was looking for volunteering opportunities (as part of recovery from drug addiction). When GA was able to offer paid peer mentorships all three were encouraged to apply and secured positions. One of the mentors had an employment history in an unrelated field, but the other two did not have

any substantive work experience and did not necessarily regard themselves as employable because of their 'lived experience' (addiction and offending histories). All three mentors had reached the point where they wanted to change their lifestyle. For two it was realising that having a challenging personal history did not necessarily exclude them from employment-related opportunities. For Mentor 1 there was a pivotal moment when they met a GA support worker with lived experience who had turned their life around. They made an instant connection, and inspired Mentor 1 to believe they could do the same:

'Well basically, he told me about his life experience and how I could use my life experience... so I could benefit from my poor past experiences, and I could actually be in a position to help other people as well, and I didn't know I could do that before... I could see the position he was in. He was smartly dressed and [had] a good job, a nice guy and yeah, it had an influence on me. He was a big influence on me'. (Mentor 1)

'So, when you meet someone like that, you realise blinking heck, I didn't know that I was capable of doing what he is doing now, but I am and that's a massive thing as well because believing in yourself is a really big thing.... He said "look you are fully capable of this"..... I had never been told that before. I didn't even think it. I always thought that I was down there and like professionals were up there'. (Mentor 1)

Mentor 1 started to feel more self-confident and to take more personal care of themselves and their appearance, which they associated with having a purpose in life. Through another volunteering experience they met someone who helped them to get dental treatment, which was significant. Mentor 1 described it as '*really important*' as they felt they had previously looked '*terrible*' and lacked the confidence to talk to people because of it.

Another mentor wanted to become a community worker, but because of significant involvement in crime assumed '*you can't have a job like that*'. Through volunteering they learned they could become a peer mentor or support worker and felt that '*owning*' what they had done, recognising their mistakes, and taking the opportunity presented would help them to move away from a life which was a '*mess*' to one that was more fulfilling. They felt that lived experience gave them a second chance to '*become what you wanted to be before you done crime*' (Mentor 2)

For Mentor 3 the decisive moment came through experiencing unconditional acceptance. They had been recalled to prison for breaching licence conditions and felt that because of their offending they were seen as (and regarded themselves as) a '*criminal and a bad person*'. These negative perceptions affected their mental health and well-being. Through attending the Support Centre, they became curious about the considerate attitude of the GA staff (and why strangers would care for others), who they experienced as non-judgemental, not concerned about past history and who encouraged them to see something different in themselves (which hadn't always been the case in previous involvement with professionals). This was in tandem with their PO showing genuine care and concern which enabled them to understand past experiences more fully and to be open to new experiences and opportunities:

'There is a second chance out there. I started to see more of myself and a future. I did see myself taking steps forward after that. Until then I didn't see it.... It was a massive, massive moment for me and yeah, I've not looked back since'. (Mentor 3)

'I genuinely thought I was just going to be stuck in a loop for the rest of my life. I thought this is my life now, let me just accept it. And that's why I was receptive to this'. (Mentor 3)

'They cared in the sense that okay; you've made mistakes and stuff. We're moving forward from it ... but they didn't judge me for it and that was massive – huge because ... I was on probation ... I've been on it for about three years ... But the three years I've been on it and for the whole time every time I used to go for my appointments, I just

felt like criminalised.... I didn't see nothing more of myself other than just a criminal, just a bad person'. (Mentor 3)

Recruitment and role

The peer mentors were initially recruited and managed by the CIC, and it was envisaged that their role would be 'Community Connectors' (Partner 1). However, it was not a clear what they would be doing, and induction was minimal, but some useful activities were undertaken which formed the basis of the peer mentor role:

'So, [name of mentor] is also accompanying some of the more wobbly men for their first time if they want to work on the gardens up in [the CDO]. He's been to [the homeless hostel] with somebody. He shares his experience appropriately. He really knows his way round the area; he lives in the area as well. He's spoken to the housing associations about what you need when you come out of prison. Sat in with GPs about what works, what doesn't. He's done a video for local pharmacists about scripts'. (Partner 1)

Following an organisational change within GA, the recruitment and supervision of the peer mentors was transferred to the Charity. At this stage more structure was put in place including an attendance rota, so the mentors had an established routine, they were given a work phone and laptop and were treated as professional members of staff. They had responsibility for some of the activities the Support Centre organised. This included creating and delivering a mental-health related podcast, involvement with a gardening group, being the point of contact for boxing activities, accompanying the men on Probation on appointments and participating in day trips away from the Centre. They were appointed as 'meeters and greeters', which involved introducing themselves to the men who were attending Probation appointments, asking them if there was anything they would like assistance with, telling them about the activities they could engage in at the Centre and generally building relationships. The mentors participated in morning briefings with the POs and other support staff to discuss who was attending that day and whether they could support any of the men. They felt this was collaborative and inclusive:

'.. we'll sit with Probation in the morning first, get a list of all the appointments and we'll ask them does anyone require anything from us? Do we need to know anything about anyone or whatever? ... so, when this person comes in, we know we can give them the extra bit or say no, this person's all right, or, he's been having a rough week. Just don't be pushy or something. Little things like that'. (Mentor 3)

Support for the role

The POs were supportive of the involvement of the peer mentors and complimentary about their skills, expertise, personal backgrounds, local connections and knowledge. They were very good at putting people at their ease and promoting the activities the men on Probation could join in with:

'I felt when it was Mentor 2 and Mentor 1 it was just great that they were from the community, they knew people Was a massive bonus.... They're brilliant when people come in ... I can see out of the corner of my eye somebody's come in who I know is a little bit anxious, they would just sit down with them, cup of tea and they didn't really want to know me when I was ready for them. So, they were like, "I'm quite happy sat here." A few of them would kind of say how inspirational Mentor 1 was because they knew him from a previous life. Particularly if they're still in the middle of that chaotic drug using life and they've just been speaking to Mentor 1 and he had such a brilliant way with them, that then they'd be like, "Oh that's what I want." And you'd be like oh I'll tell him later because he'd be really pleased'. (PO 2)

There was a significant advantage in engaging people with lived experience, provided there was proper structure and support, as they were role models for others who saw them succeeding in overcoming their problems:

'I think the lived experience is good because I just think for the men on probation, having a chat with somebody with lived experience is - we can come across as preaching and we just haven't got that experience, so we don't know what it's like. So, I do think that's a great asset. And yeah, I do think for the community aspect of things it should be somebody from this community really. So yeah, for me, probation, I'm none of those things. I'm not from this community and I don't have lived experience, so yeah, I'm going to come across as the preachy one. So yeah, I'd like somebody to work alongside who's the complete opposite'. (PO 2)

The peer mentors were asked about the Probation Service role in the community and the use of peer mentors in its activities. They all saw the benefits of the Probation Service being integrated into the community and of working with mentors (with lived experience) who could develop relationships with the men being supervised. They stressed they could relate in a way that professionals might not be able to and that it was important to have this blend of experience when trying to assist and support people who were going through similar experiences:

'So, the agencies I have been introduced to and worked with in the past ... They wanted to help, their hearts were in the right place, but they couldn't empathise with me 100%. ... You really, really can't understand if you just read it, you have to live it'. (Mentor 1)

As well as the impact on themselves they all talked positively about what they were able to do for others. They felt that a familiar face was reassuring and helped to create trust. Knowing people from their community assisted with first interactions and in developing and maintaining ongoing relations:

'90% of the people I know through growing up, just being out there [in Ely]'. (Mentor 2)

'Some of them I have literally known all my life and its like I know the majority of them just were dealt a bad hand. Unfortunately, their circumstances led them to make bad decisions. It doesn't mean they are bad people at all'. (Mentor 3)

The mentors felt they were non-judgemental, accepting of others and understood what some of the men were going through. They could be a point of contact when problems arose, encouraged others to utilise the Support Centre and to see the benefits of making better choices in life:

'I've become really good friends with them and speak to them outside and any time they're feeling any sort of way, they'll get in touch with me and by the end of the call, text, whatever, everything's all right again. I love being able to do that. Its really nice. Its so good'. (Mentor 3)

They all had experiences of seeing change in others and of sometimes playing a part in it:

'... a man was introduced to me, and he suffered from anxiety and literally wouldn't look me in the eyes. He was so shy and so nervous. So, I started taking him to the gym, started working with him and we have built up such a relationship like now, he's lost lots of weight, he's so confident.... Watching him walk around, literally looking people in the eyes, having these meetings. Literally for me that is what Grand Avenues and [the Centre] is about. Everyone is literally being there for each other' (Mentor 2)

'Because one of the boys I have known him for years ... for like the past seven years, I think the longest he was out of jail was five weeks ... He's a self-confessed jail head... He's started to put his foundations in place, and he is doing good and that is massive

to see. I've seen him in jail and the person he was ... to the person he is today, two different people... (Mentor 3)

The peer mentors felt their role was a way of giving back to their community. The change from being a beneficiary of GA to being a provider of support was significant:

'And it enables us to give back to our community because we all grew up in.... We all grew up here and a lot of us, haven't exactly done the best thing for the community, so it's enabling us to get directly involved to give stuff back and the family here, to be able to provide people that platform to do so, it's a really, really special thing'. (Mentor 3)

The peer mentors felt that GA was the way in which Probation should be delivered. The criminal justice system tended to remind individuals of what was wrong with them and what they had done wrong, but the approach taken by GA showed real care and concern:

'Probation should be focused around the person and how to help them, how to enable them to make better decisions, because I feel that personal touch was missing ... I'm now a massive advocate for it myself. It worked for me: I've seen it work for people. It should be the way probation works'. (Mentor 3)

Managing the mentors

The process of engaging with and working with the peer mentors wasn't entirely straightforward. Those involved found it was time-consuming to manage the issues which arose in and outside of their employment, they could not always be kept fully occupied and there were tensions at times between those who had been professional support workers (in substance misuse or housing) and those who had come from that lifestyle. It was suggested that the peer mentors could have been paired with professional support workers to learn how to undertake some of the basic activities, but it was not evident whether this was discussed or put in place or whether GA had the capacity for it. Care was also needed when individuals with lived experience were used as 'professional mouthpieces' to not ask too much of them. Support and praise were important but needed to be proportionate to what the peer mentors were doing, and they needed to be encouraged to behave professionally (attend on time and to conduct themselves appropriately):

'One of them, for example, didn't really do anything. I'm not going to beat around the bush. Then he'd get praised for doing these other little things and it was a real battle for me because I was like, no, I want to get this man work ready. He's got a lot of potential. He comes in, he makes his breakfast. He doesn't make anyone else a cup of tea. He's got none of that etiquette. He's still grabbing a foodbank if he can. It's all these things where he's just constantly still on the take, and I was like, "You've got to get out of that mindset from years of doing what you're doing'. (Partner 5)

Some of the professionals thought the management arrangements should have been stronger by having individual plans for each of the peer mentors which looked at their progression and what would happen once the mentorship ended. The plans could have addressed how volunteering and mentoring could enhance their skills, experience and employability and helped them to identify the next steps and the support needed. That said, some assistance was provided with job applications. Other considerations were whether the role should be limited to 18 months, whether HMPPS should be responsible for recruiting and managing the mentors, and whether they should be paid because of the impact on benefits:

'I found a few of my guys that would have wanted to have done something where they stepped up and were part of the whole process but found the responsibility of being paid and it being paid employment too much for them....If you're telling PIP and assessments, you can't do this, you can't do that, and then you're all of a sudden working voluntary, it changes the dynamic of your claim. ... The guys who actually show some interest

who then want to do something think, well, I've got to be careful, because I don't want to be accused... of saying I can do more than I can'. (PO 1).

Peer mentor views

Despite some of the difficulties, the peer mentors all gained useful experiences and insights from undertaking the role. None of them described having received any formal training, rather it was a question of learning on the job. They undertook some useful activities such as learning how to support others to make housing and benefits applications, which helped them to be more 'hands-on' and to develop relevant experience. One of them had undertaken restorative training to help them to support individuals with family problems and in repairing relationships. The peer mentors all stressed that it was vital to be supported to develop their talents, and continual encouragement helped them to acquire self-belief, pride and confidence:

'So, I get on the job support because I have been in a different world for so long, its still very early for me. So I haven't worked for 25 years and obviously I have been on the streets and things like that....I'm so grateful I have had the support and I've benefited from it so much...I've turned my life around in the space of a few months... that's since I have been coming here and engaging with Grand Avenues and the [Support Centre]...So, just stick with people, and be there ... and make sure they know you're there and then when they're ready, obviously try and give them extra encouragement'. (Mentor 1).

All three talked about improved self-esteem and self-worth, seeing value in themselves, the necessity of having positive influences around them and the transformative effect on them and their lifestyles. This came from feeling cared for, nurtured, having achievements no matter how small recognised and being valued as individuals:

'So, I think that's the main thing, it's given me is pride and confidence. Forget about everything else really, that's the main thing that has really, really changed my life it has, feeling that I am worth making the effort for. I never felt that before. I always just thought I was useless and a waste of space. And now I can see I've got good qualities and values that people are looking for..' (Mentor 1)

They all referred to a degree of personal fragility, whether it was dealing with mental health problems, or the resilience (and diligence) required in making significant life changes:

'I am still fighting demons inside myself where I am battling addictions and depression, just self-worth.... Yeah, a lot [has happened] and I think that's why I struggled with certain things, because its quite overwhelming at times. There's so much change'. (Mentor 2)

GA was a place where they felt safe and going there helped them to regulate their feelings and manage personal challenges. They felt the attitude and inclusiveness of the professional staff at GA made the difference and two of the mentors specifically referred to the Centre having a 'family atmosphere':

'... As soon as I walk in, I am going to be happy again. I know I am going to be all right. And it happens every time. Every time I come in with a negative, emotional mood, as soon as I am in here, I am fine'. (Mentor 3)

'So, it's a really nice warm environment, everyone is friendly and respectful and non-judgemental and honest, and I really needed that I did because I am so used to being judged everywhere I went'. (Mentor 2).

Identity

All three mentors recognised an identity shift in themselves and stressed the value of having opportunities for people with lived experience as a stepping stone to change. One of the

mentors, was able to demonstrate to others they had changed for the better and the importance of this being acknowledged:

'I've made mistakes, I've committed crime... my life was a mess ... I'm trying to change my life Its always been important for me, the way people think about me.... I used to do so much wrong, but with this job, it was a chance to make it right... It was a chance to rebuild what I had done wrong, rebuild me'. (Mentor 2)

Mentor 2 had posted information about the Men Changing Lives Group on Facebook (to raise local awareness) and received a very positive response, which had not been expected. The replies received were validating and motivating; *'You're doing good, this is amazing, good on you. You've changed your life'*. They recognised they were being viewed as having a non-criminal identity. The experience of peer mentoring had been highly significant (and led to them considering other similar opportunities):

'Its definitely made me grow up. I feel like I have taken responsibility for things that I have done in the past. I feel like its given me an outlet where I can express my feelings and I can be myself in here'. (Mentor 2)

For another whilst the experience had not initially been motivated by the desire to change, becoming a peer mentor had been enriching and led to improved emotional and mental well-being, to the extent that supporting and assisting others was being considered as a career choice. They stressed how happy they were in the role, felt a sense of pride and were pleased their parents could see the progress they had made. They felt the conversations they were having with others were meaningful and they were more *'emotionally intelligent'*, than when they had been in a *'regular job'*. The way they were treated at GA helped them to see themselves in a positive (not criminogenic) light.

'It's the most important part of my life at the moment because its finally ... I've finally found peace and happiness and it's all down to this"... I think to myself about how far I have come and how much I have to lose and it brings me back down ... It's like yeah, you've come too far to look back now, so the only way to look is forward and I can't stop smiling'. (Mentor 3).

Another talked about their previous identity:

'My identity was a drug addict and a homeless person. So, you kind of live up to it when you are in that situation... and I even identified as a homeless person even for like as long as two years after moving into my flat I had a bed, but I would sleep on the floor in a sleeping bag with all my clothes on and that.... I thought I was going to be a scumbag all my life I did and that I was going to be nothing ever'. (Mentor 1)

As a result of gaining confidence through volunteering and mentoring, the mentor started to think about permanent full-time employment and was successful in obtaining employment in a support worker role. They were recruited because of their lived experience and understanding of the challenges faced. When asked about their current identity, they saw themselves very differently:

'Proud, that's my identity now'. (Mentor 1)

All described enjoying what they did, of having found a sense of purpose and having a connectedness to their colleagues and community. The desire to help others to experience the same and to improve their lives was strong. In some instances, the language used when describing the process of change was restorative (accepting responsibility, making amends and wanting to give back). They all recognised the achievements made (a year ago one was *'doing nothing'* and another was in prison) and appeared to be on a desistance journey, with cessation of offending, the adoption of a non-offending identity, an increasing sense of belonging and recognition by others that they had changed for the better.

Conclusions

Input from the peer mentors worked well for a while, but the role was not continued when GA moved from the Support Centre which was regarded as a loss by some (particularly the lived experience element). GA did not have any plans to take mentoring further at the time as the intention was to return the focus of activity to community development and engagement. It was not one of GA's objectives to develop a peer mentoring project and as previously indicated if the use of peer mentors or volunteers were to be part of future arrangements their role, function and the support they required needed to be factored in and resourced. The right peer mentors could make a valuable contribution, but they needed to be properly managed and supported. It could be beneficial (individually and professionally) to offer real opportunities to people with lived experience. Meaningful paid employment and work experience gave those with limited vocational experience the knowledge that employment opportunities existed that did not exclude them.

Although not planned in a systematic way to start with, GA had developed a pathway for people with lived experience as the Support Centre provided a variety of volunteering opportunities, which could lead to paid peer mentorship. From this, one mentor found their first paid employment and applications were made for support worker positions in other organisations (although having a criminal record also proved to be an intractable barrier in some instances). The mentor with previous work experience was considering a career change to something more empathetic with their experiences of mentorship. However, challenges remained, in mainstream employers being prepared to provide employment. Two of the mentors applied for and were successful in obtaining support worker roles in other organisations but in both instances, the provisional offers were withdrawn when their full offending histories became known through DBS checks (full disclosures had been made).

Mentoring provided short term work experience to demonstrate employability and contributed to the creation of a CV, but what happened after that was unresolved, particularly whether the mentors would be assisted to find employment and whether any support would be provided in applying for work and in the probationary period with an employer if successful. The question of expectation was a massive one for the men who become mentors. They were encouraged to develop skills and experience but ultimately needed to find employers who had the confidence to employ them, which would help them to sustain a change in lifestyle, rather than being stuck in an existing one, which they feel they had outgrown and were ready to move on from. It was also evident that if individuals with lived experience were to be part of GA (or something similar) they needed dedicated support, appropriate management and clarity about what the individual and collective plan was to ensure that any aspirations were realistic and achievable and there was an exit strategy for them that would help them to progress and use the experience and knowledge they had gained.

Chapter Nine: The Support Needs of the Men and Responses to Them

Introduction

This chapter describes the assistance provided to the men on probation. It acknowledges the difficulties faced, the views of the men and POs in terms of what was provided by the commissioned partners and others, including the enrichment activity provide by the Charity and some concerns about dependency on professional services. It also explores some areas of Probation practice and concludes with how one man who received support from GA found his place in the community.

The types of problems that Probation Service users experience have been well documented, and GA was no different in this respect. POs described their 'usual caseload' as having challenging problems often associated with substance misuse, mental health, needing somewhere to live and having disordered and problematic relationships. These problems placed considerable demands on them:

'They're all things that we are banging our heads against the wall that there's just not the resources So yeah, they're pretty common themes that we're seeing across... the whole of Probation'. (PO 2)

There were significant experiences of trauma, one of the POs indicated they did not have a single person on their caseload who had not undergone some form of trauma, often characterised by misusing drugs and alcohol, being hypervigilant, 'going from one drama to another' (PO 7) and ultimately needing reassurance that what they were feeling was normal given their experiences:

'There's a few up here who were actually in the children's home up here, and they had horrific physical and sexual abuse in the care home. I can't remember what the operation was called, but it was massive, and the abuse that they were subjected to... it actually came out when there was a fight at a pub and it ended up being brought up in front of the police, and that's how a disclosure was made, and then the police investigated it and it was massive. It happened in the seventies and eighties. A lot of the men are dead. They've either overdosed, committed suicide, or they've ended up in the criminal justice system'. (PO 4)

One of the biggest difficulties was getting the men the help they needed. They could be 'brushed off', give-up on appointments and easily get disheartened:

'A lot of them, they're very macho up here and for them to go and say, "I don't feel very well, I don't feel like me", for them to say that and to pluck up the courage to do that, these are big burly men, real geezers. For them to go and say something like that is massive. So, when they go there, and they don't get the outcome... and I think some of the men are like, "they're just going to think I've gone there for drugs" and I'm like, "well no, not necessarily, they might offer you something else, they might offer you an alternative" and they're like, "I don't want to end up on drugs, it's no better than heroin'. (PO 4)

Support provided by the commissioned partners and others

The assistance provided to the men while attending the Support Centre broadly fell into the categories of providing help with practical problems, providing mental health and emotional support and undertaking advocacy to enable access to services and providing assistance in navigating complex bureaucratic systems. GA was able to deal with a range of problems because of the expertise in the team and the knowledge the support workers had about how to connect the men to external services or provide what was needed from within their own

organisations. The following sections describe the problems encountered with examples of the assistance provided.

Finance

From the case data examined the most commonly recurring problems were with finance, often benefits related. Responses included assisting those who were under sanction and not in receipt of any income or with a reduced income, sometimes because of failing to comply with requirements, often because of dysfunctional lifestyles and personal problems (including social anxiety) which made it difficult to attend appointments. The impact was inevitably hardship and lack of income to buy food and pay bills. It also excluded the individual from applying for any other benefits whilst the sanction was in place such as Cost-of-Living Support. This caused distress and impacted on fragile mental health. In some instances, GA initiated a Complex Needs Alert, for vulnerable individuals to prevent further sanctions being imposed and to raise awareness they had significant difficulties. Advice was also provided about appealing decisions and supporting appeals for example by involving their GP.

Other forms of assistance related to the benefits individuals might be eligible for and making benefits claims. For example, providing support with Personal Independence Applications²⁹ (PIPs), which help those with long terms physical or mental conditions and disabilities and applications to the Discretionary Application Fund³⁰ (DAF), which provides grants to alleviate hardship and pays for essential costs such as food, gas, electricity, clothing and emergency travel. The CDO was able to make these payments to individuals, could issue fuel payments and had access to a fund provided by Save the Children. It was calculated that between October 2022 and March 2024 it maximised the income for individuals associated with GA totalling £23,489 of which 40% were successful PIP applications. The CDO and the Charity also had community pantries and provided food parcels to those in need. The following is an example of how one of the men was assisted because of his problems with the benefits system:

POP 11 had been employed but had an accident at work which left him with a recurring health problem. He had been in receipt of sickness benefits and was considered fit for work despite being physically unable to undertake manual labour. His situation was a factor in his criminal behaviour:

'That's how I committed my offences. Because I went to work, then I got laid off, then I went to work on the bins, for the County Council, that's when I slipped and did my back in. So, I went on the sick. They took me off the sick and said, "No, you can go back to work," but I should have appealed it.....I couldn't go back to work because I couldn't walk ... So, that's how I ended up going back to being a criminal' (POP 11)

This led him into illegal activity which resulted in a custodial sentence. When he was released from prison, he discussed his problems with his PO who asked one of GA's support workers who specialised in benefits advice to assist him, which resulted in a successful PIP application. He indicated he would no longer need to offend as he would have sufficient income in the future:

'[Support worker] sorted out my sick benefit for me Yeah, I told her about the difficulties. She's done all the forms and now I've been awarded my PIP and that. There's no reason for me to commit any offences..... I don't want to be out there ... But now, the rent's getting paid, and I've got enough money to last the month until I get paid again, so what's the point? Who wants to go to jail really isn't it?' (POP 11)

²⁹ [Personal Independence Payment \(PIP\): What PIP is for - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/personal-independence-payment-pip)

³⁰ [Discretionary Assistance Fund \(DAF\) | GOV.WALES](https://gov.wales/discretionary-assistance-fund-daf)

Housing

Housing problems were varied. Responses included providing support with applications (because of a change in circumstances, being homeless or at risk of homelessness), securing a new/different tenancy (suited to individual needs and vulnerabilities) and dealing with problems connected to accommodation, including managing relations in shared housing and dealing with disputes with neighbours. The following is an example of the help provided to one individual with a housing problem, which assisted him to build a better relationship with his daughter:

POP 6 had a history of substance misuse, which contributed to his offending. His sister had died in tragic circumstances. He remained in her flat following her death but did not have tenancy rights and was at risk of eviction and homelessness. The Local Authority was trying to re-claim the property and served him with an eviction notice. He did not want to be placed in a homeless hostel because he did not want to associate with people who were misusing substances as he felt it would encourage him to do so. Several months after making a housing application, the Local Authority offered POP 6 a flat next to a pub, which he did not want to take:

'I was waiting on the housing list because the Council was waiting to take me out of that place and put me in another accommodation. They offered me one accommodation which wasn't suitable for me because it was right next to a pub, and it was no good for me because I've had a history of drink in the past there's a lot of triggers, you know, to me, to go down the wrong path again. ... local pubs and old acquaintances and things like that'. (POP 6)

GA advocated on his behalf and refused the property, explaining why it was not suitable. The Local Authority responded that POP 6 was at risk of making himself intentionally homeless. One of the GA's partners contacted a local housing association and found that he was eligible for one of its flats, which was secured. GA assisted him to furnish it, ensured his benefits were in place and put him in touch with tenancy support to help with budgeting. GA ensured *'that he was getting the right decisions so that he wasn't being set up to fail before he started'* (Partner 2) and there was a supportive team around him. POP 6 also received on-going support with food vouchers. The move was important as it provided a basis from which he could begin to develop a better relationship with his daughter, who started to visit him regularly:

'Yeah, I've got more access to my daughter now and everything.... it's brought me closer and everything, whereas before, I didn't like to take her [to the previous accommodation] because there is a lot of stuff going on she comes and goes because it's a nice area ... I see her at the weekend and have a bit of fun, go bowling and have some nice food. I make a fuss of her. She's a good kid'. (POP 6)

The GA support worker who assisted him felt the temptation to return to his previous lifestyle or past patterns of behaviour would have surfaced had he not received the assistance he did. The move was life changing, away from past associates and negative influences and enabled him to reconnect with his daughter. His self-esteem and confidence grew, and he started to develop aspirations and wanted to undertake a basic computer skills course. He felt that GA had given him stability, support and independence and as a result his life was in a good place:

'Things are going well thanks to the project they've fully supported me. They've been really good with me, patient, and everything.... I would just like to thank everyone for doing what they've done for me and just want to keep a positive mental attitude'. (POP 6)

Employment

One of the most significant relationships which GA formed was with a local employment initiative *Shape Your Future*, from which it received considerable support. This was a programme which had been set up to provide tailored assistance to individuals living in the Ely area. Its remit was to assist those in employment (or volunteering) to progress and to overcome the barriers that might be preventing them from doing so. It held a fund for work-related costs provided by an independent source. *Shape Your Future* assisted some of the men to gain qualifications, signposted them to training opportunities, helped them to find employment and provided financial assistance to purchase the clothing needed for work.

'[Name]... he was somebody who was really keen to get into work, so his Probation Officer was able to link in with [Shape Your Future], get him his HGV licence. He's now in full-time work. People who've come and said they're interested in barbering, and they're now qualified barbers and working there full-time'. (HMPPS 2)

Personal development

One of the men received help from GA in re-focusing his life and developing his interest in music, which had career potential:

'During lockdown, I started struggling a lot with depression because I was from a door-to-door sales background. That stopped during COVID, so I just found myself sat in the garden, because it was sunny all the time, just listening to music and drinking beer and it was getting a point where it was like this is too much now, I'm probably going to give myself liver failure. I need to find something to take up my time. So, I started playing around with a software on the computer and making my own music, and I was having fun and messing around with that'. (POP 8)

Through GA, he was introduced to a professional musician who mentored and helped him to develop his musical interests. POP 8 felt he would not have had the same opportunities without the links made through GA, and his PO encouraging him to pursue his interests, which gave him purpose and direction. As a result he considered himself to be a different person to when he first commenced Probation:

'It's crazy in as much as I did was bad, and I was on Probation because of that. I feel like my life has changed because of Probation and it has changed for the better, so not only have they helped me, they have helped rehabilitate me, because they have given me something to focus on, and something positive and I think that's what I was lacking Weirdly, Probation is probably the best thing that's happened to me in regard to helping me get to where I need to be I think it's helped me turn something terrible into something positive, which has been nice'. (POP 8)

'I feel like I've had more opportunity, and I've grown more as a person by coming here than I would have if I was just staying in the strict regimen of WS where it was like, come in, "what have you been doing? You're going to do this, this and this" whereas you come here and it's more humanising because they try and help you progress'. (POP 8)

Emotional and Mental Well-being

Several of the men required assistance because of mental health difficulties. Suffering anxiety featured in their narratives, and was present for various reasons, often related to problems with benefits and resultant hardship, difficulties with housing and accommodation or relationship problems. A Community Psychiatric Nurse attended GA fortnightly and one of GA's support workers provided significant support to the men and their POs in identifying problems and how to resolve them, encouraging the men to participate in activities which could improve their well-being, engaging with them to feel safe in disclosing past experiences of trauma. The worker tried to ensure they got the right help, whether a medical intervention or following up

with a GP to share information, make sure they remained registered, or to request a crisis appointment. Several of the men were assisted to access counselling, therapy, and other forms of support for addiction, trauma, and mental illness. One had sought counselling for addiction and past trauma but had been unable to access it through mental health services and could not afford to pay for it. GA assisted him with both:

'I've always felt that's what's needed, but I couldn't get it before. Even though I've been under the mental health system, I couldn't access counselling through that, but I can through this I didn't think I'd ever have the opportunity. I was going to try and pay for it, but I can't afford it'. (POP 7).

He was also encouraged to attend the gym and found it to be beneficial and enjoyable:

'Yeah, so I've joined a boxing group every Monday morning and that's great, it's the highlight of my week'. (POP 7).

The men commented on feeling connected to the POs and GA staff who understood their problems and helped to resolve them. For example, one of the men had an application for a PIP turned down, despite having physical health problems which had deteriorated and suffering from anxiety and depression. He explained his problems to a GA support worker who lodged an appeal on his behalf:

'They listen to me, and they understand... All of them. Everyone I've spoken to. It is nice to get these things off your chest. It's nice to vent and have somebody listen and understand whether they've been through it or not, and it's nice to have a bit of support' (POP 9)

This motivated him to continue with the process, his anxiety reduced, and he felt more positive:

'Where I have been trying to get PIP for God knows how long, and they kept turning me down, it was like the novelty was wearing off. And when [support worker] said she would help me with it, I thought I'd give it one more go'. (POP 9)

Complex and multiple needs

Some of the men had multiple problems which were challenging to address, required various interactions with different services which would have been difficult for a PO working on their own to resolve. It is difficult to adequately capture the range of assistance provided and what it meant to the men. The following two examples relate to men GA worked with over several months and are snapshots of what happened.

POP 10

POP 10 had problems in his accommodation which involved being 'cuckooed'³¹, living amongst people misusing and dealing in illegal substances and experiencing anti-social behaviour. He wanted to be re-housed, to move away from the negative influences, to lead a better life and to maintain his employment, which was at risk because of the disruption he was experiencing. GA helped him to move his tenancy and provided various financial assistance. GA supported him for over eight months through these difficulties and to make an application for a housing transfer. A housing worker from the Local Authority who attended the Support Centre was also involved:

'The move from the council, they kept losing my paperwork for whatever reason. There was always some problem. There was a woman here from the council housing department, and she'd just, "All right," get on the phone, cut through all of the... red tape. All gone...' (POP 10)

³¹ The exploitation of individuals who are vulnerable and whose property is targeted for illegal activity

Once the new accommodation was available, POP 10 needed assistance with removal costs as he had been unsuccessful in obtaining assistance through the benefits system. A GA worker arranged for two of GA's partners to finance these costs which enabled him to hire a van; the alternative was to leave all his possessions behind:

'She got funding off someone, part of it, and she raised funding from somewhere else, and between all of them they managed to get enough money together for my removal costs. (POP 10)

During this time, his electric bike and means of getting to work was stolen. He was upset by the theft as without the bike he could not get to work on the other side of the city and did not have the funds to replace it. Through *Shape Your Future* a replacement bike was obtained:

'I had my bike stolen a while ago. [GA worker] arranged with someone to at the council to get me a brand-new bike bought for myself from Halfords. That got me back into work'. (POP 10)

POP 3

POP 3 suffered from social anxiety, required assistance to obtain medication following release from prison and had problems with family relationships including his mother and her interactions with neighbours. He wanted to develop a friendship and support network and had also experienced past trauma he was having difficulty in coming to terms with. One of the most pressing problems was obtaining medication after he was released from prison which was essential for maintaining his mental health and wellbeing. He asked GA for assistance, as he could not deal with this on his own, was getting frustrated and was on the verge of giving up:

'Yeah, and my doctor wasn't giving me my meds once, so I came here and spoke to [GA worker] and I ended up getting my medication back off the doctor. They weren't giving it to me, it was terrible.... Yeah, because my mental health was terrible. Getting meds and appointments and stuff, as soon as they get out of jail, things like that. I lose my mind when I don't take mine'. (POP 3).

He was encouraged to take part in activities provided at the Support Centre to help to overcome anxiety and social isolation which led to him joining the Men Changing Lives group.

'I wasn't going out the house, I wasn't doing nothing, but I'm involved with the men's group on the Friday's. So, it's really helped me this place. I didn't want to mingle with people; I wanted to be on my own... Very anxious. I'm on tablets for it and stuff. But that's getting much better now'. (POP 3)

It is challenging to fully convey the turbulence some of the men experienced in practically every aspect of their lives and their need for someone they trusted to talk to, not only to help them to resolve practical problems but also to provide emotional support when they felt unable to cope. Several of them talked about the importance of advocacy and having someone to *'fight your corner'* (POP 5) which was evident in the examples cited here.

Views of the Men

When asked to comment on the assistance they received, the men described the breadth and quality of support provided, how it made a positive impact on their lives and how it contrasted with previous experiences. Having access to different services in the same place made it easier and quicker for them to get the help required, to feel supported and that progress was being made:

'What I'm saying, the good thing about this place as well, if I need to see anyone about housing, if I had to see someone about Citizen's Advice, everything is in the same building...I can come here and see somebody straight away and I find that things get done quicker here [than other sources of help used] it's because everyone is together It's like when you go to a supermarket shopping. You want to go there, and you just want to do your shopping. You don't want to be going from Tesco's to Sainsbury's, from Sainsbury's to Lidl. I want to go in there; it's cost effective, isn't it? You're saving time, you're saving petrol'. (POP 2)

'The support from everyone is just amazing, and if you need help with anything, they can help you with whatever you want, and they will go out of their way to help you do it. I think they're great here'. (POP3).

Some contrasted this to previous experiences:

'It was different. Like I say, I was based in WS. I just felt like, because I was only seeing one person, there wasn't enough support around, and obviously here, there's a lot more people to help you. I felt like, forgotten about in the other place. And different agencies. I think it's a good thing. Like I said, in town, in WS, you don't really have all those people. They can refer you to people but there is like a waiting game. Here, it seems faster'. (POP 4)

The ability to connect with others and build positive relationships was significant for some and increased the options available to them. The first point of contact for one of the men was his PO if a problem arose, but his network of support increased because of the other individuals and organisations he met through GA:

'When I was going through my parole, the parole board chair said to me, what you going to do if you've got an issue, and you haven't got probation to fall back on? Probation is not always going to be there. Then of course, you say to them, I've got this organisation to go to, I've got that organisation. I've got this person; I've got that person. There's lots of different avenues to go down'. (POP 1)

The men also commented on the relationship they had with their PO and how they experienced it at GA. It was important to have what they considered to be a good PO irrespective of where they reported to (some relations had started WS); *"he's great to work with"* (POP 7); *'always being there for him'* and responding when he was worried about something (POP 15); being told that *"your offence, doesn't define you.... so, tell me about yourself"* which was encouraging, friendly and non-judgemental (POP 8) and having a PO who was *'very grounded and that they listen'* (POP 16). This contrasted to less positive experiences and feeling processed through the system:

'You could have a probation officer that won't look you in the eye. I have had okay probation officers, but more time than not to me it just feels like they want to know everything about your life and they judge you before they even get to know you. They're quick enough to just recall you or breach you. Instead of just getting in contact with you and being like, "Oh, I sent you the appointment," because I haven't got a phone... This is just an example. Because I've been off drugs I don't like having a phone, because a lot of people get hold of me to... I wanted to cut myself off from everyone'. (POP 14)

Some of the men talked about positive differences in their relationships with the POs at GA compared to previous supervision. They felt the POs were more supportive, flexible, understanding of their needs and easier to engage with which made the supervision process more relatable:

'I think its best like this because its more easy to relate in an honest kind of way to your probation officer. You don't feel like you are being forced to.... It helps me in the fact that I am more honest with my probation officer, so she can help me more'. (POP 7)

'We just sit down, have a normal chat and it's kind of like... going and popping over your mates for a cup of tea and having a chat, and I like that, that's nice. I actually look forward to coming in and speaking to [probation officer]'. (POP 8)

The men felt their PO had more time for them as they were not under pressure to vacate the space they were in, there appeared to be a less rigid schedule which improved the quality of the meeting:

'In WS they just didn't seem to have much time for you. I don't know if they had any of the... they couldn't wait to... yeah 10 minutes'. (POP 6)

'... it's because they've got a rota. They've got to keep to it. It's the same as the Job Centre as well. They've only got ten minutes. They've got a bit more time in here to sit you down and have a chat with you'. (POP 3)

A PO also reflected on this:

'Yeah, it can literally feel like it's a tick-box exercise. We have to see them face-to-face once a month and it can be you're so pushed for time, pushed to have time in a room because there's a queue of people waiting to use it. It can be sort of, "I've seen you, you're all right, (see you) next month'. (PO 2)

Some of the men felt more 'visible' as they were regularly attending the Support Centre outside of Probation Service appointments and their POs could see they were making positive efforts.

'... You seem to be able to build a better bond with your probation officer here. Because I'm passing all the time, even though I come here once a month or once every two weeks, I'd normally pop in here once a week anyway, to see whatever help they can give me'. (POP 2)

The combination of having a 'good' PO and meeting in a pleasant environment resulted in wanting to engage and for some was their most positive experience of Probation:

'This is the best probation has ever worked for me, one million per cent. It might be because my head is in a good place now as well, so it might be partly to do with me, but I've got nothing but praise for them, you know what I mean? I can't say that about every probation officer I've had'. (POP 14)

'This is the best I've ever seen Probation and I'm almost 50 years of age. This is a first, this is'. (POP 5)

Some of the men thought the community environment was also good for the POs:

'You can have a nice informal chat about other things, and you get a bit more relaxed. And I'm sure it's good for them as well as me to talk about other things. It brings the mood on, doesn't it?' (POP 3)

One of the POs thought the positivity came from the men seeing them as an ordinary person (enjoying a pizza day at the Support Centre or having informal conversations about mutual interests). Some of the men sometimes sat with the POs at their table (workplace) to do this and as one of the POs described it, they 'rolled with it' and closed their laptops as they felt it

showed them as being less in an 'ivory tower' which was a good thing. The men were asked if there was anything which could improve their experiences of supervision in the community. Most struggled to identify anything specific, were very satisfied with the arrangements, felt fortunate to be part of the GA cohort and wanted it to continue:

'No, I haven't got anything negative to say about this place. Everybody has been brilliant here'. (POP 9).

'What would I say? Just do exactly what they're doing now really. I think they've done a really good job.....so, there's not really anything I can think of off the top of my head that they don't do at the moment'. (POP 3)

'It's helped a lot of other people ... who I know ... and they've gone on to do better things. So, I can only say good things about it ... it's good for the community. The community needs it'. (POP 6).

'... But what I noticed is, it's the same faces coming here to Probation every week. So, they're not reoffending. If you give somebody the opportunity...'. (POP 2)

Views of the POs

The POs thought that GA gave the men a better experience of the Probation Service (which accorded with their views). The informal environment of the Support Centre was conducive to building good relations and supervision was less about "is everything okay?" (PO 2) to having better engagement, learning more about them and understanding them in the context of their community and the pressures they were under. This led to richer and deeper conversations and more honesty and openness from the men about what they were thinking and experiencing and what could make a difference to them:

'They're in their home community, possibly their partner is by the door because there's no childcare for the little one or you're seeing things that I think will reduce risk and improve the compliance of them on their order but hopefully engage them in the... their bit of society that they feel part of.... In WS you'd see somebody chatting to somebody in the waiting room and it would be how do you know them? And generally, ... it'll be, "I was twoed up with him in Parc," that kind of thing. Whereas (here) it's always, "I was in school with him. I've known him since I was little" or "We used to live next door to each other." I think it makes it more human that you can see these relationships between all the guys'. (PO 2)

Other advantages were that if a case had to be transferred within the team or cover provided for another PO, there was a good chance the man had already come across the new PO which made the transfer less unsettling and provided more continuity as the PO may already know something about the person concerned:

'I think I've become more aware of let's reallocate and..."Oh you're my fifth officer." And it's like that's awful. But I think it's less traumatic for them when it's - you're literally moving to - if you're moving from me to (another probation officer) who you've seen all the time. So, yeah maybe it's kind of made me be more aware of their trauma and emotions that they're going through'. (PO 2)

The final section of this quote is interesting, as it demonstrates the POs learning from their experiences and seeing the men not solely through risk focused lens but being more attuned to the challenges and traumas they were living with which needed to be understood and resolved. The POs felt the quality of what they were able to offer was better and they could provide genuine support as opposed to simply signposting elsewhere. The immediacy of access to services was a significant benefit and it was anticipated there was a better chance of the men maintaining some of the links made beyond the Probation period. There were some good examples of where individualised support had made a significant difference to

them (as previously discussed). Some POs anecdotally felt that community reporting improved compliance because of ease of access to appointments and being able to be more flexible. This meant fewer missed appointments (but importantly the POs retained professionalism and breaches and recalls occurred when necessary):

'The whole I'm going to summon you to WS and if you don't attend then you get a warning letter. Hopefully those days are behind us. We've all kind of had the, okay, they haven't turned up today. Let's give them until the end of the week. They may turn up and that kind of thing. And I think levels of engagement I would say have got to have improved because of it'. (PO 2)

'So, people on probation I think have better compliance here and I think they also get more out of probation. But the people who have had their orders or licences terminated they've come to a natural stopping point. I think I have finished with more progress, more skills, more benefits than [when based at] the central reporting centre. I think that's huge. But also, for me seeing the amount of men who have built up to being able to share and have really deep open discussions is really powerful and I think that's making a huge difference to them'. (PO 6)

The SPO observed changes in the Probation team, as GA became more established. As they developed local relations, they felt more embedded in the community and knew more about it and significant partners. The team were thinking more about how they could help the men to desist from offending and there had been a shift for some from solely being focused on risk (and what people had done wrong) to more strengths-based practice, demonstrated by case discussions concentrating on what the men had done well and what could be done to support them. This was prompted by the initial ABCD training provided, although not all the POs had attended it and some struggled with how it might be implemented. As the commissioned partners took a strengths-based approach, it influenced the POs to do so as well. However, the Probation Service needed to do more to help others to understand its role and function (which HMPPS recognised). Introductory sessions were provided to the partners and other agencies, which needed to be periodically repeated. There was genuinely felt to be more multiagency working which was a good thing:

'So, whether that's if their partner's come along or additional home visits with another agency, so there's a lot more day-to-day multi-agency work ongoing which I think is innovative that probably doesn't happen here (in WS). I think you'll do the odd joint visit with the police, but you wouldn't do a joint visit with like a community support officer or anything like that'. (PO 3)

The value of having the right workers

For the POs one of the most important aspects of GA was the added value that some of the support workers employed by the commissioned partners brought to it because of their personal qualities, the way in which they engaged and knew how to address some of the issues they were being presented with. This created a feeling of mutual support and there was a high level of trust between the POs and the GA partners who were having direct interactions with the men:

'I can name (Partner 4) I don't mind namechecking. She's superb. I think she's absolutely brilliant and again adds great value that in groups she'll talk about the kind of context she's had, what she's able to do if necessary, and comes with some great suggestions, brings in that local community knowledge'. (PO 1)

'Yeah, she [Partner 2] brings so much experience, knowledge of... yeah everything. And she's prepared to put in the time to find out anything that she may not know or to further things. We've been saying the different things that we've got issues with are accommodation, drugs and mental health. Accommodation that she has sat down with

people and gone, "Right, I'll take this to the Hub, and I'll act on your behalf." It's the kind of things we would never have the time to do?' (PO 2)

The workers who were the most appreciated were not necessarily recruited for the skills they had, which only became fully apparent as the support roles developed. This raises questions about how needs are best addressed, whether through the commissioning of specialist and individualised support or outward looking community engagement, ultimately GA was seeking to have a blend of both. As indicated at the start of this chapter, one of the prevalent issues in the cohort of men was the level of trauma which was revealed through conversations with individuals the men trusted. The relaxed environment of the Support Centre helped some of the GA team to work in a trauma-informed way. Some of the POs felt there was more scope for this which reflected their personal interests and was possible because there were support workers already skilled in this respect:

'Most people don't offend if they don't have any traumas or needs in their life. If you're on a stable income, you haven't had an awful childhood, that kind of stuff, you're fine. If you have had an awful childhood, then we have someone here that can talk and help you with it'. (PO 5)

One of the commissioned support workers had a good understanding of trauma and was accomplished in interacting with men who had trauma-related difficulties. As a result, the POs tended to utilise this worker for emotional trauma-type discussions as they were trusted to work sensitively with the men and the disclosures they made. The support worker was a trained counsellor, their skills complemented that of the Probation team and there was significant attunement. This had not been planned but was extremely valuable and raised the question of whether GA needed some form of therapeutic input as not all the problems which emerged from the men related to the need for practical assistance:

'[Name of support worker] is probably the most helpful person I have here, where she does a lot of referrals from my guys. Because she's trained in counselling and stuff like that, if I have someone who's in a particularly bad place, I'll have her come into my interviews and help discuss it, because like I said, I'm not a psychologist, I'm not a lawyer, I'm not these things. I'm a probation officer, so my skillset's there'. (PO 5)

A further consideration for the POs was whether partner agencies could undertake some of the professional contacts (which was what Community Rehabilitation Company had done for lower risk cases), so there was a more blended approach in partnership support (two of the partners also commented on the scope for more co-working – see chapter eleven). Cases would need to be risk assessed, partner agencies would need to be comfortable and clear boundaries set around expectations and what they would be required to do. This suggestion was based on what had happened during Covid restrictions:

'If we didn't see that person that week but they were seen by the hostel staff, that was sufficient. If it was sufficient then, why can't we look at that now? What does that look like? Are we going to trust that we've got the right people doing it? Absolutely we should. So, it's looking to test that. That might mean that I may have 30 on paper, but if 10 of them in that month have been seen by somebody else, that's a space that I can do something else'. (PO 1)

Whether this would have progressed is debatable as Probation's risk-based culture was regarded as hindering innovation, as there was always the concern that something could go wrong and the ultimate responsibility lay with the PO. It was also possibly not the right time as the Probation Service needed to focus on Reunification:

'The problem with that is, then, is that we co-work a case to be innovative, and say, "Right, we're going to do this differently, thing." You say something or do something that changes the risk of that person because you enable something. He then goes off and does something quite terrible. The only person that gets blamed is me'. (PO1)

The type of contact wasn't fully explored and could mean different things as these examples and quotes illustrate. For example, a statutory contact could not replace Probation's obligations, but being part of a contact visit (with a PO) was possible to try and help to resolve a problem or to provide wellbeing and emotional support. As indicated below one of the options was to accompany the PO on Home Visits which occurred, mainly to provide additional support to the PO, particularly when the individual they were visiting was experiencing difficulties the GA support workers could assist with.

Other areas of practice

Two other areas of practice were raised by the POs. which were Unpaid Work and Home Visits. Unpaid Work was recognised as an area that could be developed. The Support Centre had a community garden project on a Thursday, which Unpaid Work (and the Probation Service) had been introduced to and it was recognised that there was the potential to do more, with organisations which needed help with gardening and maintenance. A positive change had been made to the reporting arrangements for individuals undertaking Unpaid Work in Ely. Participants had to travel to another area to register and then return to Ely to undertake the work; this arrangement was altered to allow local registration:

'It just didn't make any sense at all. We've now agreed that's absolutely pointless, so they just meet the supervisor on site a bit later at the venue. I think - and don't quote me but I think - more people are turning up for unpaid work because it is on their doorstep. They haven't got to go to a central meeting point in Canton to then... (come back)'. (PO 7)

The other area commented on was Home Visits (HVs), which must be undertaken within specified periods during Probation supervision. The benefits of HVs for the POs were being able to spend more time with the individual, getting to know the significant people in their lives, obtaining a greater understanding of the environment they were living in and their family circumstances which could assist in determining how they were supported and managed:

'There are so many layers to people. Again, it's one-sided, isn't it? They can tell you, "Yeah, everything's all right with the wife or the missus," or whatever, or "My mum is all right, she's just not well," but then when you go to the home you can see the fuller picture'. (PO 7)

Apart from the routine requirements, HVs were also used to visit people the POs were concerned about and to accommodate those experiencing difficulties. One of the advantages of being locally based was that HVs could more easily be undertaken and be arranged at short notice:

'Yeah, it doesn't have to be the - okay, we'll have to put this in the diary because one of us has got to bring a car and all that kind of thing. So yeah, that works I think really well ... whereas when you're in WS and you've booked a whole day, I'm going to do ten home visits today. Then each one is going to be five minutes sort of thing because you've got to travel round'. (PO 2)

A further advantage of undertaking HVs as part of a small team was that the individual being visited was likely to see the same POs, which the buddying system in WS could not accommodate and being locality based gave the POs the flexibility to find out what was going on before initiating enforcement action by visiting the person concerned. HVs had resulted in disclosures being made about problems the PO had previously been unaware of:

'(We) did one a couple of weeks ago to a youngster who's fairly new on her cohort and she said she was struggling to get him to engage. So, as we were going in it was like, "Oh we won't get much here." We went in. He's with mum. The most chatty he's ever been because obviously he's relaxed. He's in his home. Mum starts joining in the conversation and chatting and then we became aware of there's a younger brother who's

not going to school. Mum's having all kinds of issues, and we know that [name of support worker] is great and will come out and do a home visit. It didn't sound like they were on half the benefits they needed. As we came out of there it was like this is what it's about we're helping the whole family and we're being part of the community and we're finding these issues. And this poor woman is overwhelmed and doesn't know what she's entitled to and wouldn't have gone and looked for that help, even though that help was out there. And hopefully if we've done this little bit and she will know she can go to the [Local Hub] and have this continued help because it wasn't on her radar that there was help out there'. (PO 2).

However, awareness of difficulties did not mean the POs (or GA's partners) were able to resolve them. For example, problems with accommodation were not always addressed by those responsible which resulted in a sense of helplessness and an inability to resolve some of the difficulties people had. HMPPS intended to discuss this with the Council to raise more awareness. POs were uncertain whether being based in the community had led to more HVs, some had anticipated it would, but did not think that had been the case. Others felt there was the potential to do more and that increased HVs could be one of the unique features of GA and the Probation Service offer. Others wanted to explore whether HVs could be undertaken with one of the partners as they generally required two POs. If partners (and community engagement workers) were able to do this, the capacity could increase, and it could become part of what GA routinely did:

'So yeah, I in terms of what I'd like to see being a bit more innovative is more kind of home visits with [the Partners] and also doing more around resettlement of prisoners earlier on'. (PO 3)

This would raise issues for the commissioned partners in terms of their role, risk assessments and safe working practices, but had its merits.

Enrichment

What worked well for a period (part of phase one and most of phase two) was the relationships the Charity built with the men and the enrichment activities its Support Centre offered. At the heart of its activities was the Men's Changing Lives group (MCL), a meeting group for men (on Probation and members of the public) to come together to discuss various topics and participate in recreational activities. MCL met weekly and offered a variety of activities to promote friendship and provide a forum to discuss topics of interest. Participants took part in recreational games, discussions and had a meal together. The Changing Lives podcast was run by the Centre's peer mentors and staff and provided a space for individuals to share their stories and experiences (HMPPS purchased some equipment for it). It was a community focused platform for raising awareness about mental health struggles and personal growth journeys. Across the various episodes, the podcast highlighted the challenges and resilience of those facing difficulties with substance use, imprisonment, and emotional trauma. The Charity organised weekly boxing and gym sessions in collaboration with a local fitness centre. There was also a gardening project which the men could take part in which became a site for Unpaid Work.

It was not possible to measure the usage of these activities by the men on Probation as the Charity had not kept any record of Probation engagement (or been asked to). Their estimate was that the gym had one or two regular attenders and MCL usually about 15, although it could increase to as many as 25 to 30 people. Wellbeing walks which were later introduced (on Tuesdays) had around eight people but could fluctuate between 12 and 15. All groups had core members, with MCL being the most dynamic in terms of attendance, but the rates of attrition were not known nor the reasons why. Some of the men (and peer mentors) commented positively on their involvement:

'They said, why don't you try coming to the men's group, so I could socialise again. I was like okay; I will try it and I came in and I was literally here for ten minutes and I went back home. But I didn't give up. They just said keep trying and I would stay for the whole duration. Sometimes I'd stay even longer ... its such a good friendly place. I haven't seen one argument or nothing like that. And we all chill or play cards and stuff. It's a really good atmosphere'. (POP 3).

Others, were less involved, citing commitments with work or education:

'Not so much, because obviously I do college through the week and that's my commitment right now'. (POP 4).

Some chose not to engage in the Centre's activities:

'No, I don't come down here just to kill a bit of spare time. I'm mostly asleep in the mornings and then I'll get up, have my shower, have my cups of coffee, have my tablets. I'll have a little go on my phone, I go on Facebook, I watch videos, I'll read some of the comments...'. (POP 9)

'They do a thing on a Friday, just to have a chat and all that sort of thing, but it wasn't for me. I could go to them all but I don't need everyone else's problems as well'. (POP 5)

Whilst not everyone engaged, the men were made aware of what they could take part in and encouraged if they showed any interest. For some it had been highly significant, and they attended the Support Centre on non-Probation appointment days because they liked being there, wanted to go to MCL or needed to access support:

'I have come here just to see housing and that's it...just sorting out my applications'. (POP 4)

'Yeah, all the time. I was there last week. I still go there even though I haven't got an appointment, just to have a cup of coffee and that.... Just a nice... because it's warm there. Very welcoming'. (POP 6)

They were also asked whether they would visit the Centre when their period of supervision with the Probation Service ended, which some thought they would:

'I have used this place more than a few times, and they have helped me a lot ... I will continue to use it as well'. (POP 10)

'If I needed, definitely. A million per cent, I'd come straight in. Like I said, if I just needed a chat, maybe just pop in'. (POP 14)

The POs hoped that the connections made would lead the men to be more curious about what was in the area, and they would continue to use the links they had made. The Support Centre was a source of support and the extent to which they chose to engage in additional activities and visits mainly depended on their personal interests and circumstances. Whether they would continue to go there when the Probation Service were no longer at the Centre was of interest, as most spoke positively about their experiences.

The POs felt that the availability of enrichment activities for the men was important in helping them to develop healthy relationships and build self-esteem. Whilst therapeutic approaches and medical treatment were necessary for some, so were having other opportunities to talk and be open about their problems:

'We went on one to [...] Park, and it's beautiful there, by the viaduct and the boardwalk, little beach and only one of our POPs came he didn't stop talking from the time he got there till the time we got back. It's often when you do things like that, that you have disclosures'. (PO 4)

What was needed was more free social activities, such as going for walks as they provided opportunities to mix with others with positive attitudes and encouraged the men to step outside of their social norms (MCL was helpful in this respect). Some of the men were very isolated and unable to expand their networks beyond their usual social circles:

'I think it's about getting them through the door, because it's so hard... people up here, even though they live in the community, they're very, very isolated and they might not leave their houses. It's so difficult to explain. They might go from one house to another to parties and pubs and things like that, but they wouldn't think of going anywhere that's Council or Church, or anywhere there might be authority, and that's what they see. So, they wouldn't access anything like that because they'd think – "oh'. (PO 4)

Enhancing well-being had a powerful impact on some of the men and how they perceived Probation (their community and family dynamics). One of the POs observed that because GA helped some individuals to feel better in themselves, they were being their better selves. This stemmed from a genuine interest being shown in them with no agenda and the GA team wanting them to do well:

'A lot of our guys respond ... it doesn't have to be profound and ... life changing. It could just be, I wouldn't have come here, I wouldn't have made contact that day, but they come, "hiya [name of person], how's the weather" and they'll have these conversations, talk about things, maybe go to men's club, maybe they'll do one or two things and that's nice. They wouldn't have done that before'. (PO 2)

For those who were motivated to make changes, the GA team helped and encouraged them to take the first steps, and the men felt they benefitted.

Doing too much and dependency

One of the consequences of multi-agency working was that too much could be done. Getting the balance right was important to avoid over-reliance and dependency as this example illustrates:

'So, my case from like a year ago when it became a homeless and (the Charity's staff) paid for him to go into a B&B for one night. Then they asked one of the peer mentors to take him home and let him sleep on the settee. We basically couldn't get rid of him ... He was there just all day (and) slept outside waiting for the Support Centre staff to turn up. He was living with ex-girlfriend and her partner ... kind of on the settee they had a big row, chucked him out and he had different sort of disorders, one of them being attachment ... I'm thinking that kind of means he can't form attachments, but it was the opposite way. He's (over attached) particularly to certain people. You could see he was beelining for [one of the support workers]. And then yeah, when he rocked up on a non-Probation day all upset because he's been chucked out ... [name of worker] put him in a B&B in Barry, so then had to bring him in the following morning. Gave him money - there was just too much done for him' and them all going, "Have you been to housing?" "No." (PO 2)

Eventually one of the peer mentors took the man to Housing and he was placed in a hostel. The PO felt the individual needed to be in the right system and not in GA every day. It was ultimately one of the peer mentors (not a professional) who recognised that he was stuck and needed a push. The PO felt they had not always done the right thing for some of the men, but it was part of the learning process and helped them to establish where the boundaries should be. The temptation to do too much was easier in the community because of accessibility to various sources of support but was not necessarily the right answer. Some of the commissioned partners also picked up on this. They felt that community-based organisations should support individuals to become independent, as it was too easy to become 'a saver, enabler' (Partner 5), which could result in some of those they were trying to help getting into the habit of 'taking' which stopped them from moving on:

'You're doing a lot of damage in terms of when you enable people, they have a high reliance upon you. I'm thinking of one family in particular who come here a lot. They've done good work with them but nothing's progressed. Nothing's moved on'. (Partner 5)

Similarly, organisations could get stuck in a cycle of trying to address needs (which could arise from having a room full of agencies waiting to assist), that help should be time limited, and it was better to encourage the men to think about what they could do for themselves after some initial support:

'You are constantly looking for their needs, and they'll always be needy ... You start talking to people about their aspirations and desires for the future, but you also make sure the foundations in place. They get a job, they get their first pay packet, they're off the rails again. That's more our mindset, whereas here it's just reactionary. If someone comes in, in trouble ... "Can you give them this? Can you give them that?' (Partner 5)

The partner felt that GA was inclined to give the men what they needed without question, rather than taking a deeper look at what was going on and why they were in the situation they were. They felt long term plans were not always in place and that GA could have benefitted from more shared processes. As the GA team comprised different organisations which operated in diverse ways there was the opportunity to share good practice and more focus could have been given to having the same understanding of some of the issues they were likely to be faced with and to jointly plan how they would assist the men through vulnerable times to mitigate against what could go wrong *'If somebody's getting a PIP payment and they're an addict, what's going to happen on their first payment?'* (Partner 5).

It was appreciated that Probation could not deal with the complexity of all the issues faced and being able to refer them to another agency *'for a quick fix'* (Partner 5), was a pragmatic response. Another support (Partner 2) felt that GA was not yet mature enough in this respect, and if agency and empowerment were end goals they were still a work in progress. The mechanisms were helping people to use their own voice, be heard, learn to communicate in a non-threatening way and for some ultimately be empowered to make some of the changes needed by doing things for themselves. This included thinking about what they could contribute to their community through volunteering or other opportunities. However, the extent to which this was feasible for some of the men and them being ready to think in these terms was still a long way off.

Finding a place in the community

Dependency was an issue for those who were lonely and did not have a social network. One of the men who had served a long custodial sentence did not have a friendship group and needed this more than professional support at times. His PO noted that his mental health improved when he had lots of professional involvement and interest shown in him and declined when it was absent. There was a need to break the cycle of professional involvement and to help him to connect to local groups and activities, *'so that's what's keeping him safe, but that's also what's keeping the public safe'*. (HMPPS 2).

The man recognised that he needed to have a structured routine and was fearful of going back into prison for something beyond his control or making a silly mistake. He was conscious of how he needed to live his life and through volunteering met people who were becoming part of his network. He knew what he needed to do and that his life could not just consist of appointments with professionals. Despite the challenges, through GA he found his place in the community. He was trying to establish a new life and to navigate difficult and stressful family relationships. His primary concerns were establishing structure and routine so that he did not infringe his licence conditions. He identified the factors which could put him at risk, knew what to avoid and concentrated on developing a social and support network and his own

sense of identity. He described his challenges, how he managed them and found his place in the community in which he now lives:

'And I had another sister, she's a manic depressive, and every so often she would have an outburst and she did it three times and on the third occasion, I decided... it was nothing to do with me and I thought, this is something in my life which is making me unhappy, uncomfortable, so I ceased contact with her as well, to keep myself safe. Because in prison, I learnt that these red flag situations, or situations that might take you slightly one way down the narrow path shall we say, on the road back to doing the wrong thing. So, I decided that was too much of a risk as well, and so I put that to an end as well, with a polite text message. I had [probation officer] read it first to make sure that I wasn't doing anything that was going to escalate the situation or make it worse. But I've actually found, coming here, and going to the church and doing my volunteering, is a life that I enjoy better'. (POP 1)

'The main benefit really, has to be breaking it down into simple terms ... of me ... having a routine that is constructive. It keeps me on the straight and narrow where offending is far away. I have other things in place in my life that doesn't involve offending'. (POP 1)

'Yes, probation is just a tiny little aspect of it. But the whole aspect really is being part of the community, and you feel part of the community which, it sounds like such a cliché, but it's true. I feel like part of the community, feel like I'm on the map and I feel like I've got a purpose as well and if you do something constructive like volunteering, that makes you feel good as well'. (POP 1)

'..... so I think these projects are important to stabilise the community, because Ely is a deprived area. Ely has got its own problems. Some of them complex, like all areas have got their problems. But I think this place (GA) is in the right place, because in a deprived area, this is just what you need, an established place'. (POP 1)

Conclusions

GA was able to assist the men on Probation with a broad range and depth of difficulties. Problems with benefits and housing frequently occurred (and encouraging employability was an ongoing objective). As has been shown, problems were not isolated, and multiple needs existed. Men who embraced what was available were appreciative of what was provided as it made a real difference to them and for some there were significant improvements in lifestyles. An inevitable area of interest is whether these changes would be maintained and lead to permanent desistance from offending and whether the men would continue to use the connections made if they needed assistance in the future. For the POs the availability of specialist support and access to local services was undoubtedly a significant help, GA facilitated better interactions with the men and the support of skilled GA support workers complemented what they were trying to do. The Probation Service could achieve more with additional support provided it was personalised and tailored to the needs of the men, although there was a balance to be struck between being enabling and being too involved and creating dependency on professional services. Sometimes access to a range of service was not the panacea it appeared to be. GA's partners all recognised the problems that were associated with helping others and the necessity for everyone to share the same view of what was right for individuals and to help them to build healthy and supportive relationships in the community without professional relationships as an ongoing feature of their lives.

The men who were interviewed did not identify any significant concerns or issues and for most GA had been a good experience, suggesting that community-based probation supervision when delivered in a supportive and accessible environment, promoted good interactions and for some positive life changes. The availability of prompt support which met their needs was a key factor in this. This has implications for the design and delivery of Probation services, notably the location and accessibility of services, the physical environment of Probation

offices, the quality of meetings with POs and others, and the range and consistency of support provided. If these factors are considered Probation services may be better able to engage and support individuals and to facilitate better outcomes for them and their communities. However, community-based supervision is not a one-size-fits-all solution; different approaches are needed depending on the individual (eligibility criteria was restricted) and what the community-based approach was intended to look like and achieve. Probation's role in the community and how it can effectively operate needs to continue to be explored and developed.

Chapter Ten: Addressing Inter-generational Offending

Introduction

One of the original objectives of GA was to *'positively impact on the wider community, especially the families and dependents of offenders, providing positive intergenerational outcomes'* (see chapter one). Family focused work was intended to be one of GA's distinct features. It was included in the specification for the Community Development Service to be delivered by the commissioned partners (in phase one). The intention was to set up new ways of working with the families of men who attended GA and to promote this across the community. Ideas included working with schools and housing providers to co-work cases where problems had arisen, providing restorative solutions, identifying sources of family support and learning from other family focused projects. This chapter discusses what GA did in this respect.

Addressing inter-generational offending

There were some reservations at the outset (from the commissioned partners and some of the POs) about what could realistically be achieved in the available time frame (initially with 18 months funding) and whether GA had the capacity and resources to make a long-term impact on intergenerational offending. One of the POs described it as *'a very big ask'* (PO 1) in localities which had historically high levels of crime and deprivation. Not untypically the men they supervised had never worked, were unlikely to have completed their education and were not always positive role models for their children:

'Drug supply and drug use is prolific and it's that next generation ... we want to show them that it doesn't have to be this way. And cannabis use particularly with the youngsters. It's completely considered normal. So, to try and change the mindset is so difficult. And particularly if dad is smoking cannabis in the house, then how is the teenager not going to start?' (PO 2)

The POs and commissioned partners were asked in the first round of interviews (in November and December 2022) what family focused work should look like. The need for it was fully recognised as caseloads were characterised by fragile domestic relationships, domestic abuse (as perpetrators and victims), family estrangements, children being taken into care and imprisonment affecting family members:

'We have guys who've seen their children on a weekly basis. The offence might even have happened against said mum, ex-partner. No restraining order, so all above board, legitimate, third-party contact etc and then mum decided no contact with dad. Maybe dad (has) got a new girlfriend, or she has. There has been an argument, whatever there is, and that then is a total derailment.' (PO 1)

'And as I say the families that we work with are quite chaotic and the way that they behave, the way that they communicate with each other is very normal to them. But actually, there's probably a lot gone on underneath and we're just barely scratching the surface and if we started to repair and heal the families, would that lead to better outcomes further down the line? So, I think that piece of work is really key if I'm honest.' (Partner 4).

GA offered the opportunity to have a greater understanding of family dynamics, circumstances and problems and how they were affecting the men under supervision and to look at what could be done to build better foundations for relationships, lifestyles and mindsets. The POs were clear from the outset that they could not address these issues alone which the partners concurred with:

'Do you see it ultimately as a function that the Probation service can undertake on its own.... I look at the capacity of the probation officers and their primary role and I question that myself'. (Partner 4)

One of the POs suggested that GA could be more ambitious. The Probation Service and key agencies could collaborate more to discuss how some of the individuals and families who were causing the most concern could be jointly supported, which might assist in addressing the intergenerational objective and be a different approach to what traditionally happened. Some individuals and their families were well known to the statutory agencies, but services did not tend to collectively examine the problems or solutions which were needed:

'I wonder whether there's some value in saying, "Would you be interested as a service in coming regularly and finding some way that we could be able to share enough information to make it valuable, so that we can start approaching families and people, get that permission?'" (PO 1)

This could be achieved by creating a MAPPA³² type forum with the right agencies looking at holistically what was needed for an agreed small group of families:

'Because you have MARACs³³ that are victim-focussed. You have MAPPA's which are offender-focussed. What about family-focus?' (PO 1)

However, GA was not well enough resourced to do this, would have had to adopt a different approach (working with a smaller cohort) and was not mature enough as its relationship with wider services were still developing and as previously discussed there was no consensus on how to take this forward.

Family members attending the Support Centre

One of the ways in which family engagement initially developed was by getting to know some of the family members because they accompanied the men attending Probation appointments to the Support Centre. The POs had different opinions about this particularly about engaging with children, which they did not regard as part of their role, although assessing family circumstances and undertaking background checks to ensure that children were safe in the domestic setting was part of what they did. Some did not feel the Centre was an appropriate place to bring children to and they should not be part of the supervisory contact:

'Some of my cases bring their kids here, but then their kids are just sat outside while I'm talking to them because I can't talk about, "Your daddy's a drug dealer," in front of them, can I? So, it's a weird balance'. (PO 5)

This PO thought that if family members were going to attend the Support Centre there needed to be a facility for them but did not elaborate further. They did not see the benefit of seeing the family on a regular basis and regarded family work as being located with the commissioned partners:

'Yeah. I think I offload a lot of that on to those services, because that's what we've got them here for. You know, once I've done my background checks, making sure the kids are safe and stuff like that, in reality that's my part done, and then the other stuff goes on to the support networks we have'. (PO 5)

Other POs thought that because it was possible for the men to bring family members to the Support Centre, it should be encouraged and could be helpful:

³² Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements

³³ Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference

'Certain people will bring family members in. I've got someone who brings his mum in every single visit, but then I've encouraged that from the start. His mum was sat outside in the car, so I said, "Just bring her in." He didn't realise that he could, but now she comes in. I sit with her for part of the supervision and with him for part of it, so I get the two sides of the story'. (PO 7)

Meeting the wife and daughter of one of the men being supervised had given PO 4 a different perspective. They were able to see him as *'a grandfather, rather than someone involved in the criminal justice system'*:

'Yes, because you can fall into the trap of having a false narrative I suppose sometimes and I'm not one to judge people, but it's quite easy to fall into that'. (PO 4)

In another case, a PO asked to meet the man's partner because of a problem which had arisen. This would not have been considered in WS:

'We are kind of more doing the, well look, bring your partner next time. We can all sit here and... Bring (Partner 2) in and yeah, try and kind of help the whole family I think we acknowledge that the person is not just a person on Probation, he's a family man and he's got people that need him and are reliant on him and we can bring them in as well'. (PO 2)

Although there was engagement with family members, the POs were clear that their responsibilities lay with the men they were supervising (not their relatives) and if more in-depth work was required with the family that it sat with the commissioned partners:

'But I recognise that that's not my sort of forte, not to say that I haven't sat down with families, but delivering that restorative work, that's why we have a partnership agency in for it'. (PO 6)

The men's perspective about involving of family members

The men were asked about the involvement of their families with GA. Although it was not a central focus for all of them, some shared insights into how their family members had been involved. As indicated one of the primary ways was accompanying the person concerned (because they were providing the transport and/or emotional support). As the Support Centre was open to the community, family members could wait while the appointment took place. One of the men said he would never have taken his mother to WS, because *'there are too many disrespectful people'* (POP 5). Their involvement with the Support Centre led to them engaging in other activity:

'.... I usually drive, but I haven't got a car at the moment, can't afford it ... but my mother drives and she said, okay, I don't mind taking you there. But she came in with me one day and that was it. She said, what a nice place in there. ... She wants to come here. She loves it. We go for a meal as well, when they had the meals at the [Local Hub]. This is a brilliant place'. (POP 5).

Another man did not feel able to attend appointments on his own at the start of his involvement with GA, so mother came with him. The team at GA recognised this was important for him and it led to them helping her with problems she was experiencing:

'My mum came up here the first couple of times I came back into Probation because my anxiety was so bad, I needed my mum to come with me. It was quite embarrassing looking back, but it had to happenthey've helped my mum. They offered her to come to the women's group and stuff. I had to speak to them about that'. (POP3)

This was also the case for another:

'But they've even said to my mother, if you want to ever just keep coming here, you come here, have a chat, I'll always be here, even when [name of son]] is off probation. I've never been told anything like that before, or my mother'. (POP 5)

However, not all the men had family members they were in close contact with, but found some of the support they were lacking through attending the Support Centre:

'No, as we speak, I haven't got one member of the family that I'm in contact with. I've never had a family to be honest But my family is the [Centre]. I have more in common with [the Centre] than my own family'. (POP 1)

The inclusive and supportive environment at the Centre extended beyond the men on Probation to include their family members, who were welcomed which helped to foster engagement with the Probation Service, and whilst not all POs agreed on what this should look like for some it was beneficial.

Family-focused work

There was consensus across the GA team at the start of the project (phase one) that family focused work would be centred on restorative meetings and family group conferencing (which would be used for conflict resolution and mediation) reflecting the expertise of one of the commissioned partners. The CIC felt there was the potential to undertake family group conferencing to help to address domestic violence and to establish a route into families where there were intergenerational problems:

'[The families] are so big, they tend not to socialise out. They tend to keep themselves to themselves, as I would if I was the main drugs dealer on the estate. I've got my territory, and I've got the black-market economy stuff off the back of a lorry and all my children get excluded so we home school'. (Partner 1)

When questioned about what had developed some POs felt there had not been as much family-focused work as originally envisaged and as previously mentioned the plan to address inter-generational offending had not developed. The loss of a community development worker (in phase one) may have contributed to this, although some of the support workers in the partnership were skilled in undertaking family-focused work and provided practical and emotional support, sometimes on a long-term basis to family members which developed because of their expertise rather than from a plan of action. It is noteworthy that none of the organisations which were commissioned were primarily known for their expertise in working with families. There was also some activity which included the CIC going into a school to undertake mediation between the school and the family to improve relations and to prevent exclusion/withdrawal of the child, being part of Children's Services strategy meetings and undertaking some restorative activity:

'So, we've got [the CIC] going into schools trying to help some of the parents who have had a massive relationship breakdown with the school and the kids by nature have been excluded'. (PO 4).

'But the restorative work with the families is the main area where it's happening, and you do see it with restorative work being done with the whole family sat around the table very frequently'. (PO 6)

The CIC attempted to set up a complex a family group conferencing meeting with various members of the same family who were in different custodial establishments. Although this ultimately did not happen, considerable time and effort was spent in trying to make it work. One of the support workers provided extensive practical and emotional support to a female member of the same family for a significant period (around two years), which involved counselling them through a traumatic period in their life, addressing accommodation-related problems, ensuring they had legal advice and assisting them to improve their engagement with

statutory services. Further details might make this case identifiable, but what was evident was the commitment from GA in assisting the individual who had started to attend the Support Centre on a regular basis and who had connected with the support worker (more so than with their PO who was located elsewhere). The support worker also helped the PO who was supervising her husband (one of the GA cohort) to understand the complexity and interconnectedness of their problems:

'The work (Partner 2) does, oh my goodness, it's another level. Yeah, those are the things you just... you don't get to see when you're WS, you don't get to understand either and you don't get to see just how traumatic it can be, whereas now, we're getting to see that You can read, when an email is sent to you ... "Oh he's having a difficult time, ah". But then when you're here and you sit with them and you listen to it, it's visceral. It's completely different'. (PO 7)

The support worker also assisted the men and their families who were involved with Social Services in circumstances where they had limited or no access to their children to help them to build a better relationship with professionals in those services, to be aware of their rights and to connect them to organisations which could assist them. Some of the men (and their family members) were anxious about communicating with the agencies which could assist them because they were concerned about being misunderstood or misinterpreted:

'A prime example of that is one of the men's daughters that has had five children removed. She wants to go back to court for her children, but she's got to show evidence that she is able to pay her bills again, she is able to provide food in the cupboards and a roof over their heads and find her self-worth again as well. So, I supported her in (the first) appointment Today they've gone on their own. So, it's being able to get in and get out as soon as you can to give that person that skill'. (PO 7)

These examples raised the question of what GA could realistically do when resources were finite, as effective family work could be long-term, in-depth, required relational expertise and knowledge about the relevant services and pathways which required navigation. It was also evident that whilst restorative approaches were one option, they were not necessarily what was needed when there were more pressing problems which required attention and where the attention needed to be given. Restorative meetings take time to set up as participants need to be properly prepared to understand the purpose of the meetings and processes.

Some of the plans originally envisaged did not come to fruition, such as setting up family discussion groups, learning from family-focused projects and services, engaging with organisations which specialised in helping parents separated from their children (Both Parents Matter was cited) and neither did any of the men on Probation go into local schools and talk about their experiences (with a preventative focus). Some of the POs felt that family focused work did not develop in an identifiable way and could not provide examples of *'where restoration has been done with the POP and family member'* (PO 7), whereas others felt there had been 'soft developments' in family-focused work but as indicated were not certain about what the longer-term plans were:

'So, I feel like there's been soft developments and the team do a lot of home visits. People come in with their family members and we offer support and there's soft touches and we'll say, okay well actually if you go to the home, introduce them to [the CDO]. So, there's one family now, the man is on Probation and his children are going to wellbeing groups with [the CDO] as a result of being on the project. So, there are pockets of that, but I think the vague phrase, "Oh we're going to do family work..."... how is that going to be achieved'. (PO 3).

Intentions regarding family focused work were strongest in phase one of GA but dwindled and become less of a priority although in phase three part of the role of the HMPPS PSO was to continue to explore what family-focused work could look like. It is also possible that in

gathering information for this evaluation that work with family members was under-reported, as it was not particularly visible (when compared to what was done with the men). In interviews participants reflected more on what did not happen than what did. Where it had occurred the most impactful work had been undertaken by one of the commissioned support workers. The worker was regarded as a good listener and communicator and worked in a *'trauma-informed, restorative, therapeutic, strengths-based approach(es) with compassion and empathy'* (PO 6) which helped to build relationships with the men, resulted in important disclosures being made and being able to reach into family backgrounds. Several of the examples cited in the chapter relate to the work they did, a further case being the assistance provided to one of the men on Probation which resulted in him and his partner having their first Christmas, without police involvement:

'Okay, so every December, he has problems. His alcohol intake goes right through the roof; always has problems with his partner. They break up, they argue, all the rest of it and he anticipated that. It was coming, it was coming. Worked with (GA support worker) and this year is the first time in sixteen years, no argument, which is incredible really He said, "I didn't talk before. I'm almost forced to. I came here, I've got to speak," and he said, "But actually, it's meant that my relationship's improved, because now I talk to her'. (PO 1)

Some of what was done had a beneficial effect on the men's families, partners and relationships would not strictly be regarded as family focused work. For example, the work the CDO did regarding finance and benefits was not directly family-facing but could result in a better standard of living and reduced hardship if problems were resolved. Priorities were often lack of income, meeting basic needs and helping individuals to get the right network of support around them. When there were other worries such as the cost-of-living crisis, the men may not be in the right frame of mind to think about how family relations could change as that was not the most pressing concern (Partner 4). Although it would not generally be described as family focused work, reducing substance misuse could also have an important effect on the family:

'But if someone has a dad that's beginning to reduce his cocaine intake, that's not going out and committing crime, that's not doing all of those things, that's a pretty big impact on the family too'. (HMPPS 2)

From the HMPPS perspective, GA was at its best when it was tailored to the individual men, which could mean engaging with the family as a priority and should not stray into areas that other organisations were better placed to deal with. Although GA offered a space in which the men could bring their family members/those they had a significant relationship with to accompany them or because they needed help, the focus had to be on managing the men through court orders or licences. Further, although GA increased the potential for family support and engagement, it was not there to solve everybody's problems and had to be realistic about what it could do:

'Where I might disagree with some people on that trajectory is that if on the left we have WS and on the right we have the ideal – the impossibly good future, I think some people would put what this looks like – this is the family group conferencing, this is your restorative practice, this is all of those kinds of things. This is just my personal view. I'm not convinced that's what I would put as the impossibly good future. I think I would put that as families that have – yes, have their basic needs met – and sometimes some of this can be a bit fluffy'. (HMPPS 2)

Ideas for development

POs had ideas about what they would like to see happen in terms of family interactions. This included helping the men and their families to be empowered to deal with statutory agencies and not see them as negative entities (such as Children's Services). Others felt that family

focused work could be undertaken if there was more multi agency working (as mentioned earlier in the chapter). A further idea was whether there should be closer links with youth justice where there was evidence of intergenerational offending, however no conclusion was reached, other than acknowledging there was potential for development. Another area was custody and introducing men returning to the area (as part of pre-release arrangements) to GA to raise awareness of its existence and what support could be provided to them and their families. There had been visits to HMP Parc to do this which some of the support workers had been involved in, but they were not systematically undertaken. One of the support workers felt that GA could look at what it could do to help families who were experiencing difficulties because the partner/husband was in custody to ensure they could cope e.g. assisting with rent-related problems, helping the children to manage, looking at the short and long term emotional impacts (of parental separation) and helping to alleviate stress for the men who might be concerned about how their family were dealing with the situation (this was in line with the Farmer report 2017³⁴). HMPPS also felt that more could be done to help families at the start of a custodial sentence to identify whether they needed any support, particularly with finance to prevent problems from escalating. There was potentially a role for one of GA's partners in this:

'But just we know that when a family member is in prison, we know that this can be a really tough time. Our staff are trained and used to working with people who've been through the criminal justice system. We know that it can result in financial hardship and here's the money, advice, support we can give you I think that's the gap and that could provide us with a real opportunity for [the CDO], for example, to build excellent relationships with family members so that when someone comes out, the household is in a more stable position because finance, I think is a good example'.
(HMPPS 2)

If families were to be positively targeted, processes needed to be put in place to trigger how they would come to the attention of GA whilst in custody. As individuals could end up in various institutions across England and Wales it would be difficult to ensure that Prison Offender Managers and Community Offender Managers were aware of GA and doubtful it could extend its reach with its existing resources.

Conclusions

Ultimately family focused interactions took various forms; relatives were able to accompany the men to the Support Centre which in some instances gave the POs greater insight into their relationships and GA helped to resolve the problems some of the men had which could positively impact on the family even if there had not been direct engagement. Family work was undertaken in some cases, but how it was determined, who had what support and for how long was not quantifiable.

The question of whether and to what extent GA was able to address inter-generational offending was debatable, whether it was right objective and the focus was in the right place. It suggested doing something that directly impacted on children, so they lived a different life to that of their parent(s). GA was not a child-centred project but aimed to change how the men (as parents) lived their lives. It was more realistic to help them to think about what they would want for their children and to see the benefit of leading crime free lifestyles:

'....perhaps some of this is about breaking the cycle, isn't it and if those dads are going home and through their actions and words reinforcing that that isn't a good life and that there is a different path and if they're modelling different behaviours, but also if they're displaying healthy relationships with the partner, with the children, all of those kinds of

³⁴ [6.3664_Farmer Review Report](#)

things, that can do more than any intervention or any programme that the prison and probation service could organise. (HMPPS 2)

Identifying what a 'good life' looked like and getting the men to adopt it was only part of the picture. HMPPS felt there was more scope to work in schools with head teachers and safeguarding leads to help them to understand what the involvement of parents in the criminal justice system (particularly custody) meant for some children, whether more could be done to raise awareness of Invisible Walls³⁵ and to share good practice. The suggestions around improving pre-release and increasing family engagement for those in custody was something to consider with the Probation Service and whether GA should develop an 'offer' for people who were part of its cohort, based on what POs had the capacity to deliver and saw as priorities. Family focused work and community development work are two very different entities, which relate to GA's identity, which if defined would highlight what it needed to do and whether it needed a partner experienced in working with families.

³⁵ Invisible Walles provides a Family Interventions Unit in HMP YOI Parc and helps those in custody to rebuild and retain their relationships with their children and families. It delivers various family focused interventions, offers long term mentoring support during the custodial period and on resettlement and encourages the active involvement of fathers in their children's education. [Home - Invisible Walls](#)

Chapter Eleven: Reflections on Grand Avenues from those involved

Introduction

This chapter offers reflections on GA from the PO perspective, from some of the partners involved and HMPPS. It discusses whether at the end of the evaluation period GA was progressing or regressing, what aspects should continue or discontinue, lessons learned, whether it had achieved its objectives and replication.

What worked well and less well: Probation perspective

The POs thought they had adapted well to working in the community, were able to work agilely (from different venues) and were focused on making GA work. They built good relations with some of the men they supervised, enabled by working in environments which facilitated relationship-building. This led to better supervision, more positive experiences of the Probation Service and encouraged the men to be open about their needs which helped to identify the right help and support for them. Being co-located with GA's partners and other agencies, gave the POs more support and options, enabled them to connect the men more easily to what they required, and the men were receptive to what was on offer.

The POs regarded partnership working as a good thing, with more positive than negative aspects and wanted it to continue to develop. Some of the activities had worked well, such as a cookery initiative which provided an incentive to take part (an Air Fryer) and was a positive thing to do for the men and the community. There had been a very productive period when based at the Support Centre when partner relations worked well as all were committed to wanting to improve the situation and circumstances of the men on Probation and to positively impact on re-offending (although this could be interpreted in different ways). When it worked well the partnership was mutually supportive (including the input from peer mentors). If there was a criticism the POs wanted more assistance from support type workers to accompany the men to appointments and activities, but this had not been part of the original brief for GA. Most of the probation team enjoyed being in the community; some did not want to return to more traditional ways of working, although others did for various reasons, including the continual changes GA underwent (partnership, team members and venues). The POs mainly moved back to WS or other specialist teams. It was a matter of personal preference in most instances (rather than redeployment) Despite the changes in personnel GA continued to operate and maintain momentum.

What worked well and less well: Partner perspective

Views of the Community Interest Company (only involved in phase one)

The CIC felt that the partnership (in phase one) had a good blend of knowledge and experience, there was mutual respect among the partners, and none viewed the other as a competitor. Collectively the partners knew what the needs of the men were and how to deal with them. There were robust conversations with HMPPS when arrangements were not working which led to changes for the better. One of the challenges had been whether it was possible to change Probation practice. At times, GA had felt like *'this big cruise ship of Probation'* with *'all these little ships around'* (GA's partners) and several projects existing in one. The ability to drive forward some of the ideas discussed was difficult as traditional practices tended to prevail. The CIC felt that if GA's ambition had been to change practice there were several activities which could have been undertaken. This included exploring whether community agencies could take on some of the case management work (in some respects, what the Community Rehabilitation Companies had been doing, but was not one of GA's aims).

The CIC also questioned whether there had been a missed opportunity to develop a more organised collective approach to trauma informed, restorative and strengths-based working.

Pockets of practice had developed because of the expertise of individual workers but the organisation felt more could have been done. Further, the peer mentor activity could have started earlier and been more ambitious in recruiting and training mentors from the community to deliver early interventions and preventative activities. However, GA did not have the capacity or infrastructure for this, and it was not part of the original intention. A further idea was to explore whether dependency on professional services could be genuinely reduced and have an impact on reducing offending. A weakness in the project was the short-term funding of the commissioned partners which was not compatible with GA's long-term goals, and more clarity was needed about the proof of concept: *'what's the concept we are trying to prove?'* For example, when the Probation Service is located with people who know the community, what impact does it have on education, employment and families, intergenerationally.

In terms of the approach, the CIC felt that the *'tail was wagging the dog'*. The project was not community-led but determined by what the Probation Service wanted. It was unclear where community development (the ABCD approach) and the strengths-based family work sat (despite partner impressions that the latter was with the CIC). It had not had adequate time to undertake community development work, which should have been led by what mattered to the men (which could vary enormously). There were limitations to what GA could do as other agencies and individuals needed to behave differently. This included landlords being less prepared to sanction and more willing to adopt trauma informed and restorative approaches when problems arose. This required work to be done with other agencies to make them aware there was an intention to make a systemic change and to explore with them what could be done to be part of the change process. It is important to note that this was something that HMPPS was doing but it came much later in the project, after the CIC had left GA. The CIC had wanted to develop Neighbourhood Resolution Panels as a means of community based problem-solving but there was not enough support in the project to do it and it was not what HMPPS wanted at the time.

Views of the Charity (involved in phases one and two)

The Charity thought that the arrangements with the Probation Service had initially worked well as there was compatibility between the organisations in wanting to assist people who were marginalised and not receiving the support they required. It was positive that HMPPS was enabling community-based organisations to work with the Probation Service. One of the benefits the Charity offered was a Support Centre which was open to the public five days a week (the Probation Service was only there for two days). Their staff worked hard to make the environment warm and welcoming which visitors responded to and they constructed varied support and activities which came from consultation with the men on Probation and the community and aligned to what the Charity wanted to do as an organisation. However, the Charity later felt the arrangements and relationship with the Probation Service had not worked that well because the Probation team did not alter its approach and did not have the autonomy or management support to try new ideas and initiatives (the relationship could feel one-sided and inflexible). Although Probation created a locality-based team, it was not integrated into the community, simply located there and should have been more involved in local activities. The Charity would have liked to have seen more alignment across the GA team and each of the support workers to be assigned a small group of men to work with alongside the POs on their supervision plans. They thought this would help the POs to become better acquainted with the men as there was a tendency to know more about people when they were in crisis than when dealing with them routinely:

'(GA support worker) you've got these 12 people," when your person comes up, you're the lead. You're directing. Unless it's about risk of reoffending you're going to know everything about that person. You're working with them for the next 12 weeks...' (Partner 5)

The POs felt there were getting a better understanding of the men they supervised and were making progress in this respect. As has been discussed in other chapters, partner

perspectives and expectations sometimes reflected their own interests and ambitions rather than that of HMPPS and the Probation Service.

Views of the Community Development Organisation (involved in all three phases)

The CDO was in a different position to the CIC and Charity as it remained a partner throughout. In the interests of balance some of its observations (contained elsewhere in the report) are summarised here. The CDO's main concerns in phase one were whether it had a place in the project despite the organisation's knowledge and expertise. This was addressed with HMPPS and a distinct role identified in providing financial advice and support to the men on Probation. This became the CDO's main work throughout all three phases which it regarded as consolidating its position and enabled it to provide a valued and necessary input. By phase two the CDO was altering its view from being concerned about working with offenders to realising the services it provided were what was needed, which did not require the criminal justice expertise or knowledge that other partners had. In phase two, the relationship with the Charity started well but did not coalesce (mainly because the Charity was starting to form opinions about how it wanted to operate in the future which led to divergence from GA). The CDO recognised this and retained a professional approach despite some of the challenges which were becoming evident in the partnership. It continued to focus on what it had agreed to deliver. By phase three, the CDO regarded GA as one of its key community support services and concluded that it should have been the lead partner from the outset, a position it had achieved by then. One of the factors which were underlying throughout was that it didn't question what the Probation Service was or should be doing but looked at ways it could effectively work with it and what support it could provide. The CDO was realistic about what Probation could achieve outside of its usual role and didn't challenge its practice or have unrealistic expectations about what it could do. It was also prepared to work constructively with HMPPS to ensure that GA could develop and access its services, which gave the partnership a strong foundation.

Progression or regression

From April 2004, GA no longer operated from the Support Centre, which was a significant change. All the GA team members interviewed after this date were asked whether GA had progressed or gone backwards. There were mixed views amongst the POs which almost exclusively focused on what was about to happen. All agreed the risk-related problems which had arisen between the Charity and Probation team had altered the working dynamic, made the partnership untenable and leaving the venue inevitably had an impact. Some regretted the change, as the arrangement had the potential to be long-term and was a model for other Probation Delivery Units (PDUs) to adopt. Further, the support from services and agencies and some of the enrichment activities were likely to look different elsewhere, which raised concerns about the loss of immediacy of access to support. The matter of which agencies to engage with also needed to be determined. The POs felt the relationship with the CDO was excellent as its strengths were getting to know the men on Probation, investing in them and being consistent in the support it offered.

Despite this, the change presented the opportunity to look at what had worked well and not to automatically continue as before. For some it was the chance to re-examine what GA was trying to achieve and how Probation could successfully operate in the community and become known as an organisation which helped and supported individuals (and not just supervised and sanctioned them). A priority was to ensure the Probation team was based in venues from which they could effectively operate and were fit for purpose. There was a willingness to learn from past experiences. The presence of a more dedicated SPO, who had the time and was empowered to make decisions was regarded as very positive by the POs, and for some a project manager type of role could have improved matters further.

In terms of further progression, one of the POs suggested that the Probation Service should revisit how the GA cohort was allocated, and whether the arrangements should extend beyond post code criteria and consider what individual men needed and whether they would engage with GA, which was more in keeping with how cases were usually managed/transferred:

'.... There's a lot of men on the system at work that would really value that extra support that I think you could fairly identify [them].... I think they could really do with having their caseload full of people that are really utilising this to grow the brand ... You would probably ironically find your identity a little quicker, but at the moment they're just managing who comes in'. (PO 1).

Some of the men had responded very positively to GA and if it was available to others who needed it, it might make a difference:

'Some of the people who have embraced the GA project like (POP 2) That's the way he naturally is. With other people, they are reserved. They think that you are trying to catch them out, trying to get them back to prison, trying to get them into trouble. Perhaps if they had seen us from the start actually helping them, taking them to the GP appointments, phoning them up and getting their PIP claim started they might think, oh, they are actually helping me, so they will engage with us more'. (PO 7)

The matter of GA's identity needed more thought; what it was and where it was going and why. Some felt these issues were unresolved and more could be done to determine what GA's offer was to the men it was supervising in the community. GA had started with an emphasis on intergenerational offending, but that had not progressed as it proved difficult to determine what to deliver. When compared to IOM and WISDOM, which had clear characteristics it was uncertain what GA was presenting itself as, and discussions didn't progress much beyond being able to see people in their community. One of the POs questioned whether GA could perpetually 'go with the flow' and at some point, decisions should be made about what it was and what it offered. Developments had concentrated on the men and getting the venues and partnership arrangements right for the Probation team, which was the correct place to start, but if GA was to develop further, it should re-assess where it was going and whether and to what extent the family-focused element was part of it. The project had felt 'messy' at times, not everyone thought this was good enough and more clarity was needed. Overall, whilst there had been problems and there might be a step backwards because of the loss of the main base on the whole progress was being made and lessons learned were being incorporated into future arrangements. The POs felt that GA had a good basis from which to go forward, and the team agreed with the direction of travel. For some, regression would mean returning to old patterns of working, moving out of the community and a loss of some of the important relationships made:

'Because the alternative is coming back to a building like this where everybody's seen in one building to one-size-fits-all, and I think if you move with the times and you're going to try something new, and be kind of creative, and see how we can better serve families and people'. (PO 2)

Aspects of GA which should continue and discontinue

When considering what aspects of GA should continue and discontinue, suggestions included:

- continuing to build relationships with the community to explore what was available;
- building up knowledge and working alongside support agencies;
- looking at opportunities to re-introduce peer mentoring possibly with the support of a professional organisation; and
- involving families where appropriate to get a better understanding of the lives of the men they were supervising.

In phase three the introduction of a monthly operational meeting between the CDO, HMPPS and the Probation Service worked well. There was a need for it as there was big difference and different demands when working in the community compared to working in an established office or institution (and in a multi rather than single agency setting). There needed to be a vehicle through which issues which arose could be addressed. Attention still needed to be given to communication and developing a framework and guidance, clear objectives and a strategy that everyone was on board with as well as clarity about how it was directed (by HMPPS and/or the community). This included refreshing team knowledge and providing induction into the ethos, purpose, objectives of GA and what constituted acceptable working practices (particularly around risk) which could prevent a recurrence of some of the problems which had occurred in earlier phases. GA needed to move from having informal understandings to formally agreed processes in the areas which posed challenges, particularly where differences of opinion might prevail and to facilitate working relationships:

'We've got an information agreement already in place and more of an induction process around other agencies coming in'. (PO 3)

There were some wider issues to address in relation to the Probation team. For example, whether it was right for a PQiP to be employed in a locality team or whether more experienced staff were needed. Expectations needed to be managed notably what the options were for POs who enjoyed community-based working and did not want to return to a traditional office base. This included whether being based in GA should be time-limited and how the experience gained could be used elsewhere. For the SPO a specific concern was change fatigue, which could be a barrier to retention or in attracting POs to the team and whether there should be more bespoke arrangements (for example shorter days or more home-based working) to compensate for some of the challenges of locality-based working.

Lessons Learned

The GA team and HMPPS were asked what lessons they had learned from their experiences of GA. These varied from individual observations to more practical aspects of partnership and team working. The wider benefits for the POs were what they learned about the men and their needs and having a better understanding of the community and realising that its reputation wasn't always deserving which came from being based there:

'I have learnt that the reason for this being rolled out in Ely because it's an area of social deprivation ... and it's got a high crime rate and it's judged by people outside and it shouldn't be because it's got such a strong community spirit. People are so proud of where they come from. People stay here. There's generations of families and they all live round the corner from each other. There's a reason for that and it's not because they can't get out. They don't want to. There are very strong family values. It's underestimated outside. I think we have to be in that community to have acknowledged that and experienced it. You can tell people as much as you want, but we're sort of seeing it every day and being part of it. Yeah, they don't have to accept us'. (PO 2)

As the neighbourhood was the primary agent of social change, situating a Probation team in a locality and in community hubs with the right services made sense and worked well and had the potential to have a greater impact than some of the structured interventions and programmes which HMPPS commissioned. This could be *"the beginning of a slow process of Probation, moving back into the community"*. (HMPPS 2). Partnership working was one of the biggest areas of learning, particularly in getting the right partners in place and sustaining their involvement. For HMPPS commissioning the right third sector organisations, discontinuing arrangements which were not working, ensuring that partners added value, remained invested and were prepared to work through challenges and difficulties were essential. It took time to get the partnership right and funding played into this. Too short a period drove certain behaviours and inhibited development but allowed changes to be made and too long was

problematic as it might tie Probation into unsuitable partnerships. GA went through three different sets of arrangements before what was in place was right for the project. Finding 'a happy middle ground' between the Probation Service and other agencies could be difficult with different organisations and agendas. For HMPPS, it was essential that boundaries were explored about what was and was not acceptable at the start of relations and to work with partners to help them to understand why Probation worked in the way it did and the rationale for some of its decision-making, particularly around risk management and minimisation.

The traditional HMPPS approach was to commission rehabilitative services, for employment, finance and housing support which had quantifiable outcomes but inhibited the ability to try different approaches. These services were not always effective in what they delivered and were not configured to deal with individuals in crises:

'What we've found is that all of the systems and structures we have in place within HMPPS are completely ineffective, and so when someone comes to you in crisis, when someone's not got a house, when someone's in absolute debt, they've got no money to go and buy a bit of food, a conversation about the community allotment is pointless. We're constantly having to go back to how do we meet those basic needs, which means the community-building, it's kept feeling like it's on the back foot'. (HMPPS 2).

GA established there was a good range local provision freely available suggesting that community resources could be used more and community engagement could focus on making better local connections for the Probation Service and the men that needed them. This required a different approach to determine the type of help needed and where to go for it, what prospective partners offered and to encourage them to think about how they could engage with the Probation Service. This took time, required a different view of resourcing and needed a dedicated means of identifying what was available and relationship building:

'That resource is more about relationship-building and building partnerships to unlock what's already there'. (HMPPS 2).

An example of where this had happened was through the relationship GA had formed with *Shape Your Future* a local employment initiative which aimed to break down the barriers to employment for people in the locality by providing them with the support they needed. It had funds available for some work-related costs and assisted some of the men to gain qualifications, signposted them to training opportunities, helped them to find employment and provided financial assistance to purchase the clothing needed for work. A consideration for the future was whether HMPPS could change its focus from commissioning services to capacity building in the community, which could be achieved by redirecting some of the funds used for rehabilitative services to identify and support organisations to work with the Probation Service. This would mean a departure from existing practices, recognition that the current commissioning arrangements were not always meeting needs, less centralised commissioning and greater delegation of funds at a local level:

'We hardly use our ETE providers [in GA] because there's [name of worker] who's employed by Cardiff Council. She's a million times better than any service that we have through our contracted providers. I could go through a list of examples of where the sources of support that we've been able to identify locally which we don't have to pay for are just so much more effective than the stuff that we're commissioning'. (HMPPS 2)

This would be of benefit if the connections made on Probation were able to continue after community supervision had ended. Under the current commissioning arrangements, the contact with the provider ended at this point. Developing community connections was potentially a more effective and sustainable way of working:

'At the moment, if ... you take ETE. You go [name of contracted provider] for some support whilst you're on probation. Then, even if they have the most wonderful adviser,

worker, once your order has ended, can you go and access that service? Well, probably not, whereas if you build a relationship with [a community-based provider], it doesn't matter when your order has ended. You can continue to go back'. (HMPPS 2).

The opportunity for this existed for GA, but whether it would be replicable elsewhere in localities, with less and more widely spread services and populations would need to be explored. GA undertook considerable scoping before it became operational which identified over 200 local services, so the foundation for undertaking this type of capacity building was there and GA was in a good position to continue to pilot the approach.

In terms of project management, HMPPS had anticipated that the willingness to be open to trying new approaches was universally accepted within its organisation, which had not proved to be the case. A significant unforeseen challenge at the start had been to convince colleagues to be open to change. Establishing GA had required resilience and perseverance:

'I should say, in the first day of my job, I thought we were going to be supporting others to work in a more community-centred way and we might get a bit of resistance from community groups, a bit of fear about working with offenders, whatever. I think by the time day two came, I realised that 90% of the challenge was going to be internal and that's the battle ground. It's convincing colleagues. It's convincing people that hold the purse strings, people who believe that this is the right thing to do'. (HMPPS 2).

The Strategic Lead was not just involved in driving GA forward (at a strategic level) but in having to deal with some of the more mundane but essential elements of GA's operation (ordering chairs, organising storage etc). From HMPPS's perspective, it demonstrated that it was not possible to have staff who were servicing the systems, policies and the governance completely divorced from the operational necessities. The drawback was there was no escalation, independence and separation from the GA team, although a significant benefit was the trust which developed between the team and the Strategy Lead:

'That's why I end up getting involved in everything ... t's just, I'm the only person who has that overview of how probation is working and what's expected of them, and how our grants thing, is working and ... the governance things, and what that means for the spending review and all of those things. You need to have that whole picture. That means that I just get drawn into absolutely everything'. (HMPPS 2)

Finally, there were some personal observations regarding practice and working methods. For one of the support workers, not being afraid to challenge some of the men when they would continually present with their problems but not be committed to finding a resolution. When liaising with other agencies, to be questioning when a particular course of action was not working, to try and find another solution, to hold other agencies to account and to have difficult conversations when needed. Finally, when engaging with the men being aware of how the smallest of actions could make a big difference to them and the importance of praise and validation:

'I've learnt that if you - the smallest gesture to the men that we work with can have such a huge impact. But you can just see - like we've sent letters to people that have being doing well, giving certificates to people for engaging The probation team giving a card to someone that got a job, and I feel like those small gestures go a long way in terms of early support and engagement, instilling belief in that person and showing that we're proud that they're working hard'. (PO 3).

Has GA achieved its objectives?

GA was regarded by some as a 'work in progress' and still developing. It was important for the Probation Service to keep trying to establish itself in the community and to break down the barriers between the criminal justice system and the community. GA had shown that Probation could work successfully in different environments. However, some questioned whether simply

moving into the community was sufficient as they understood GA to be an innovative project which would change practice, queried whether this had happened, whether the opportunity had been missed and whether at some point GA would be required to evidence what it was doing differently. One of the POs joined the team because they hoped GA would be unique and different, but did not think it was or that it had reached its potential:

'I was hoping it would be a pilot, something unique, something different, and really, it's not. Essentially, it's the same role, I'm just lucky enough to be based in my community and in nice centres, not in a grotty old building in town'. (PO 7)

This was because GA had not defined what difference looked like and as discussed previously whether because of the re-unification of the Probation Service and emergence from Covid it was the right time to innovate. For some the only metric which GA would ultimately be judged on was whether re-offending rates had dropped:

'If you can see the re-offending rate of Ely and Caerau over five years, and then this project's five years and you see the re-offending rate (has) dropped, then we've probably done something. If it's the same or higher, we've wasted five years'. (PO 5)

Others felt that GA was achieving its aims, as the men were attending their appointments and various individuals had made significant progress because of the support provided by GA:

'People do come in. They're being seen and there's not been any catastrophic error with that. There's not been any big event or incident where we've had to withdraw (from the community). That's obviously proving that we're doing something right and we've managed it right. I think all those things are great. I think our attitude as probation, (and HMPPS), towards the whole thing has been really consistent'. (PO 1).

'We really have, to the people like [POP 1] ... I could name just so many of them, seeing where they were from the time I first met them to seeing where they are now'. (Partner 2)

The POs were asked how well they thought GA and the Probation Service had integrated into the community (as discussed earlier two of the partners did not feel they had or that anything had significantly changed). The team supported various community days that the Support Centre were involved in (e.g. family-based activities and other events) and thought that helped them to be regarded as part of the community. The POs were still exploring different ways of working, which took time and expectations needed to be realistic. For one, GA was not '100 percent firing on all cylinders', but there had been 'major strides' (PO 7), it was continually developing and the longer the team spent in the community, the more knowledge they gained. Integration was a continuous process, not a single event:

'I'm really pleased with how the team in the last 12 months have integrated further. I think there was a bit of confusion at the beginning, and it did feel like we just maybe worked in Ely, but I think over time the development, the relationships forged with members of the community, some on probation, some not, other agencies, despite the challenges being in different areas of Ely has been beneficial with linking in with [Church two], the minister there. The person at the Pavilion and now having the community connectors and on board'. (PO 3).

There was the need to be realistic when viewing the objectives. GA could not change everything that was needed in Ely with the resources it had; 'there are not enough people on it to think that we can go into an area like Ely and change the world' (PO 2). Two years into the project, HMPPS questioned whether the original objectives (chapter one) fully reflected what GA had become or what had developed. For example, it was not apparent what the intention had been about trialling innovative community solutions:

'..... it's never really been clear to me what those innovative community solutions are. I don't think the stated objectives match what we have been doing, what we are doing, and what we want to do in the future'. (HMPPS 2)

At the time the original objectives were developed there was different thinking about innovation, for example the development of a life plan for those on Probation, *'which is like a passport which has their aspirations and hopes for the future'* (HMPPS 2). Whilst there was a good reason for this being an objective at the time, the challenge became what to do with it at the end of community supervision, who would pick it up. Ultimately it was unworkable:

'So, over the course of the three years we've had about 275 people on Grand Avenues. Which professional is going to take a caseload of 275 people and keep going without us putting (in any finance)?' (HMPPS 2)

Sticking rigidly to the original objectives was not a concern as those involved in GA's development knew it was likely to be an agile project and unlikely to properly take shape until it was fully resourced in the community (at the end of the field work period Community Engagement Workers were being appointed). The initial vision was that GA would be led by a partnership and evolve over a 10-year period. This was problematic as 10 years spanned multiple (Government) administrations and funding settlements, and circumstances and priorities could change. In addition, those involved with GA had different ideas of what it was trying to achieve and should do which was a help and a hindrance. In phase three a collaborative planning exercise took place with the CDO and the POs to develop a mission statement, vision and key outputs, which would provide a basis for further planning and the production of a briefing document about GA:

'We're currently going through a process of trying to work out what we're doing well, what should our priorities be – what are the things that are important to us, but we maybe can't deliver ourselves, and so we need to work with other statutory organisations to deliver'. (HMPPS 2)

HMPPS wanted the long-term constant objective for GA to be *'around community safety and well-being'*, even if delivery changed and to be responsive to any changes in the Probation operating model. Regarding innovation, HMPPS did not feel that GA was doing anything new or particularly innovative. Trialling innovative community interventions was the wrong objective, as it *'makes it implicit that this might require ongoing investment from HMPPS'*. It also raised the matter of what type of intervention should be considered; Probation focused, or community partner focused, which then led to whether it fitted with the way the third sector operated, its capacity and how it would maintain the activity. The arrangements with the CDO represented value for money (an annual grant of £50,000), which was modest when compared to what could be spent on funding programmes and it had made a difference to the support provided.

For HMPPS at the core of GA was providing the right conditions to build a good relationship between the Probation practitioner and an individual on Probation and reflecting what research found improved the quality of Probation practice. HMPPS did not want GA to develop toolkits, materials and manuals for practitioners, but to create an environment where people could build relationships and be open about themselves, which was more productive and revealing than the 15-minute appointment and check-in at WS, with the men going back to their communities and POs not being any more informed about their lives. The POs and community partners were good at building positive trusting relations and if that could be done in an inclusive and welcoming environment it was likely to be beneficial for everyone.

Replication

When asked if GA was ready for replication there were mixed opinions. Views in favour tended to be based on GA having more going for it than not, despite the lack of clarity at times and that it was beneficial for the Probation Service to be working with the right partners in the

community, that other PDUs could benefit from doing something similar and learning from GA's experience. PO 7 questioned what 100 percent right would look like, which was a valid point. HMPPS thought that GA should not be replicated in the same way elsewhere, partly because some of the local links and partnerships made were particular to the locality and had been crucial to its success. It was more a matter of applying the lessons learned and determining what would work for each community as all had different challenges, a view which was shared by the Partners:

'Yes. Because if you're trying to replicate this project over in another part of the city, you would have totally different issues because no two communities are the same ... the needs are driven by the community and before you can build on anything you need to make sure (of) that bottom rung'. (Partner 4)

Others did not feel that GA was ready for replication because it needed a framework which addressed the basics of working with different agencies in the community, risk awareness and management and better quality control around the expectations of partners:

'Yeah, because we've got no control over these agencies either. We're inviting them in, but if they don't show up on a Thursday they don't show up on a Thursday. That's the end of it. We need more control'. (PO 7)

Other matters related to GA's identity, 'brand' and additionality; whether replicating a service meant it needed a changed identity, if so, what was going to be done differently or whether simply moving location was enough (*'I'm not sure what you're replicating other than you've been in the community'* – PO1). Moving appointments to a different environment might promote better engagement but did not in itself guarantee better outcomes.

Senior leaders in HMPPS were interested in replicating a GA type of approach in England and Wales and several areas were under active consideration. There was the potential to extend further in Cardiff as the Probation Service was divided into several teams which covered the city, so a footprint was already there, but whether it would work in all localities and for all types of offenders (depending on their risks and needs) needed further exploration:

'So, if there was an option for east to go and work in Llanrumney in a hub or wherever, then I think that definitely be achieved. I'm not sure about smaller towns, more rural, but I do feel that probation generally could work to this model for everyone no matter where you live and move away from big buildings like this. Although ... there will always be a need for some people to attend an environment like this because of their risk and the building structure (in the community) not being adequate for high risk to staff'. (PO 3).

To successfully move forward there needed to be collective buy-in and commitment from local leaders and regional and national leadership in HMPPS. Any developments would not be managed with the same level of central support from HMPPS as responsibilities would be devolved to the PDUs. That said, HMPPS planned to recruit a project manager to provide initial support to interested areas, to help them to develop local plans, build relationships and codify what needed to happen:

'In Bristol, for example, we're not going to be like project managing what happens there, but we will put a bit of the infrastructure in place, have some of those early conversations with key partners, and you might think of it as a mini-internal consultancy type thing'. (HMPPS 2)

HMPPS Area Executives were interested and enthusiastic because they wanted better 'community connections' and to explore what was possible as a GA type of approach offered the prospect of genuine change. In addition, GA attracted interest from a variety of external organisations including prisons, housing associations and health boards so there was an

appetite and interest in doing something different and in developing community-based operations.

Conclusions

GA's partners agreed that it was right for the Probation Service to work in the community. It had been a good initiative to be part of despite the challenges and there was an enthusiasm to make it work strategically and operationally. A critical issue for some was GA's identity and what it was trying to achieve, as that affected its day-to-day operations as well as what expansion into other areas would look like. Relevant matters were whether simply re-locating Probation into a better environment which its staff and the men liked was sufficient, (accepting that relationships were likely to improve and knowledge of the men and their needs increase) or whether the objective was to innovate and what that would look like. HMPPS did not regard GA as pioneering (or innovative) or that some of the original objectives had been the right ones (for example addressing intergenerational offending as discussed earlier in this chapter). Being successfully based in the community with additional support was a valid objective, but the opportunity to be more innovative had been hampered because there was no agreement about what that looked like and on-going Probation pressures. The focus became relational working and providing the right conditions to nurture this. Whether community-based working was right for the entire Probation Service was a much bigger question.

All parties were clear that GA should not simply be transplanted elsewhere without a clear articulation of what it was trying to achieve. As it had evolved capacity building and developing community connections were at the forefront. HMPPS staff who had been involved with GA suggested there should be more scope to commission differently and make local arrangements. GA was in a good position to do this and although it was not one of the original objectives it was a logical direction to go in from the foundations it had. GA had established two very productive sets of arrangements, one with the CDO which it commissioned to provide specialist support and with another local organisation which it did not commission but through which it was able to access resources, advice, guidance and employment related support for the men. A further test was how far the latter could be repeated with other organisations providing different types of support which was continuing to be explored.

If co-location and joint working was to be part of the focus, one of the key issues was getting the partnership right. It took three years to get to the point where this had been achieved. One of the benefits of GA was the pool of resources it created for the Probation Service, with the potential to do more. This included assisting other agencies to understand how Probation functioned and the non-negotiable elements of partnership working with a statutory organisation. It was essential to engage with agencies which were committed, had similar ideals and brought relevant skills and services. Partners working with GA and the Probation Service had to be in accord with what the commissioner wanted (HMPPS), as no matter how interesting their suggestions might be, they were unlikely to be adopted unless they fitted with the overall vision and were regarded as valid and helpful by the Probation Service.

Chapter Twelve: Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter starts by addressing the research questions, discusses key elements to consider if GA is to be replicated and concludes with recommendations which emerged from the research. The evaluation covered a specific period and way of working, when GA was largely based at the Support Centre. As the evaluation was concluding GA was moving from there and what it would look like and how it would operate was yet to be determined. The research study set out to answer the following questions, which are discussed below:

1. How has the re-location of Probation Supervision into the local community been carried out and what barriers and enablers have supported it?

HMPPS were clear why they wanted GA to be based in Caerau and Ely (because of high levels of crime and deprivation), which was supported by initial scoping undertaken with a broad range of stakeholders from the community. The most productive relationships came from being in and part of the community and provided a platform from which to find out more about what existed locally and to build local connections. HMPPS undertook preparatory work to identify GA's cohort and what the eligibility criteria would be. POs would have liked more input into who was transferred based on their needs and not just their post code as they wanted to ensure that those selected would benefit the most from what was being provided. The Probation team worked well under the pressure it continually faced. There were some concerns about case recording at the start, which arose from hybrid working (holding cases in WS and GA), but did not feature significantly as GA became established.

One of the main enablers was the commitment of the GA team (POs and partners) to make it work. The impetus remained despite changes in personnel, partnership and venues. There were concerns about 'change fatigue' and inevitably some turnover of POs for various reasons, but those who liked working in the community adapted to what was required and wanted to remain there. The expertise of the support staff was valued by the POs because of their ability to engage with the men, their knowledge of the problems they were being presented with and how to resolve them. This led to a high level of mutual trust and confidence. A further enabler was the HMPPS Strategy Lead who successfully established GA, was resilient, solution focused and prepared to make changes. The Senior Responsible Officer was also supportive of the way in which GA operated, which gave it a strong foundation.

Barriers to development were delays to the start-up of GA due to Covid, the reunification of the Probation Service and too much focus on envisaging what it might look like rather than taking initial steps. The Strategy Lead overcame this by finding a way forward with the Probation Service and establishing good relations with the Probation Delivery Unit, which were maintained. Confidence grew as GA became established, and reticence shifted to interest in what was going on. The Probation Service was party to the decisions being made and agreed with them. There were significant individual successes with some of the men and no major incidents of concern regarding those being supervised.

There were advantages and disadvantages in the types of venues used (and within each venue) which could enhance the community experience (the right environment fostered better engagement) or detract from it (distracting, difficult to maintain confidentiality or not neutral enough). There were continual efforts to ensure that the POs could effectively carry out their functions and that the working environment was right for them. The arrangements at the Support Centre worked well for a period with the combined expertise of the commissioned partners, presence of some external services, support from peer mentors and the availability of activities that men on Probation could take part in. The Centre was a venue for community activity and was less stigmatizing and criminogenic, which the POs and men felt provided a better environment for Probation supervision and offered the men a place to go outside of Probation appointments, which some did, although the level of take up was difficult to assess.

In addition, there had not been any resistance or complaints from the community, despite the Support Centre becoming known as a place where the Probation Service conducted appointments. It is difficult to identify whether this was because of the initial groundwork done in the area which demonstrated support for a community-based Probation team or because there had not been any 'incidents' which caused concern to the community or local residents (or the combination of both). Members of the community and 'offenders' appeared to integrate well and used the same services the Support Centre had to offer, which meant it was not solely gathering groups of offenders together as WS did. Some of the other venues worked less well than the Support Centre because the same level of support could not be provided, they were not as neutral and although they gave GA more options to operate from, they were not right for everyone and for various reasons (configuration of rooms, availability of WiFi etc).

The impact of the move from the Support Centre occurred outside of the evaluation period, so it is not possible to fully identify to what extent GA retained some of the positive aspects and how that was achieved. However, anecdotal evidence suggested that it was still evolving (by exploring new ideas and learning from past experiences), continuing to be a positive way of working for the POs, partners and men on Probation and a project that remained worthwhile. An important development was the availability of the Pavilion, a new venue which Probation had exclusive use of in Ely. As well as being a contact centre for Probation appointments it had the potential to develop other activities the men could participate in, (for example a gardening project, which commenced after the evaluation period). The Pavilion also provided the right environment for GA to flourish and had some of the advantages of the Support Centre (a welcoming environment) without some of the concerns (notably about how risk would be managed). Additionally, GA had the right partnership in place, a committed Probation team and there was good evidence of collaborative work which was progressively getting stronger. Further, the appointment of a Community Engagement Worker was very positive. It was anecdotally reported that they fitted in well with the team and were expanding the community connections.

2. What changes in interventions and working practices have occurred as a result and how effective are they in supporting a more pro-social way of living?

The men attended their appointments and community reporting was not seen as a soft option or optional choice (the requirement to attend was understood). There were significant advantages in connecting an individual to a service at the same time they were attending their Probation appointment as the POs felt they were more likely to engage with what they needed and was on offer. The role of support workers in dealing with some of the issues that Probation could not or did not have the time or knowledge to address was a significant help, notably with financial problems (debt, hardship or benefits related) or to do with housing and employment. Although introducing therapeutic support was not part of the original plan, due to the skills of one of the support workers, significant work was done in this area in the first two years of GA which helped some of the men to disclose past problems and to move forward, suggesting that trauma-informed support could be part of what is provided particularly if the environments in which the Probation team were based facilitated this way of working. Some of the men benefitted from emotional support as well as the practical assistance provided.

The POs felt that because they were working in less criminogenic environments the quality of their relationship with the men was better and they had more in-depth knowledge about them, which assisted the POs to be able to better identify their needs and respond to them. The men confirmed this, and some felt able to be more open about their circumstances, developed a good relationship with their POs and both parties felt appointments were more relaxed and less time-bound which facilitated engagement. For the POs this was less about 'checking in' and more about finding out about and supporting the individual. The case studies illustrated some of the complex problems which needed multi-agency involvement and importantly an advocate to work on behalf of the men. However, one of the challenges for GA was capacity and what a small team could achieve in a locality with significant deprivation and crime levels.

Effectiveness would inevitably be correlated to the availability of resources, although that is not to diminish what was achieved.

In terms of innovation and changes to working practices, there were potentially three elements: working with the men, their families and the community. The most important element was addressing the needs of the men, which GA was achieving as described above. The family-based element was less certain (discussed below) and co-production and community involvement was still developing. The degree to which GA was a co-produced project is debatable. It may have benefited from a period of internal capacity building and exploration of partner working practices to help to develop this aspect. The Men's Group at the Support Centre was potentially a platform for co-production but it did not have this remit, had its own agenda and it was not clear how any ideas it generated would be fed into the wider process of project development. A few interested men engaged, and the project needed to be realistic about the extent to which men on Probation wanted co-production and would view it with any interest given their sometimes difficult circumstances. In terms of community engagement GA recognised that it needed to reach out.

A key aspect of community development work was helping external organisations to understand what the Probation Service did and how their services could help to prevent offending. This was identified in the early stages of the project in stakeholder workshops, which continued to be held periodically throughout and was part of ongoing work to identify what was available locally and what GA could connect to. A further aspect that is relevant to community working practices is what type of PO this requires. Most POs were positive about their experiences of GA but where the reasons for leaving by choice were known, it was evident that in a minority of instances it did not suit everyone. This raises the question of whether community working requires a particular type of PO (who is adaptable and resilient to change) and comfortable working in a structure that is both rule-bound and flexible and can find an acceptable balance between the two. It should not be assumed that being in the community is an easy or preferable option, some embraced it whereas others found it challenging.

The intention was not to develop prescriptive plans or rigid planning processes for GA but to 'see what would develop', which was hit and miss and at times and could result in tension in accommodating a broad vision with the tightly prescribed way in which Probation operated. A criticism from all the partner agencies was about the lack of plan and direction (clear aims and principles) and what GA was expected to achieve and by when. There was also the question of whether it was a top down or bottom up led project. Had there been an agreed theory of change, developed with the partners and combined with internal capacity building, it may have been possible to look at what could be done with the three elements identified above with the knowledge, skills and capability GA had. It is important to note that none of the partners were experts in family-focused work and the organisation which was best placed to develop an ABCD approach was not fully utilised in this way. The potential for innovation attracted some of the POs to GA but had not materialised as they would have liked. Some wanted to trial holding smaller caseloads (ten per PO), so that more focused work could be done. However, what the enhanced activity would look like needed to be determined, as did what community-based activities POs would do, how it would augment their skills, be relevant to their role and not duplicate what other services were doing. Further there was the question of what the GA offer should be to the men on Probation, apart from seeing them in their own community and whether this was sufficient practice change. Whilst a mission and values were being developed for GA (three years in) which would address some of the points discussed, it did not delineate what was unique to GA or what GA offered to men in the community and what could be developed further.

If trialling innovative community solutions is viewed through a different lens, the main vehicle for it came from the relationships formed between the men and various workers who were part of the GA team and the skills and strengths they brought in engaging with the men and helping them to improve their lifestyles. This was less a question of innovation and more a matter of

providing the emotional or practical support they needed to re-direct their lives which some of the men achieved. Whilst this might be seen as 'light touch' innovative in that it introduced a different, and more effective type of support it did not fundamentally alter what Probation delivered. HMPPS recognised this and wanted GA to provide the right environment to nurture relational practice as it appeared to be the right area to concentrate efforts on.

3. How have the men (and their families) experienced locality-based working, had their needs met and has this led to more positive relationships with their supervising officer, family and the community?

The men preferred being seen in their community, liked the proximity to home and convenience. They described being able to develop a better rapport with their PO in a more relaxed environment and liked the immediacy of help and support provided. When based at the Support Centre, the men knew when the POs or other services would be there if they needed assistance, and some participated in the Men Changing Lives group (which was held on a non-Probation day) and were invited to take part in trips that were organised to various places by the Charity. The Centre's activities were open to the community and not restricted to the men on Probation. The enrichment and befriending activities were beneficial for some of the men although it has not been possible to assess how many engaged with what was on offer on a regular basis or to quantify to what extent and for how many the venue became a regular part of their lives. It did for a small identifiable number who were interviewed, as they felt it was welcoming and inclusive, gave them structure and attending became part of their weekly routine. Where there were reservations, it was generally due to social anxiety, other commitments or not feeling attending the Support Centre was right for them. When the Probation team moved from the Centre it is not known whether the men who had formed an attachment to it continued to attend (beyond one of the peer mentors who remained as a volunteer) or whether the attraction diminished. This is something to potentially follow up on.

There were significant life changes for some of the men which came from the emotional and practical support they received from GA. The men valued what others were doing on their behalf and for some this started to move them away from their past lifestyles and to be more open to making changes. The evaluation identified a small number of men who had complex problems who received significant assistance to overcome them (financial, housing or employment related and to do with their emotional well-being) and to lead more positive lifestyles. It was not possible to fully assess whether more in-depth knowledge about the individual and their circumstances and good engagement led to better outcomes. For some it did but for others whilst assistance was provided, such as making a successful PIP application, it was not possible to ascertain whether it was enough to prevent re-offending or addressed the root cause. That said, the indications were very promising and if a small number of men were helped to the extent that they stopped offending, it was significant progress and suggests it would be worth following up to establish if the changes were maintained (the research period was too short to provide evidence of this). The POs would have liked more capacity (whether through peer mentors, volunteers or support workers) to accompany the men to appointments and to cement the community connections being made for them, but this was not part of the immediate plan for GA but might merit consideration for the future as it was consistently raised by the POs.

A further benefit of being based at the Support Centre was that the men could be accompanied by family members or partners. This gave the POs the option of meeting them and finding out more about their circumstances, which was not normally possible other than through Home Visits and could not be accommodated at WS. Some of the family members had pressing problems which GA support workers assisted them with. It proved difficult to determine what addressing intergenerational offending should look like. GA was not a child-centered project, and POs had to meet their statutory obligations to the men they were supervising. They believed the best way to help the family was by addressing the needs of the men (improving income, reducing hardship, reducing substance misuse, and obtaining employment etc).

Preventing inter-generational offending may not have been the right objective and neither did GA have the financial resources for it or enough of the right expertise. Addressing deep rooted and complex family problems can be a long-term piece of work which is also contingent on family members remaining engaged which from GA's experience varied depending on what was going on for them. Some of the support workers possessed the requisite skills and invested considerable time in helping some family members with practical problems, their personal relationships and engagement with statutory agencies. GA had the potential to build links with the voluntary and statutory sectors which undertook this work (e.g. Barnardo's and the Local Authority Team Around the Family), which could be a way forward.

4. How have partnership approaches to support the work of the Probation Service developed (through commissioned third sector services and other partners) and what has and has not worked well and why?

There were varied experiences of partnership working and dynamics could change positively and negatively. GA developed a very positive relationship with the CDO, which had been prepared to work through problems, to change how it could best contribute and understand the implications of working with the Probation Service. HMPPS worked with it to establish what its role would be (providing financial support to those in crisis and promoting access to its services) and supported it to overcome initial reluctance to work with offenders (it did not think it had the right expertise). It took three years to achieve this, highlighting that finding the right partner could take time, that relationships needed to be nurtured, professional trust had to be developed, and all parties needed to be committed to finding the best way of working together.

Relations with other partners which were initially promising became less successful mainly because their attitude and approach did not ultimately fit with GA. The biggest challenge was compatibility, ethos, understanding of each other and expectations. Hierarchy, expertise, clarity of roles and expectations, conflict and disagreement also impacted. If these elements were out of kilter with HMPPS and the Probation Service, the relationship would not work. The HMPPS Strategy Lead made changes when necessary and invested in problem resolution across the partnership. Multi-agency work required an effective communication structure which had been difficult to get right. Positive efforts continued to be made to ensure that information was exchanged and developments discussed, which led to improvements. It also became apparent that partnership arrangements would only work well if those tasked with actions had the authority to carry them out, which was challenging as none of the agencies had full jurisdiction over the partnership. As GA was about Probation practice, the arrangements had to be right for the POs so that they could carry out their duties. The intention had been to create 'an equal' partnership with the commissioned partners, which was not possible as HMPPS had to make decisions which partners did not always agree with and to hold them to account. Ultimately HMPPS and the Probation Service made decisions about what GA did, not the partners.

Community based working required the Probation Service to operate from venues which were outside of the Ministry of Justice's estate. Negotiation was needed with the providers about who made what decisions about how the space was used and who had access to it on the days when the Probation Service were conducting appointments. There were advantages in using venues that were 'open to the public' as they were less stigmatising, but this meant that certain risks were difficult to control and partner perceptions about what constituted acceptable risk varied. Some of the requirements of partnership working (from the HMPPS standpoint) were not ironed out at the start, which caused later problems and the end of a relationship with one of the partners. This might have been avoided had it been determined what would and would not be accommodated at the outset and how that fitted with HMPPS expectations. This was a priority with any new venue providers. What did not work well was when conflicts arose in the partnership which could not be resolved (around risk identification and management), the partner being too overt about what they felt GA should be doing, not

delivering what was needed and/or disengaging. Whilst all partners appeared to have a common ethos, the reality was very different, which affected relations throughout.

A further matter was whether GA should be co-located with other agencies or stand-alone, although what ultimately emerged as important was building strong relationships with the right agencies, knowing what was available in the area and the pathways into various support and activities. The Support Centre had a range of agencies in attendance, some more relevant than others, which was beneficial and problematic. Not all the agencies and the Probation team interacted well with each other or were curious about each other. Having a pool of resources to draw on was of assistance, provided it came from the right individuals and organisations which were able to address the problems faced by the men. Co-location did not necessarily mean that problems could immediately be resolved or guaranteed better outcomes (for example with housing) or that formal arrangements could be side-stepped (such as the benefits system), but the immediacy of access to advice for the POs and men was a significant improvement on traditional Probation arrangements. As GA progressed it became more discerning about which agencies were the most relevant and helpful. The DWP was regarded as an essential partner. What also worked well was finding initiatives that were focused on individuals living in the locality and forming relations with them. GA's link to an employment initiative *Shape Your Future* was very productive. Its lead worker was vested in the locality, helped GA to make useful local connections and provided advice, practical and financial support to the men on employment and vocational progression. It was the type of partnership that GA wanted and would continue to pursue.

There were varied opinions on co-location and as much as it was valued, it was questioned whether it was replicable across all GA's venues, because of organisational capacity, likely take up of services, the policies and priorities of prospective partners or whether the focus should be outward looking in identifying community-based agencies to engage with and securing their involvement. Co-location was not a necessity, but knowing how to access services was, as was improving links with local Hubs which had existing arrangements with external agencies (One Stop Shop type of approaches) and drop-in facilities. The CDO evolved with GA and was providing the support it needed with tangible evidence of having improved the financial circumstances of some of the men it worked with and was continuing to promote its other services to GA.

GA had a period of retrenchment, when initial plans for the Community Development Service and ABCD did not come to fruition but towards the end of the evaluation period was regenerating that focus with the recruitment of two Community Engagement Workers. These workers were employed to undertake community development work to increase the resources available to GA based on the identified needs and interests of the men. A further option for building community links would be to consider appointing more support workers and/or peer mentors, but as previously mentioned this was not the way in which GA wanted to build community connections, and its current structure and resourcing would not allow it.

Community-based partnership working was part of GA's identity, and it moved through different versions before establishing what worked best. Each of the configurations of partnerships in each of the phases had its strengths and weaknesses. What was needed was finding ways of effectively addressing the most commonly recurring problems that GA was dealing with (notably benefits, housing and employment) to support desistance and prevent further offending. One of the issues for GA was whether it could replicate the successful elements of what it was doing within its own structure and in each of the venues it operated from, with the conclusion being that it could not. Each venue and set of arrangements had their own strengths and weaknesses and the key was to identify what they were and to work in the most appropriate way with them.

GA had been something of a voyage of discovery, with no clear blueprint, which was an advantage as it allowed flexibility and changes of direction but a disadvantage for replication, as there was not a clear 'roadmap' to follow which might help others to avoid some of the

pitfalls experienced. That said GA demonstrated that it was flexible, able to develop in different ways and be responsive to change. HMPPS strengthened its team to provide support to other localities which wanted to embark on a similar journey, so the expertise gained was being used to best effect.

5. How has a sustainable community-focused approach been developed and whether and to what extent have community links and associations for those under supervision in the area been strengthened?

It was not possible to say with any confidence that GA had developed a sustainable community focus. The development of an ABCD approach had been hampered by not having the right partners in the right roles at the start and different ideas about who should do what (POs, partners etc). An internal restructure of roles and responsibilities within the partnership led to a move away from ABCD for a period and to the commissioned partners providing direct support to the men using their expertise and knowledge, which was more inward than outward looking, although did involve connecting the men to services they needed or advocating and brokering on their behalf. When the evaluation was concluding, Community Engagement Workers were being recruited to reanimate links to the community as there remained a genuine intent to see if it would make a difference to the Probation Service, provide the men with useful community links and develop sustainable connections.

The extent to which community links and associations for those under supervision had been strengthened varied on an individual basis, but it was significant that GA was trying to generate a variety of resources (services and activities) which could be accessed for the men tailored to their individual needs and interests. The CDO was an important partner, as it was embedded in the locality, and was not solely reliant on HMPPS funding. It had income from independent sources and provided various services for the community to alleviate hardship and improve wellbeing and lifestyles, although it also required some funding to focus on the GA cohort. An option for the future was to monitor the take up of the CDO's services from the GA cohort as that might give an indication of how well the men were utilising community-based resources. A challenge was how the specialist support provided by the CDO would be maintained without some financial support, which could be provided if there was a degree of local commissioning which HMPPS could continue to provide through GA. This was where GA had the potential to innovate, which would not require changes to Probation practice, which had not and could not alter, but to examine the Probation Service's relationship with the community and how it could support the men and prevent offending.

In terms of sustainability, GA was attempting to put in place links with core services which could help to address the problems the men presented with and to identify agencies and initiatives in the locality which could respond to individual needs and interests. It was evident that POs working alone with their caseload were unlikely to achieve the same outcomes because of the breadth and depth of the problems and the expertise needed to address them. Within the GA team various support workers provided different elements of what was required, but capacity was also an issue in terms of sustainability. It is worth noting that in year one GA had four support workers directly engaged with the men by phase three there was only one. Similarly, in phase one it had three peer mentors but by the time it was entering its fourth phase (April 2024 onwards) it had none. However, the creation of Community Engagement Worker posts was a positive step for GA as the expectation was continued stakeholder identification and engagement.

Developing sustainability also concerned the Probation team. The POs felt they had a better understanding of the community because they were based there, but their role had not changed, and it was doubtful they were acquiring new skills. This raised several issues:

- what should be the role of the community-based PO;
- whether it should have different functions;

- what the pathway should be for POs working in the community; and
- how the knowledge acquired could be retained on an individual and corporate basis if the community focus was to be preserved, strengthened and sustained.

Conclusions

A key issue for GA and replication was what to reproduce, whether it was simply a Probation presence and reporting base in the community, an operation with other agencies which may or may not be commissioned to provide access to mainstream or specialist services (statutory and otherwise) or a project concentrating on outward facing community development, co-production and capacity building. The reality was to some extent all these things, but that could also cloud identity. GA had different partnerships, relationships and arrangements with the constant being to provide the right environment for the Probation Service to work in and to develop community connections into which the men could be introduced to. The lack of quantitative data is a limitation of the research and being able to correlate the support provided by partners and the impact on the men when viewed as a cohort (rather than as individuals). Whilst everyone preferred having a 'nicer' environment to work in and report to, how far it led to better outcomes and impacted on lifestyles, desistence and reoffending was not quantifiable (numbers are relatively small for this type of analysis), although it is anticipated that information from the Ministry of Justice Data Lab may be able to assist with this. There were some notable individual successes, which came from being based in the community which may not have occurred had the contact remained in WS. Anecdotally the POs indicated that breach and recall rates were lower in GA, but this needs to be substantiated. It was evident from interviews with the men and their case studies that some made very positive progress. Reducing recidivism even for a small number of individuals can represent a significant cost saving to the criminal justice system when compared to the ongoing costs of delivering services to offenders in the community and in prison.

GA is a positive and worthwhile initiative which is still developing, although questions remain about what family, community involvement and co-production look like, can be developed (and co-exist) and whether it needs an identity or not (other than being a locality-based initiative). The indications are that GA should continue to be iterative, refine its approach and concentrate on how the Probation Service can effectively work in the community with various partners and increase understanding of its role and function through the various forms of stakeholder engagement it undertakes. As a locality-based approach, GA's successes and challenges need to be understood in the context of the specific locality in which it was situated which has high levels of crime and deprivation, challenging social issues and what could realistically be achieved, but it does provide a broad and flexible model that others could learn from. Based on the findings the key elements that make it replicable are:

1. Determining what the general intention is and whether being based in a community setting is sufficient or whether the aspiration is to change working practices in the Probation Service and how it works with partners, and to broadly agree what that looks like, avoiding rigidity in defining the different elements.
2. Identifying the right partners, being prepared for this to take time, that arrangements might not be right from the start, making changes if necessary and recognising that as the project develops the type of partnership and partners might need to change.
3. Setting local governance, defining roles, responsibilities, powers and delegations at the start and clarifying the relationship to national governance and decision-making, including identifying what the Probation Service can insist on in partnership working arrangements.
4. Co-production and capacity building within the partnership at the outset to ensure there is clarity about the plans, intentions, communication and direction of travel and who the decision makers are on which issues.
5. Understanding what the local area has to offer to the Probation Service and how its resources, services and activities can be accessed.

Recommendations:

The following recommendations were identified from the analysis of GA activity, which need to be understood in the context of how it was operating at the time:

Key elements

1. Determine whether GA should develop a clearly defined and articulated offer to the men on Probation, addressing some of the issues raised such as more Home Visits, engagement whilst in custody (particularly as part of pre-release arrangements) and access to trauma informed help and support and whether GA should have a particular identity, as with some other teams in the Probation Service, considering how it differs from ordinary Probation work and connects to other specialist Probation activity.
2. Consider whether GA should pilot a significant reduction in caseload (e.g. ten per officer) to determine whether it would make a difference to outcomes for the men being supervised. This could be linked to the GA offer to the men under supervision. (It should be noted this recommendation was made in the context of innovation rather than business as usual activity).
3. Pilot how capacity building in the community could be undertaken by devolving a small budget to designated areas, starting with GA, for this purpose. Continue to monitor what GA is doing in this respect and any difference it is making.

Structure

4. Determine what the planning processes are (co-production or otherwise), what the communication structure should look like and whether project management support is required to set the direction and determine the priorities, with whoever is driving it forward having the authority to work across different agencies to develop a plan that is agreed and followed.
5. When working in a shared environment all parties need to have a common understanding (agreed at the start) of what working with the Probation Service entails and to develop a common understanding of how to operate, what boundaries exist and what is and is not negotiable around risk and staff safety to ensure that different organisational policies and practices align.
6. Determine what a GA type of approach requires in terms of venues, depending on what is available in the locality (which is at least one main base). Venues should ideally be neutral spaces, welcoming and inclusive and able to accommodate Probation Service requirements so that POs can effectively carry out their statutory functions.

Partnership

7. Identify who the core community partners should be and the relationship with them (co-location and how to access their services). The criteria should be whether the partner can meet the needs of service users, support the Probation Service and there is sufficient need for their services or the activities they provide. There are advantages in co-location with other organisations because of the immediacy of access to their resources and the potential for those on Probation to have continued engagement at times other than Probation appointments and when their orders have ended. However effective relations with local services which are not on the same premises could also provide this.
8. Work with families requires specific expertise and a different approach (to community development work) and is best placed with organisations which have this knowledge. If this continues to fit with GA's objectives, future commissioning should consider whether a partner with family-focused experience is required and how relationships with existing local services can be developed.
9. Consider the need for support staff, such as volunteers, peer mentors or Lifestyle workers to help to cement community connections for the men on Probation by

assisting them to access befriending and enrichment activities, accompanying them to meetings and appointments and advocating on their behalf.

10. If individuals with lived experience are to be part of the approach, develop a strategy to address recruitment, training, support, the purpose of the role, end goals and exit strategies to ensure it is a positive and enriching experience and provides the opportunity to progress.

Future Developments

There are several options that GA could consider as part of its ongoing development and evaluation:

1. Undertake the following research and monitoring activities to get a clearer picture of some of the help and support provided to the men on Probation:
 - For those individuals where positive progress had been made whilst engaging with GA, follow up to establish if this had been maintained.
 - Identify the take-up of services and support provided by the CDO from its commissioned and non-commissioned work.
 - Continue to monitor the range of resources and contacts GA is developing and the role of the Community Engagement Workers in this.
2. Consider what the relationships should be with other specialist Probation teams and partnerships e.g. IOM and WISDOM which are working with men from the Caerau and Ely area. This is relevant as some of the men being managed through these arrangements may, if their risk levels alter, eventually report to GA.
3. Similarly consider how links can be made with the Women's Pathfinder and Young Adult Hub in Cardiff which are working with individuals who live in Caerau and Ely and whether there is scope for greater connectivity.
4. Develop relations with Cardiff Youth Justice Service and youth organisations in Caerau and Ely to explore whether there is a basis for increasing mutual understanding of the needs of children and families who have a family member in prison or on Probation and how they can best be supported.

