

Our Reflections: A Limited Edition Recovery Conversation Cafe. Across The Gate: HMP Perth 27th November 2013



The cafe in action

In early 2013 a member of staff from HMP Perth completed the SRC lead conversation cafe host training. Her commitment to recovery, made at the end of that training, was to host a conversation cafe within the prison. In the autumn of 2013 she contacted the SRC to assist with this first 'world style' conversation cafe within a prison in Scotland. We were delighted to help.

Our aim

The aim of the event working group was simple; gather staff of services and people in recovery from areas served by the prison together with prisoners and staff from HMP Perth. As the working group continued to meet, the conversations we wanted to have with all those invited became clear. We were interested in what happens to people's recovery as they cross the gate to liberation and how can we support recovery more inside the prison?

Event Planning

The working group met 6 times before the event and consisted of 3 prisoners, 3 prison staff, 2 SRC team members and 2 recovery activists from Perth. We had wide ranging conversations about recovery experiences in the prison and outside. The group met again after the event to debrief among themselves and will meet once more with the governor as one of their commitments.

The Event Agenda

10.00am	Coffee and exhibition open
11.00am	Introduction and etiquette
11.00am – 1.00pm	4x 20 minute Conversation rounds with 2 seeds “Recovery Inside, Recovery Outside”
1.00-1.30pm	Lunch
1.30pm	Film Recovery walk
1.45pm	One hour interest Action groups
2.45pm	Lightbulbs and Commitments
3.15pm	Event Close



The host team

Were we successful in achieving our aim?

Yes. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive with over 90% of those in attendance agreeing that the event was helpful for their work or recovery. On opening the event we said it would be a success if we managed to achieve mutuality; human-to-human

connection in the room. At the end of the event, prisoner, officer, community activists and treatment staff stood linked in a circle - result!

Who came to the event?

A total of 64 people came to the event. Invitations were given to 20 representatives from ADP's and treatment services in locales served by the prison. Perth, Angus and Dundee ADP representatives were in attendance. All the major locality treatment providers; NHS, CAIR Scotland and Addaction were present. A total of 10 invitations went to Recovery groups and Restoration Cafe and Perth Addiction Support Team (PAST) were there. Individuals in recovery from SRC Board and Team Consortium were also present. 16 prisoners, many in recovery were present and about 15 prison staff also.

Feedback

Feedback was received informally on the day and subsequent days by email, Facebook and twitter which was wholly positive. More in depth feedback came in the survey monkeys which about half of the total participants filled in. The working group met to consider its own thoughts also and give more of feedback they had heard informally between the event and the review meeting. All feedback given has been typed and will be available to interested parties in a separate document.

'The event was very awe inspiring. Being in recovery is a new beginning for me and at 45 years old, after a 7 year, 6 year and now 8 year sentence I had to look for another way ahead.'

'I found it interesting to hear real life stories. It was also positive to hear about support organisations available.'

'It was an eye opener for me I didn't know there were so many agencies out there to help me through my recovery.'

Visibility of recovery - initial impact

There were 2 seeds from people in recovery- one a current prisoner in HMP Perth and the other a recovery activist from Perth town. The majority of the cafe host team (7/9) were in recovery. In addition there were around 10 people in recovery from outside the prison and a good number of the prisoners attending identified themselves as in recovery from addiction.

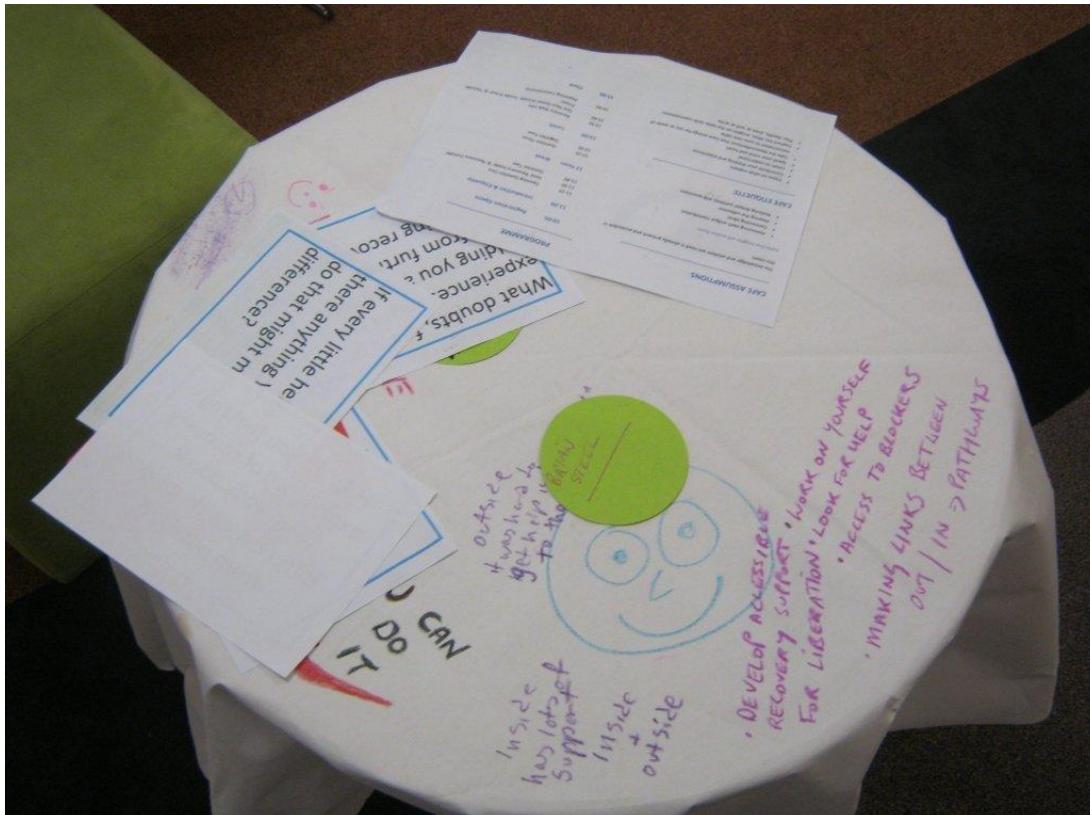
From the evaluations we saw that many people in recovery within the prison were uplifted and inspired by their contact with each other in a recovery context and with people who are in recovery in the community. Likewise some services within the prison and in the areas served were introduced to recovery communities and mutual aid fellowships they hadn't talked to before.

Visibility of recovery; developing impact (recovery bounce)

The working groups commitments:

- Share our findings with governor's team, celebrate the working groups achievement (ALL)
- Host a quarterly coffee morning for short term prisoners to connect directly with recovery groups, mutual aid fellowships, treatment and support services, community groups and individuals willing to help ease the transition 'across the gate'. (Recovery Network)
- Build an inside 'recovery cafe' like those spreading like wild fire outside (NHS/Regimes/ Recovery activists inside/outside in partnership).

- Convene a recovery network/ working group in the prison, to nurture and support recovery initiatives in the prison.(ALL)
- SRC to send words and photo to prison newsletter “The Gallery” and to bring event report to governors meeting.
- 27 recovery commitments were made, mostly by prisoner attendees at the event.



One of the café tables

What did we learn?

One of the key insights was how different the recovery experience is inside the prison from outside, indeed it seems to be the polar opposite. Recovery outside connects, whereas recovery inside seems to isolate. Happily, we also found that it is possible to create human to human conversations no matter what uniform is worn and that mutuality and respect; key conditions for recovery to grow, can be created in a prison setting.

A happy unintended consequence of the event was that we found the event itself was already doing a great deal of the connecting for post release recovery work that participants said they wanted to see happening more. This event equipped many of the prisoners present with opportunities and contacts for recovery support in their own area.

Finally we learned that we need to be more sensitive in using the word ‘god’ in the serenity prayer. While it is a common part of recovery culture, it is not helpful if some people feel uncomfortable. We (SRC) commit to using only humanist version from now on, if we use it at all.

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 January 2014