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I've become more settled really. I've become more at ease with myself. And obviously when your mind's at ease you can deal with situations better...You know it's the - the whole process of the, you know, going through the process of the forgiveness course, right. It makes you think about yourself, and the kind of person you are. And, and what you've done really, so, that's what I mean by- If I hadn't done the forgiveness course I wouldn't have looked at myself so deeply really.

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**Prisoner Participant**

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# Evaluation of The Forgiveness Project **RESTORE** Prison Programme

## Executive Summary

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I feel great. Because...In a way it's inspired me because I've actually, erm, put in to do voluntary work at probation...You know, where I like go round help young youths and all that. So- [clears throat] And also I like wanted to, um, see my victim, you know, do - You know, because it happens somewhere, don't know where but, you know, to explain why, what I did and why I did it, and like, then so I can apologise, y'know what I mean, just makes you think about your life, what you're doing. How, how it affects other people.

**Prisoner Participant.**

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## NOTE:

During the analysis stage of this project, the Forgiveness Project's programme in prisons rebranded and that intervention is now known as **RESTORE**.

However, as all the participants in this research knew the intervention as the Forgiveness Project (TFP), and referred to it as such, we have retained the use of **TFP** throughout this document.

## Background

The Forgiveness Project (TFP) describes itself as a UK based charity that uses real stories to explore how ideas around forgiveness, reconciliation and conflict resolution can have a positive impact on people's lives. One aspect of the charity's work is a programme run within prisons, targeted at the early stages of a sentence.

TFP's prison programme is an intensive, group based intervention that encourages prisoners to explore concepts of forgiveness and reparation in a framework that fosters greater accountability and responsibility.

Every course is co-facilitated by at least one ex offender and a victim/survivor of serious crime. Unlike most voluntary sector led preparatory restorative justice interventions, TFP centres on the personal testimonies of both victims and perpetrators of crime and violence. TFP has no political or religious affiliation and TFP's prison programme is similarly secular in its approach.

TFP aims to facilitate changes in attitude and thinking styles of offenders. That is, encourage prisoners and young offenders to find their own pathways to change, potentially drawing on any personal, communal, spiritual or religious beliefs offenders themselves may have but may or may not yet see as relevant.

TFP runs programmes via both education and psychology units. The emphasis on individual change is also intended to differentiate TFP from prison or National Offenders Management Service interventions. This person centred, facilitative but non prescriptive approach was adopted with the intention that prisoners and young offenders would be more responsive to the intervention than they may be to other, more standardised, manual based programmes.

“ If I was that person now, I probably wouldn't be here talking to ya...I'd be probably in a block. You know what I mean, I'd probably be kicking off a fuss, over minor shit. I mean, my first year in prison, it was hectic, always fighting over minor stuff. Like 'this person owes me a pack of biscuits, right I've got to go punch him up, 'cos he didn't pay me on time, I've got to go hit him, 'cos if I don't hit him it makes me look like an, like an idiot in front of everyone else and I can't have that'. You know, just, weak minded, you know what I mean. And I just, grew out of that and I was thinking, 'what the fuck was I thinking?' So yeah, definitely I'm more mature. I'm a man now, so. It's good. ”

### Prisoner Participant

## Design and Participant Information

This evaluation was commissioned to build on a previous qualitative examination of the work of TFP within prisons and to provide information that would begin to evaluate its impact. The aims included consideration of the extent to which TFP is meeting its objectives and assessment of whether adequate safeguards are in place for the young offenders and adult prisoners who participate in the intervention.

We adopted a triangulated approach using quantitative and qualitative methodologies with:

A prospective, longitudinal sample of male young offenders and older male prisoners and matched control groups (a total of 20 research and 20 control group participants across two institutions, followed up over 3 months).

A sample of 7 prison staff drawn from the same two institutions.

A retrospective, cross-sectional sample of 4 adult, male prisoners from a third institution.

Our key hypotheses for this evaluation were:

H1	That TFP will encourage greater awareness of victims and victim empathy.
H2	That TFP will encourage enhanced cognitive processing and improved thinking skills.
H3	That participants will face psycho-social challenges that result in additional needs, currently unmet. These needs include increased anxiety, challenges to self-esteem and increased negative attitudes.

I went in, quite closed minded... Um, as in, “Another course, I’ll give it a morning, and ah, you know, dinner time break I’ll make an evaluation, and see whether I want to continue it or not..Um, first morning kind of blew me away...”

**Prisoner Participant.**

## Research Tools

For the three month, prospective follow up strand of the research, quantitative measures were implemented before, immediately after and 3 months after, research group participants completed

TFP’s intervention. The standardised measures are listed below. Further information about any amendments/ versions used and citations are in the full report.

The Self Liking/Self Competence Scale-Revised [SL/SC]

The State Trait Anxiety Index, 12 item version [STAI]

The General Health Questionnaire, 28 item version [GHQ-28]

The Post Traumatic Stress Diagnostic Scale [PDS]

The Constructive Thinking Index in 41 item form [CTI-41]

The Beck Dysfunctional Attitudes Scale [BDAS].

The Crime PICS II [CPIC]

The Prisoner Life Stress Scale [PLSS]

“ Again, like with, with BVA you're in a classroom with, 12 other lads and you get given a folder and you just collect paper...And you write on the paper now and then. With TFP you get a small booklet, which you put a small amount into. The most amount goes into your brain, know what I mean. That's what- That's the key of taking things away. Know what I mean, a bit of paper would just get thrown to the back of the cupboard and that...”

### **Prisoner Participant.**

## **Research Tools** continued...

Additionally semi-structured qualitative interviews were included at the 3 month point with the research group.

The control group completed the standardised measures at Times 1 and 3 by way of a quantitative comparison, but qualitative processes of change were not assessed within control participants. For additional triangulation,

interviews were conducted with 7 staff (a mixture of uniformed and nonuniformed) and with 4 further adult, male prisoners from a third institution, all of whom had completed the programme at least a year prior to interview.

Qualitative analysis allowed us to consider aspects of the lived experiences of the prisoners and young offenders interviewed. The depth of analysis provided practical insight that facilitated an examination of how prisoners demonstrated key psychosocial constructs such as empathy, in the details of their speech, and in their reflections on self change in relation to others.

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Um, it's actually quite exciting. And I'm not normally someone that actually, has in the past been a believer in a lot of these programmes, but this one's good...So, I, ah, I like this because it allows them to come up with their own ideas and views and ways, which then coincidentally do really conform with what you want them to do. It's almost like they're, ah...They're, they're structuring it themselves, and it's coming out the way you want it to, you know. So...I think it's got a real chance of succeeding, succeeding with prisoners.”

**Staff Participant.**

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## Findings

Our findings indicate partial support for each hypothesis:

**That TFP will encourage greater awareness of victims and victim empathy.**

When assessing this hypothesis on the standardised scale (the Victim Hurt Denial sub-scale of CPIC), there was a clear “floor effect”. In other words, even before the intervention, there was little evidence that prisoners explicitly denied they had caused harm to victims. This may well have reflected prisoners' prior participation in programmes such as “Becoming Victim Aware” (BVA) and other work being conducted at the institutions considered. In contrast, when conducting in depth, more probing qualitative interviews, we found clear indications that there had been improvements in attitudes towards victims. The qualitative research component thus enabled us to better understand the nature of prisoners' attitudes towards victims, and furthers our concept of victim empathy

beyond the starting points of whether or not they deny hurt caused to victims of crime.

**That TFP will encourage enhanced cognitive processing and improved thinking skills.**

This hypothesis was designed to test possible processes at play if TFP did seem to have an impact. Firstly, we can say that the quantitative data did indicate that TFP encourages attitude change in areas most likely to have an impact on desistance from crime. Those who had attended TFP workshops showed improvements in scores on the General Attitudes to Offending, Anticipation of Future Offending and Evaluation of Offending as Worthwhile sub-scales of CPIC. However, the standardised scales selected to measure attitude change and cognitive functioning in general, non criminogenic ways, showed no enhanced cognitive processing or improved thinking skills. So, although TFP seemed to have the potential to reduce

“ ..during the Forgiveness Project... [ ] I suppose it... It's made me less confrontational, more relaxed in the way I deal, not just with my life, but the way things interact with my life... You know, it's- I don't see everything so personal anymore ”

### **Prisoner Participant.**

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## **Findings** *continued...*

reoffending, the measures selected did not give us a route to understand the processes by which such changes occur.

Here again, the qualitative interviews helped provide a little more information. Prisoners spoke of being more mature, feeling calmer, being less hasty, even of surprising themselves by how much less strident their actions had become since engaging with TFP. Similarly, officers and other staff identified prisoners who had been more pro-social and again, calmer than previously.

### **That participants will face psycho-social challenges that result in additional needs, currently unmet.**

Some participants did display anxiety, have health related problems and show evidence of outside problems and trauma. However, these did not appear to be related to TFP and in most cases were pre-existing. Some of the scores on trauma scales and anxiety scales were

certainly concerning, and there were clear indications of at least one prisoner with suicidal thoughts. Care was taken to find out more in each case, and we found that on-going health problems or family difficulties outside the prison were more at play than anything else. We therefore conclude that there are significant matters of prisoner well-being to be considered but these are generalised matters for prison management and control and could not have been said to be caused by or worsened by engagement with TFP. Indeed, we had repeated evidence that where prisoners were in distress, both TFP and the institutions concerned were working very hard and efficiently to share information and enhance safer, healthier custody.



“ I mean, prison’s a kind of hard environment to really show your true feelings and stuff, you know what I mean. I mean, I might walk around, and put on a smile on my face, everyone thinks I’m alright but inside I’m, I’m dying inside...I mean, many a night I lay in bed and cry myself to sleep. But that’s not something I let anyone else see.. ”

**Prisoner Participant.**

## Conclusions

We think it worth highlighting the impact that TFP could be having on recidivism.

Recidivism is not something that can be effectively measured whilst prisoners are still incarcerated. However, there are tools routinely used to inform risk assessments and decisions about licence or progression within prisons. One such tool that is widely adopted within HM Prison Service, is the CPIC. Given the low numbers of prisoners and young offenders being followed up, we had not felt it likely that there would be sufficient variance within the cohort to show change before and after the intervention. However, the impact of TFP seems to have been powerful enough that the changes were statistically significant. This is a very positive outcome of the evaluation and indicates that a larger scale evaluation of impact, post release is warranted. Although the data are complex, the most encouraging finding is that there is almost unanimous praise for TFP’s work and its impact, both from prisoners

and staff. They all highlight the powerful speakers, the sensitive facilitators and the importance of group and individual ownership of processes of change. TFP is, time and again, identified as being different, as allowing prisoners and staff to step out of the normal roles required within incarceration. It fundamentally appears as a humanising, empowering intervention that provoked very strong support in evaluation participants.

“It was good. Everyone was participating in it, it was good... ‘Cos everyone was involved, no one was, not getting involved. Everyone enjoyed it, it was a nice calm environment.....I think it helped me to realise that, you, you’re not the only one going through it, there’s other people out there that do”

**Prisoner Participant.**

## Recommendations

Our recommendations summarised right:

TFP needs to be better understood by the wider establishments within which it is operating.

The team should consider implementing screening measures to promote management/referral of prisoners with increased vulnerabilities and to help with future systematic review of its operations.

The TFP team need to consider whether they wish to seek to run the intervention as an accredited programme.

“...you see these, these guys that come into a group, and they're sitting there and they've got a face like, "This is just another course."...And then when some of the people tell their stories, some of the facilitators from outside, you see these big men, that, think they're emotionally and physically tough, and give it all the Charlie Big Potatoes on the landing, and you see them in there and they're, they're crying. And they're affected, and they're paying attention, and they're, they're literally got a look of shock on their face. And that type of thing can only affect you. It doesn't matter who you are and how tough you are.”

**Staff Participant.**

To find out more about  
The Forgiveness Project and

# RESTORE

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The  
**FORGIVENESS**  
PROJECT

**RESTORE**  
Transforming the lives  
of offenders and victims.

“ I'd just say 'think'. I, I'll like think about my actions now. And just think about like, the wider picture, who, who else am I going to affect, 'cos at first I'm just thinking 'yeah, I'm just going to affect myself'. No, you affect your community, most of all you affect your family. ”

**Prisoner Participant.**

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