

Life on a Life Licence:

A follow-up to 2002/01 - Resettlement issues facing female lifers

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Abstract

Griffins Research Paper 2002/01 is the report of a study of the resettlement issues facing women lifers before release. This follow-up research focussed on the women's actual experience of release:

- to explore whether the women had been adequately prepared for release and whether they received sufficient support to assist with their reintegration into the community; and
- to consider whether the reality of release corresponded with the women's expectations before release.

Findings

- The women certainly benefited from a gradual reintegration into the community before release in terms of temporary release and employment. However, the women would have also benefited from increased home leaves and more flexible use of temporary release provisions.
- The women all benefited from being allocated a supervising officer but the nature of the relationship, extent of supervision and the advice they received varied. It is essential that all supervising probation officers have a minimum level of contact with the lifer before release to build the relationship and the element of trust. It would increase consistency in supervision if all supervising probation officers were lifer trained. An information pack covering the principal issues would also ensure consistency of advice and be a useful resource for women being released on life licence.
- The level of support provided by the supervising probation officer also varied and was generally limited to risk management. The focus on risk can mean that the issue of support is overlooked. These social factors feed into risk because they provide the stability and structure of day to day living. The majority of the licensees received very limited support on release; some felt they would have benefited from additional support to assist with living independently, particularly in the first six months after release.
- The majority of the interviewees had underestimated the difficulties they would face dealing with day to day practicalities. All of the licensees had underestimated the difficulties they may face in obtaining suitable employment and housing.
- The majority of the licensees found that the transition from custody into the community was more challenging than they had anticipated before release, and one of the factors that was not anticipated was the isolation that they felt after being surrounded by people

Recommendations

The research has highlighted areas that could be improved to ensure the effective resettlement of women lifers in the community. Some of these recommendations were also suggested in the original research:

1. Release Information Pack - to be supplied to all women lifers before release when they receive their positive decision by the parole board. To include information on; operation of life licence, requirements of disclosure, benefits advice, recall procedures and a list of organisations.
2. Supervising Probation Officer - to be allocated before release and increased contact/consistency before release, specific life licence training to be provided and support available for prisoner families.
3. Before release - in open prison:
 - courses on practicalities: paying bills, budgeting etc.
 - increased home leaves and more and flexible use of town visits
 - increased hostel accommodation attached to open prisons
4. Mentor scheme to be established - to offer support on release in first six months