



**Through The Gates- improving the effectiveness
of prison discharge: first half-year evaluation,
August 2008 to January 2009.**

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1 Introduction and executive summary

This report covers the first six months of the St.Giles *Through The Gates* 2008/2009 expanded service. It follows a 2007/2008 pilot service in Lambeth and Southwark only, which is not reported upon here. The purpose of the report is to ascertain whether the service might reasonably be recommissioned by London Probation or be funded in another way, and to inform St.Giles on their own performance and amendments they might wish to make to various aspects of their practice. Both quantitative (numbers) and qualitative (experiences and opinions) data are presented.

- Readers wanting to see quantitative data only should go straight to sections 6, 7 and 8.
- Others will want to see account of clients' and others' beliefs, values and actions arising from the service, aware that these are not necessarily revealed by head counting (Okely, 1994: p.25)¹ and that qualitative methods may draw out questions that quantitative sources had simply forgotten to ask. These can be seen in some detail in section 9.
- A short section on inspection of casework and of administrative practice is presented at section 10.

A separate discussion section was not considered necessary for this preliminary evaluation; the following summary was thought to suffice.

In summary:

This first section considers numerical data obtained from the Through The Gates database and elsewhere:

- **533 clients were referred** in this six month period. This client list is the source of most of the sociodemographic data such as age, ethnic group and referral source reported on below. From this group, eighty referrals not expected to be released by the end of the test period were deleted to produce **a subset of 473 clients on which outcome data are based**.
- **Referrals** were from many sources. Probation unsurprisingly dominated (336, or 63 percent), followed by prison resettlement teams managed by various agencies (75 clients; 14%); then NACRO (30; 6%); Clearsprings and HAWk (both 15 clients); FTC (14); RAPT (10); and self (9 clients). (section 5.2)
- **Assessments in prison and elsewhere.** 105 of the referrals made, or twenty percent, were assessed in prison: rather fewer than originally envisaged. There were some refusals, but 141 clients were referred less than a month before Earliest Date of Release, and 78 less than two weeks before EDR, making in-prison assessment difficult or impossible. All referrals who eventually became clients were properly assessed in prison, at St.Giles's office, by video-link from a probation office, or elsewhere (5.3).
- **The gender, ethnic group and age of referrals** present no concerns, broadly representing the general or prison population. (section 6)
- **Meeting at the Gates.** Only a third of clients were met at the prison gates (7.1). Others are reported to have been met on discharge at other acceptable locations; for some, the service was reportedly notified too late for gate contact; and some were offered the service but did not take it up; but data on these details were not collected. Taken together, this less than expected gate contact is not a problem, but a minor change to the wording of the service model (2.2) might be advisable.
- **ID and Benefits.** ID was recorded as being needed by 66 people, and was obtained for 53 (paragraph 7.2). Benefits help was needed by 392 people, and recorded as provided for 359 (paragraph 7.3)

- **Housing outcomes, seen as Through The Gates' principal service, are impressive.** Seventy percent (330) of the 473 clients on which outcome data are based were found temporary or permanent housing (section 7.4). If one excludes those who did not properly engage with the service or withdrew through rearrest or other reason (see next item), **the housing success rate is eighty percent: a principal target for the service.** The presence of a specialist Private Sector Procurement Worker within St.Giles Trust was noted as a likely contributory factor to this success rate.
- **Housing failures** could not be analysed in a rigorous way, but the database is of sufficient quality to show that a high proportion (about 45) of the 143 people who might have been housed, but were not, showed no interest in getting help, while others made their own arrangements or were variously rearrested or deported.
- **Referral to specialist services.** Twenty four clients were thought to need mental health services, and thirteen were referred to appropriate services. Ninety three were thought to need substance misuse services, and forty six were referred. Fifty six were identified as needing Education, Training and Employment services; all were referred (section 7.5). Excepting the latter, where good integration with ETE services has been possible, these figures are evidently moderate to low; but this is of limited concern, given that it is principally the Offender Manager or residential unit's role to carry out such referrals.
- **Contact with Probation** on the day of release. 401 (85 percent) needed and wanted this; successful action was achieved with 370 (section 7.6). Sound reasons (deportation, re-arrest, loss of contact on the client's side) were recorded against most failures.
- **The number of MAPPA clients, and the number of recalls** (section 8.1) are high, indicating that the service is not unintentionally selecting less challenging clients. The test period was too short, and there were insufficient comparison data, to show if the service *reduced* recalls to prison.

This section considers the semistructured interviews conducted with five clients, two external staff and two internal staff. These identified the following points:

- **Need for a service.** Clients in particular identified their own need for a service such as this. In some instances they had previously failed because no service was at that time available, while in others they had not been ready for services on offer (sections 9.1, 9.2)
- **Assessment.** External agencies valued the service's ability to carry out in-prison assessments, particularly at a distance or at short notice, but this was not something clients commented on, probably because to them this seemed a routine matter (9.3).
- **Being met at the prison gates.** This was greatly appreciated by some interviewees (9.4).
- **Assistance with benefits and other matters.** All interviewees valued this. Clients particularly valued help with benefits, and most mentioned housing assistance. The probation officer valued help with attending probation appointments, but clients mentioned this in passing if at all (9.5).
- **Housing and the link with prevention of offending.** This was a matter stressed by managers and probation staff, and there was a consciousness of this among clients also (9.6).
- **Intensive activity over a short period.** Two clients, without specific prompting, spoke of the intensive activity they were engaged in during the first weeks after release, matching the theoretical model offered by Through The Gates (9.7).
- **Need for later support, and poor follow-on by some floating support services.** One client was clearly conscious of his need for longer term support.

This is not a service that the St.Giles's short-term service offers, and other agencies are expected to follow on accordingly. Staff said that in some boroughs liaison and follow-up with this important service was poor, though it was fine elsewhere: a matter requiring management attention (9.8).

- **Client aspirations** for training and employment. All client interviewees spoke of this. Aspirations seemed, for the most part, to be realistic and sensible (9.9).
- **Staff continuity and persistence.** Several interviewees commented on the service's ability to replace one staff member by another if there is an unexpected absence, and on staff persistence when helping with evidently complex personal difficulties (9.10).
- **Advocacy skills.** All clients and some external staff mentioned this, and did so positively (9.11).
 - **Working alongside other agencies.** Services of this type sometimes fail to refer to each other due to petty jealousies, but there was good evidence, coming directly from clients, of sound practice (9.12). On the other hand (9.15), staff reported occasional more complex problems arising from failures to understand the working methods of large organisations. Such problems seem to be reducing as the project matures.
- **Personal support.** Several clients voiced their appreciation of the care and sensitivity with which the service was delivered (9.13).
- **Former offenders on the staff.** Clients and external staff articulated particularly well how they appreciated this feature of the service (9.14).
- **Workload problems developing later?** A probation officer, aware of how hard the staff worked, expressed some concern about later burnout, and one client seemed to think the service was available to him indefinitely. It may not be a problem now, but it would be wise to attend to these problems, if they exist, in due course (9.16).
- **Other comments.** Various other comments are set out in section 9.17 and are best read on those pages, and section 9.18 offers a short selection of client observations expressing general satisfaction. Of the observations in section 9.17 we would draw particular attention for planning purposes to the confusion expressed by prison-based services as to which borough is covered by which agency, and to the absence of such a service in several boroughs.

This final section considers observation and inspection of documents, files and systems:

- **Case files** are of adequate quality, but some assessment forms are outdated and do not properly meet the claimed Support Plan style set out in the Service Model below, and would benefit from revision (10.1).
- **Policy documents and practice guidance,** again, are generally of a good standard, but some are outdated and would benefit from a rolling programme of revision if this is not in place (10.2).
- **Human resource practice,** given the potential for relapse that the unusual staff group presents, has been excellent, and we were impressed by the way emerging difficulties were handled. It is early to write local, specialist practice up as formal procedures, but a start on this should be made (10.3).
- **The service's data collection system** has been well managed, but its design has some unusual features making analysis difficult and slow, and although error was checked for and not found, the potential for error remains. Some service aims, such as making referrals to specialist services within three working days (2.2, i, below) could not be measured because dates of actions were not recorded. A programme of review and redesign is required with some urgency, and an early consideration of potential baseline data will also add to the quality of

later evaluations (10.4). Suggestions for consideration in future evaluations are made at various points throughout the document.

2 What *Through The Gates* is, and what it does

2.1 Service aims

Through The Gates describes itself as a scheme to reduce re-offending by prisoners by ensuring they are supported before release, on the day of release and for some weeks after release if necessary by engaging them with housing, benefits, specialist agencies and Probation.

It aims to fill the gap between prison-based and community-based support services, carrying people through the difficult post release period and linking them to support and supervision in the community before closing the case.

2.2 The service model

Through The Gates presents its service model, in summary, as follows:

- a) **Making referrals well before release** is the preferred practice. This allows the worker to visit the client in prison, using legal visits or video link.
- b) **The assessment visit** allows the St Giles worker to establish a relationship with the client and to draw up a support plan for the day of release and the subsequent weeks, ideally informed by the sentence plan and the OASys risk summary.
- c) **Where early referral cannot be made**, assessments are made after release.
- d) **In all cases a support needs checklist** is completed to ensure that important issues are addressed and that simple things, such as a lack of ID, are not overlooked.
- e) **Liaison with the Offender Manager** allows risk and other issues to be addressed before release, such as whether the client should be met by two workers.
- f) **The service works closely with** the Public Protection Unit (PPU), Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) and Jigsaw teams to provide suitable resettlement from agreed Approved Premises.
- g) **Clients are met at the prison gate** on the day of release or, if coming from a prison distant from London, arrangements can be made to meet at a transport hub.
- h) **Likely tasks to be completed on the day of release** include: i) accessing temporary or permanent housing provision (see 2.5); ii) attending a first appointment with Probation; and iii) attending a Jobcentre interview, normally booked by the prison.
- i) **Likely tasks to be completed within three working days** include, where needed, linking to agencies such as mental health, drug treatment and similar services.
- j) **Housing, with associated support, is a key aspect of the service.** Provision may variously be an emergency hostel place, housing in the private rented sector, or a return to the family. Support may be sought from other agencies, or may be obtained from the family. As an example of the latter, mediation work may allow an offender to access the family home.
- k) **Later assistance** depends on the level of support available elsewhere. Someone moving to supported housing with a keyworker allocated by the housing agency, or someone returning to a supportive family, is likely to need little subsequent help. Someone in unsupported housing could need assistance, commonly as a floating support style service, for some months.

2.3 Service structure and staff composition

The staff team consists of:

- A service manager.
- Two Team Leaders covering south, and north, London.

Private Sector Procurement Worker. Importantly, alongside caseworkers, the service has access to a Private Sector Procurement Worker within St.Giles Trust to access, advise and support private sector landlords.

3 Reporting requirements and targets

There is considerable overlap between data of interest to Probation and to St.Giles Trust. To aid rapid access by specialist readers, data requirements and data results are nevertheless divided into general socioeconomic data probably of interest to all; to requirements specific to the Probation Service; to requirements specific to St.Giles Trust; and qualitative commentary and findings that are again of interest to all concerned agencies.

Sociodemographic data: who the service's clients are. This section addresses matters such as age, gender, and ethnic group. Such data is both of general interest, and may also address a specific requirement in the contract document² that services build equality of opportunity into service delivery. Beyond listing some possible variables in that contract document, no further specification was given and it is unlikely that Probation expect St.Giles to monitor all of the long list of possible measures set out in the contract, but it makes sense to show at least some of these where data collection is not difficult and comparison data is available.

Probation Service requirements. The Probation Service has specified that the following items be measured:

- **Number of clients** seen. This, and associated data, is reported at section 5.3.
- **ID.** Number of clients for whom a birth certificate or other ID was obtained. This is reported at 7.2.
- **Support with Benefits.** Number of clients receiving support with benefits. See section 7.3.
- **Housing.** Number of clients for whom temporary or permanent housing was obtained. See 7.4.
- **Specialist services.** Onward referral made to specialist services (Mental Health; Substance Misuse; Floating Support; Education, Training and Employment). See section 7.5.

St.Giles Trust requirements. St.Giles Trust specified that the following items be measured:

- **What agencies refer?** This is reported on in section 5.2
- **Has the service "cherry-picked",** taken to mean, "Do people taken onto the service present noticeably fewer difficulties than the prison population or probation caseload as a whole?" This is reported on in sections 8.1 and 8.2.
- **What do clients get from the service,** and if they are doing well, how does it help? This was seen to lend itself to the qualitative data collection and analysis set out at various locations in section 9.

Targets were set by the Probation Service as follows:

Target 1, on referrals: 150 referrals per cluster in 12 months. This was taken to mean 900 referrals annually for the full service, excluding the Wandsworth/Sutton/Merton cluster where a later, separate agreement was made for Through the Gates to take occasional referrals when they had capacity to do so, and might be expected to have very low numbers. This target was easily attained overall (see 5.3).

Target 2, on housing: of those engaged with, eighty percent to have temporary or permanent accommodation obtained. Reporting on that target presents some problems, as "engaged with" was not properly defined, and engagement was not properly represented in the principal data table, but even by equating engagement to something close to "referral", this was almost achieved, and was fully achieved if clients failing to make good contact at referral are omitted (section 7.4).

4 Method

This report follows guidance from a number of sources, notably Schalock (2001)³ on evaluation, and Yates (2004)⁴, May (2001)⁵ and Alston and Bowles (1998)⁶ on research.

Quantitative data is taken from all referrals between 1 August 2008 and 31 January 2009, with the exception of referrals made so far in advance that the client could not be released, their needs responded to, and actions recorded by 31 March 2009. Given the rapidity of action following discharge, this can be regarded as a reasonable six month cohort, with a probably minor shortfall, notably in the attainment of permanent housing, because of the latter data collection requirement. Data were assembled in Microsoft Excel spreadsheets by individual teams, edited into a separate central spreadsheet within St.Giles Trust, and that central spreadsheet subsequently converted to Microsoft Access database software by the evaluator for later analysis. These data were analysed in two tables:

- **A table containing the 533 referrals** from 1 August 2008 to 31 January 2009. This table was used to report on socioeconomic data, and on activities such as in-prison assessments that could reasonably have been undertaken by 31 March.
- **A table containing 473 cases**, from which 80 referred clients had been excluded because they were reported as remaining in prison at 31 March and for whom no housing, benefits or similar community outcomes could for various other reasons reasonably be expected. This table is used for most of outcome reports below.

Methods of qualitative data collection and analysis are set out at the head of section 9, immediately preceding the presentation of those data to allow easier reading and explanation.

5 Referral and assessment data

5.1 Sources of referral by cluster

"Cluster" refers to the administrative grouping by which the Probation Service is managed, and on which targets are based. Referrals indicating the cluster where the client's probation supervision takes place are shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Referrals by cluster, 1 August 2008 to 31 January 2009

Cluster	Referrals	Target	Variance
Lambeth and Southwark (Cluster 10)	162	75	+101
Greenwich and Lewisham (11)	73	75	+3
Croydon, Bexley and Bromley (12)	75	75	+3
Hackney and Tower Hamlets (Cluster 1)	50	75	-13
Haringey, Redbridge and Waltham Forest (3)	98	75	+31
Camden and Islington (5)	52	75	-12
Totals	510	450	+113
Wandsworth / Merton / Sutton (Cluster 9)	23		
Overall total	533		

Source: table of cases submitted 22.4.08

The south London clusters. The Lambeth and Southwark service was well established at the start of the evaluation period, with Lambeth alone making 103 referrals. The other clusters had recently started but, excluding Bromley (which sent their first referral in September), referrals had started by the start of August 2008; cluster targets were nevertheless reached. The Wandsworth / Merton / Sutton cluster at the foot of the table began referring at the end of September 2008. It is currently running on a small scale and is not part of the main target. Of the 23 referrals received from this group, 18 were from Sutton.

In north London, the picture is different. Camden, Islington, Hackney and Tower Hamlets referrals began by 1 August, but targets were brought down by Camden and Tower Hamlets (22 and 23 referrals). Islington and Hackney reached their share of the target (30 and 27). Haringey, Redbridge and Waltham Forest began referrals after the start of the data period (in mid-August), but exceeded the cluster target due to the high number of referrals from Haringey (62). Waltham Forest referred 22, Redbridge 14.

5.2 Sources of referral by agency

Agencies making referrals, a matter of general interest but also a detail requested by St.Giles Trust specifically, are shown in Table 2:

Table 2. Sources of referral by agency, 1 August 2008 to 31 January 2009

Source	Number referred	Percent referred
Probation	336	63
Prison resettlement (various agencies)	75	14
NACRO	30	6
Clearsprings	15	3
HAWk (Housing Assessment Worker in Probation)	15	3
FTC (Foundation Training Company)	14	3
RAPT	10	2
Self	9	2
Drug Intervention Programme team	5	1
St.Giles Brief Intervention Service	4	1
Vision Housing	4	1
PURF (Camden's 'Pathways universal referral form')	3	1
CARATs in-prison drug services	3	1
St Giles prison teams	2	1
Police	1	<1
Forensic Intensive Psychological Treatment Service	1	<1
After care team	1	<1
SNAP (Support Needs and Placement team)	1	<1
START mental health team	1	<1
SOS (St.Giles gangs project)	1	<1
Unrecorded	2	<1
Total referrals	533	100

Probation make two thirds of referrals, followed by Prison Service resettlement teams managed by various voluntary sector agencies, who make about a seventh of the referrals received. Substantial numbers come from agencies such as NACRO, HAWk, FTC, Clearsprings, RAPT, Vision Housing, and other parts of St.Giles's services, with a dozen other agencies also making referrals. Nine people referred themselves.

5.3 Number of clients seen and assessed

The total number of clients potentially seen in the test six month period is 533. Numbers referred, with numbers seen in prison are shown in Table 3:

Table 3. Clients referred, and clients assessed in prison, by cluster, 1 August 2008 to 31 January 2009

	Not assessed in prison	Assessed in prison	Total referrals	Percent ass'd in prison
Cluster 10 (Lambeth, Southwark)	129	33	162	20
Cluster 11 (Greenwich, Lewisham)	64	9	73	12
Cluster 12 (Croydon, Bexley, Bromley)	67	8	75	11
Cluster 9 (Wandsworth, Merton, Sutton)	22	1	23	4
Cluster 5 (Camden, Islington)	48	4	52	8
Cluster 1 (Hackney, Tower Hamlets)	30	20	50	40
Cluster 3 (Haringey, Redbridge, Waltham Ft)	68	30	98	31
Total	428	105	533	20

Sources: referrals table submitted 22.4.08 (n=533)

Assessments in prison. At 105 - twenty percent of all referrals - the number of clients assessed in prison is noticeably lower than the presumably routine practice stated in the service model (2.2). Four potential clients are recorded as refusing the service, and two each are recorded as being uncontactable or receiving an additional sentence. Forty six are described as "not engaging with the service", an imprecise term that probably means the same as refusal, but may possibly refer to system errors within the prison.

More importantly, 141 were referred to the service less than a month before their Earliest Day of Release, and 78 less than two weeks before their EDR, making prison assessment difficult.

Assessments overall. This was, surprisingly, not counted precisely in the main database: we were simply told verbally that all active clients are assessed, which is no doubt the case. We would put the figure at something over 400 assessments overall, based on the 392 identified as needing benefits assistance - presumably almost universal - in Table 9.

6 Sociodemographic data: gender, age, ethnic group

The following sections present various data on numbers within each cluster, and on gender, age, and ethnic group. Partly, this is presented to give a general sense of who the service's clients are. Partly, it is to check that services are provided in a fair way. Occasionally such data may offer ideas, stated or not, for amending the service better to respond to client need.

Table 4 below, for convenience, shows both client numbers for each Probation Service cluster, and gender numbers. For ease of reading, and to avoid making this document overlong, most of the later tables do not present data by cluster, but figures are available separately if required.

On client numbers for each cluster: these vary; but they might reasonably be expected to do so in the early months of a new project. Cluster 10, with the highest number at 162, reflects the fact that Lambeth and Southwark were the location of the pilot project preceding the period under study, so that the service is very well known to those Probation teams. St.Giles Trust's premises is also close to the border between

the two boroughs. At the other extreme, Cluster 9, with only 23 clients, was the last of the services to start running, beginning only in November 2008.

Table 4. Client numbers and gender, by cluster

	Male	Female	Total
Cluster 10 (Lambeth, Southwark)	146	16	162
Cluster 11 (Greenwich, Lewisham)	61	12	73
Cluster 12 (Croydon, Bexley, Bromley)	68	7	75
Cluster 9 (Wandsworth, Merton, Sutton)	22	1	23
Cluster 5 (Camden, Islington)	49	3	52
Cluster 1 (Hackney, Tower Hamlets)	49	1	50
Cluster 3 (Haringey, Redbridge, Waltham Forest)	87	11	98
Totals	482	51	533
Expected gender ⁷ totals	493	40	533

Source: referrals table submitted 22.4.08, n= 533.

On gender: there are rather more female clients in total than might be expected from national prison data, but the variation is minor and this is not a matter of concern.

Age is shown in Table 5. These figures broadly reflect offender profiles and indicate no unfairness in service delivery.

Table 5. Age

<20	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65+	n/k
37	101	93	68	60	74	41	16	13	3	1	26

Source: referrals table submitted 22.4.08 (533 cases).

Ethnic group data were collected using Census categories. These figures remain available separately, but to allow comparison with Probation data, a simplified table (Table 6) is presented here.

Table 6. Ethnic group

Group	Referrals to TTG	Percent	Percent of recorded	Percent, London Probation ⁸	Variance between recorded percentages
White	178	33	43	49	-6
Mixed	19	4	5	6	-2
Asian or Asian British	19	4	5	9	-4
Black or black British	196	37	47	26	+19
Chinese or other ethnic group	Nil	-	0	4	-4
Not recorded	121	23		6	
Total	553	100	100	100	

Sources: referrals table submitted 22.4.08 (n=533); Offender Management Caseload Statistics.

Variance is trivial, excepting a positive variance of black clients, reflecting the population of the inner London boroughs where the service began.

7 Community outcomes

This section addresses the outcomes from Through The Gates' principal services: meeting people at the prison gates on release; assistance with obtaining ID; help to obtain benefit income; help to obtain temporary or permanent housing; referral to specialist services; and escort to Probation.

Source of data. Out of 533 referrals made, sixty individuals had discharge dates so late that, while actions such as in-prison assessments could be undertaken, community actions could not possibly have been done by a cut-off date of 31 March, leaving a subgroup of 473 (see Method, 4). This is the source of most analyses below.

7.1 Clients met at the prison gates

A third of clients were recorded as having been met at the prison gates (Table 7):

Table 7. Meeting at the prison gates on release

	Outcome
Met at prison gates	154
Not met at prison gates	314
Not recorded	5
Total	473

Source: referrals table submitted 22.4.08, amended to exclude late discharges, n= 473.

This number met at the gates may seem rather low, given the service's title and service model (2.2), but it is understood that many prisons are distant and some clients were met at railway stations or at other convenient locations instead. Through the Gates reports that for others, Early Conditional Licences (18 day early release) were not reported in time by the prison, and that some potential clients refused the service at the point of release. These events were not recorded in the database. Given the importance of this action, a wider choice of values for this variable is advisable for later evaluations, and it would make sense also to record instances where clients for one reason or another do not need to be met at all.

7.2 ID obtained

Clients need identity documents such as passport or birth certificate, often at short notice, in order to claim benefits or apply for housing, and it is routine for services such as Through The Gates to assist with obtain these where such documents have been lost. Table 8 shows this work.

Table 8. ID needed and obtained

	Need	Outcome
ID needed / obtained	66	53
ID not needed / not obtained	403	416
Not recorded	4	4
Total	473	473

Source: referrals table submitted 22.4.08, amended to exclude late discharges, n= 473.

Only fifteen percent of clients needed this help. Where they did, ID was usually obtained. Of the thirteen who needed ID but did not get it, database Referral Notes text fields show six variously being deported, losing contact or being arrested. The remainder seem likely to be administrative errors, with outcomes not yet recorded.

7.3 Support with benefits

Table 9 shows these results.

Table 9. Benefits assistance provided

	Need	Outcome
Benefits needed / obtained	392	359
Benefits not needed / not obtained	78	110
Not recorded	3	4
Total	473	473

Source: referrals table submitted 22.4.08, amended to exclude late discharges, n= 473.

One would expect all or almost all clients would need some kind of assistance with benefits, but on closer examination of the database, 51 of the 78 recorded as not needing benefits help were also shown in the Referral Notes text field as not to have engaged with the service or quickly to have disengaged, while 11 were to be deported, and others were variously rearrested, moved away, or were referred on to other services that might reasonably be expected to take on the benefits assistance role.

Of the 33 thought to need benefits assistance but who did not receive it, the text fields again variously refer to failure to engage with services (four clients), deportation (one) and gate arrest (one). Others are hard to determine. Some of the shortfall are probably database entry errors of various kinds, such as failure to report or enter newly emerging data. But they neither indicate a high failure rate or poor practice generally.

A positive database entry for "help given" does not, however, show what kind of help this was, or more importantly, whether the client actually received renewed income and how quickly this occurred. This is obviously an important matter, and later databases might usefully record this more clearly.

7.4 Housing obtained

Table 10. Housing obtained, temporary or permanent, by cluster, all cases

Probation Service cluster	Housing not obtained	Housing obtained	Cluster total	Obtained, as percent of cluster total
Cluster 10 (Lambeth, Southwark)	43	103	146	71
Cluster 11 (Greenwich, Lewisham)	19	49	68	72
Cluster 12 (Croydon, Bexley, Bromley)	7	61	68	90
Cluster 9 (Wandsworth, Merton, Sutton)	7	15	22	68
Cluster 5 (Camden, Islington)	11	35	46	76
Cluster 1 (Hackney, Tower Hamlets)	25	16	41	39
Cluster 3 (Haringey, Redbridge, Waltham Forest)	31	51	82	62
Total	143	330	473	70

Source: referrals table submitted 22.4.08, amended to exclude late discharges, n= 473.

The outcome database separately recorded whether each individual had been found temporary accommodation, or permanent accommodation. Twenty five records showed both had been obtained (presumably with temporary accommodation found first).

Given that caseworkers were initially working with unclear definitions of permanent and of temporary accommodation (we note some cases where text entries in the database

consider some hostel placements as permanent, while others are evidently not), and that, from a Probation casework point of view, it is the placement in *any* accommodation in the first few days after discharge that particularly matters, we have first shown (Table 10) whether the client was reported as placed in accommodation of any type.

In Table 11 we show the overall numbers in each database field concerning housing, with additional figures showing cases where both temporary and permanent housing is recorded as obtained, and cases where need is recorded but housing is not obtained:

Table 11. Housing needed, pre-arranged, obtained temporary and permanent, all cases

Probation Service cluster	Housing need	Housing pre-arranged	Temporary housing obtained	Permanent housing obtained	Both forms of housing obtained	Needed but not obtained
All clusters	387	44	145	210	25	69

Source: referrals table submitted 22.4.08, amended to exclude late discharges, n= 473.

While giving a reasonably good sense of needs and outcomes, these figures do not add up: temporary housing, permanent housing and housing recorded as needed but not obtained total 424, that is, 37 more than recorded need. Database inspection shows that several client records show action on housing but fail to record need, so this may be one source of the error.

7.5 Referral to specialist services

In Table 12 we show the number of clients identified as having a need for mental health, substance misuse or Education, Training and Employment services, and the number referred to such services.

Table 12. Need for, and referral to, specialist services

Service	Need recorded	Referral made
Mental health services	24	13
Substance misuse services	93	46
Education, Training, Employment	56	56

Source: referrals table submitted 22.4.08, amended to exclude late discharges (N=473).

Given the short term nature of the Through The Gates service, the success or otherwise of these referrals has not been counted, though it is evident from some of the notes in the short database text field set aside for this purpose that a proportion of these referrals had indeed engaged with other agencies before case closure.

On mental health, about five percent of clients have mental health problems recorded for them, and referral or equivalent specialist agency contact is recorded against thirteen clients.

Survey estimates of the prevalence of mental illness in prison vary from about ten percent (of people who arguably should be in hospital rather than prison, in the first place) to about ninety percent with conditions such as depression treatable by a GP on release rather than a Community Mental Health Team or similar service.

Our view is that, while low, Through The Gates' figures are respectable: it is clearly not a mental health service; responsibility for identifying and acting on such problems must lie with Probation; but where needed its assistance seems to be being provided.

On substance misuse, about twenty percent are identified as having such problems, and referral or equivalent contact is made for about half of these. Brief notes in the database notes field variously refer to assistance in reaching drug or alcohol detox, rehabilitation or other specialist accommodation. The real prevalence of imprisonment following drug- or alcohol-related problems or behaviour is about fifty percent, but again, responding to these needs is not Through The Gates' primary function.

On Education, Training and Employment, fifty six, that is, twelve percent, were thought to need this service, and all were recorded with a referral having been made. Database notes make no specific mention of outcome. It is noticeable that the number recorded as needing such services exactly match the number referred. This may well be because another section of St.Giles Trust itself offers such services, and that a knowledgeable referral to that service or others is therefore a straightforward matter.

Floating support services arguably ought to be in this list also, but fields to record such need and provision were omitted from the database. However, a text field to record outcome notes reports eleven instances where such services were requested or obtained; more are likely.

7.6 Escort to Probation

All clients are expected to see their Probation Officer on their day of release. Table 13 shows recorded need and outcome for this.

Table 13. Need for, and escort to, Probation

	Need	Outcome
Probation escort needed / achieved	401	370
Probation escort not needed / not achieved	69	100
Not recorded	3	3
Total	473	473

Source: table of cases submitted 22.4.08, amended to exclude late discharges.

Eighty five percent are recorded as needing this service. Some of the shortfall from a potential hundred percent arises because Probation Officers not infrequently refer clients after release, wanting to make use of other aspects of Through The Gates' services, notably housing assistance, even if this first stage of assistance has rather obviously passed.

Most of those identified as *not needing assistance* with attending Probation, however, are recorded as refusing the service (37), being deported after assessment (9), being rearrested, resentenced or remanded before release (5), or presenting sundry other problems such as absconding from custody.

The database does not give detail for all the 31 clients thought to *need escorting* to Probation but not taking this up. Eight were variously deported, lost contact or were rearrested. Nine are recorded as not engaging with the service as planned. 14 have no reason recorded. It may be that some failed appointments were the result of errors on Through The Gates' side, but these are evidently few, and are not recorded as such on the database.

8 MAPPA clients; recalls

8.1 MAPPA clients

These data variously: a) are of general interest; b) answer a question put by St.Giles Trust (Section 3) as to whether they might unintentionally be selecting clients

presenting few problems; and c) potentially answer questions about the effectiveness of the service.

Sixty eight clients were recorded as subject to MAPPA - Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements by which agencies work together to protect communities from the risks that some offenders present after discharge. The system categorises people at three levels, indicating the extent and seniority with which agencies are expected to work together, and broadly indicating the level of seriousness with which the offenders are regarded. Eighteen were at level one, twenty eight at level two, and four at the highest level, three. Eighteen did not have their level recorded on the Through The Gates database, possibly because they were later withdrawn from the MAPPA list.

We can take this as very good evidence that Through The Gates is not selecting, or being referred, people presenting minor problems.

We note that Through The Gates has a written policy on such matters¹², but further than that we did not seek out any detailed account of what Through The Gates actually did with clients presenting problems of this nature. This might be of interest in later reports.

8.2 Recalls

Forty eight clients were recalled to court during the test period, that is, about ten percent. Dates were not recorded, preventing any account of the pattern of recall, or any comparison with wider data. The recall rate was, however, high compared with national figures, again indicating that Through The Gates is certainly not taking on easy cases.

Data on whether the Through The Gates service affects recall were not collected.

9 Qualitative investigation and analysis

The interviewing and analytical method employed here follows that of Wiseman (1979)¹³ and of Okely (1983),¹⁴ conscious also of the potentially more thorough requirements of Glaser and Strauss (1967),¹⁵ and with some guidance taken from Yates (2004)¹⁶ again following the principles of Glaser and Strauss. Our results can be presented with some confidence, with some limitations imposed by time and budget, notably that although the client interviews may reasonably be expected to represent client views as a whole, the single probation staff interview and the single voluntary agency interview self evidently cannot be taken to represent others in the same group in the same way.

Semistructured interviews. The principal source of qualitative data was a series of nine semistructured interviews conducted in March 2009. Five of these were clients of the service, two were St.Giles Trust staff, all conducted face to face, and two were staff of external agencies conducted by telephone. The semistructured interview is a commonly used method by which the interviewee does most of the talking and the interviewer limits their intervention to four or five brief questions to open and steer the discussion (tell me about yourself; what has Through The Gates done for you?; and so on), each modified depending on the category of interviewee, with occasional additional probing or clarifying questions if the context indicates it might be helpful. Questions intentionally directed the interviewee neither to a positive nor a negative answer, except for one question at the end of all interviews ("Is there anything St.Giles could do better?"), included to overcome some of the potential problems with interviewee selection identified below. The final few interviews were modified, mostly by adding direct questions, further to explore some of the emerging themes.

Participant selection. Some effort was put into selecting participants likely to give a mixture of opinions, with moderate success. St.Giles Trust was asked to avoid solely

selecting minor offenders, such as those imprisoned once, and this was understood and complied with. A further random element was introduced by two of those identified failing to arrive on the day, with interviewees instead selected from people who happened to be present. One failing, hard to avoid in the time available, was our inability to interview individuals who were likely to strongly dissatisfied with the service, or for whom the St.Giles services had failed, as these were by their nature less likely to be in touch now.

We also asked St.Giles to identify individuals in external agencies known to have been critical of the service, at least at its inception, having been told that such people existed. This was not successful, as even obtaining agreement for busy Probation Officers (as an example) to be interviewed by telephone proved difficult and slow, and we also obtained fewer such interviews than we would have liked. On the other hand, being late in the interview process, our interview style had, as is usual with the technique in use, become more probing by the time these interviews were conducted, and we are reasonably satisfied that most potentially critical ground was covered.

In the event, all interviewees presented valued opinions.

Analysis. Interviews were fully transcribed and printed, and the documents were then coded by hand (marked with one- or two- word notes indicating what the person was talking about) to identify themes of interest. These brief sections of text were then copied and pasted into a common document, grouped under headings indicating each theme. Meaning could equally be applied to similar comments expressed by different people in different ways, or to a single remark (Okely, 1994: p.25).¹⁷ That document was subsequently edited, variously merging and separating those headings as meaning became more apparent. Commentary was then added.

Use of quotations. Quotations in the findings below are verbatim, excepting some omissions, indicated with an ellipsis ("..."), and some replacements to exclude names or shorten text, indicated by square brackets.

The number of quotations used is, in any report of this kind, a balance between representing what was said against concerns with available space, and it is common to limit quotations and present evidence largely by using summary text. Here, excepting some staff, whose accounts were partly used simply to inform service descriptions in the introductory section 2 above, we quote interviewees extensively. This is partly a matter of politeness, but it is principally because we believe this adds genuine colour and interest to the account, and consider it well worth the read.

To reduce the chance of identification, interviewees have been renamed alphabetically, with their ages altered by a few years. The five client interviewees- three men and two women- are: Andrew (40); Becky (26); Charles (45); Danny (46); and Eve (35), together with her partner Frances who was also present during the interview and is briefly quoted. St. Giles staff interviewees were renamed as Gavin and Holly. External agency interviewees (a housing worker located in a prison distant from London and employed by another voluntary agency, and a London Probation Officer) were renamed as Ian and Janet.

Headings have been ordered, so far as possible, to reflect the timeline from experiences prior to contact with Through The Gates, through the period of contact and assistance, to expectations after that contact. This is followed, from section 9.10 onwards, by comments on, and interviewee suggestions for, the system as a whole.

9.1 Previous failure: absence of services

Some of those interviewed spoke of previous personal failure because of absent or hard to access services. On drugs, a couple reported:

When I wanted support, the support years ago wasn't there. Years ago we'd wake up and say, "That's it, had enough, don't want more drugs" (snapping fingers) but when we went to get the support (Eve, client, 35)...

... when we went to get off the gear, the methadone 'script, long, long waiting list... (Frances, Eve's partner)

... Yeah, and that just set us back and we were all confused, upset, no support, and we just went back into it. (Eve)

That observer is certainly correct: limitations in services for offenders were comparatively recently acknowledged by the Government, with specialist services piloted in some areas, nationally implemented as the Drug Interventions Programme in 2003 (though taking a while to develop effectively in some areas) and developed further since then (NTA, 2006).¹⁸

Another spoke specifically of the absence of services that St.Giles now provides:

This is the first time I've been given any help. I've just been chucked out the prison gate and left to go my own way, homelessness, finding settees that I can go and crash on. It's been a real struggle for me for so many years. (Danny, client, 46)

9.2 Previous failure: motivational reasons

Some interviewees had been referred to St.Giles before, but not taken the offer up:

My Probation guy, he tried to refer me to St.Giles before and I hadn't really taken it seriously 'cause I thought it's one of those housing things and it's going to take absolute ages, so I can't be bothered. (Becky, client, 26)

In this example, the client refers to not being bothered, but an alternative explanation might be that the service was newer at that time, and may not have been fully explained to potential clients and potential referrers.

Self evidently, given the nature of drug and other problems, other clients may simply not have been ready to change. This is well known, and hardly worth a quotation here; and it was not, anyway, a matter that interviewees spoke about.

9.3 Assessment in prison and elsewhere

St.Giles Trust's ability and willingness to carry out assessments in prison was commented on:

About 75 percent of my clients are from London, [but] we're a long way from London. Housing providers don't generally come this far to do interviews, so St.Giles are a vital link between our clients and getting back to London. It's a big help to us for them to have a keyworker close to release, and for someone to reassure them on release. (Ian, prison-based housing worker, voluntary agency)

This is well argued; for prison-based agencies, assessment in that location seems to be regarded as valuable.

Further, we heard indirectly¹⁹ that prison-based housing services valued the fact that Through the Gates is delivered by a London based agency, as local agencies and even locally recruited staff from national agencies often have difficulty finding housing in London.

Of the four clients potentially assessed in prison (one was already on a tag in the community), all spoke of assessment in passing, and it was difficult to distinguish in interview between those seen by visiting St.Giles staff and those assessed on release.

With the many assessments experienced by offenders and the several agencies potentially involved, our guess is that the location of St.Giles's assessment is not an issue of conscious concern to clients in prison: while important, to them it just happens. Interestingly, the person already in the community was more aware of assessment than others, perhaps because of its more humane location:

When I got the tagging, Clearsprings gave me accommodation with the tag, and St.Giles was instantly sent an application for my support worker. He came to see me. (Eve, client, 35)

9.4 The value of being met at the prison gates

Two clients mentioned being met at the prison on release, and a third was at a distant prison and was met at a railway station instead. One expressed the value of prison-gate contact very clearly:

Just having someone there to meet you outside the gates, a friendly face... that made all the difference. Because, I'm pretty sure that... because I'm not the most responsible person, that if he wasn't there, there was a strong possibility that I would have found the nearest off licence and got meself some beers... and then I'd get into more trouble again. That initial someone meeting you outside the gates is really, really important... (Charles, client, 45)

He went on to say later:

If I'd had no one outside that gate to meet me, the chances are I wouldn't be sat here talking to you now. (Charles, client, 45)

This probably represents a majority of clients, but being met at the gates is not always about reducing offending. A worker spoke of a client with exceptionally serious difficulties within her family, including being the victim of past emotional manipulation and physical assaults:

She wanted to be met at the gates by [a family member] and Probation thought it really wasn't a good idea... she was still vulnerable [to exploitation]. So, she was in [a distant prison] and I couldn't get there in time, so I assessed her by video link to persuade her to meet me, which she agreed to. As soon as she came out of the prison gates she burst into tears because she'd been in prison so long... having someone there to meet her was quite overwhelming. (Holly, Through The Gates support worker)

9.5 Support and assistance with benefits and other matters

Unsurprisingly, given it is so central to the service, all interviewees mentioned the provision of help with obtaining income, and some mentioned help making contact with Probation, though most references by clients to the latter were made in passing, or were embedded in statements about benefits or housing assistance (see section 9.6), about the manner in which the service was provided, or about general appreciation of the service. As some examples not quoted elsewhere:

One interviewee gave a good explanation of the need for such assistance:

Alcoholics... we don't look after ourselves, we don't do the priority things, we tend to let things slide until the last possible moment and it's good having these people here for me. I mean, my CPN [Community Psychiatric Nurse], he tries to do what he can but, I suppose because St.Giles are so much more geared to dealing with the outside world in terms of benefits and such, whereas my CPN isn't so geared up... So, if it was left to me, I'd still be sat somewhere with no money in my pocket, and feeling really, really sorry for myself, and not getting very much done. (Charles, client, 45)

Another spoke specifically about income support services:

I didn't have a clue about benefits, I'd never filled out a benefit form, and they were so helpful. I didn't have to worry about filling things in wrong and getting them sent back. They know exactly what they're doing and what I can apply for. (Becky, client, 26)

Similarly, a Probation Officer spoke of help with income support, of help with attending Probation appointments on the day of release, and of assistance generally:

[The worker] will also take them to get their benefit claim up and running, a lot of these practical hand-holding things... She'll also ensure that they come and see us on the day of release which legally they have to. These essential things. (Janet, Probation Officer)

9.6 Obtaining housing, reducing re-offending, and the link between them

The importance of housing and reducing reoffending, and the link between them was, unsurprisingly, evident in several interviews:

What it's all about, the bottom line is to reduce reoffending. (Gavin, St.Giles manager)

That manager separately stated that, while Through The Gates' other functions were essential parts of the process, finding housing was central.

Similarly, a Probation Officer explained that, excepting a few offenders presenting such high risk that they need to be curfewed or monitored, Probation cannot provide housing but that, with its focus on risk assessment, the service is very conscious that:

When somebody gets released and they're homeless, they are immediately at high risk of re-offending. Statistically the chances are extremely high, so it's a huge issue. Some of these guys... coming out, class A drug addicts, even if they've been clean in prison, the only place they have to go is a crack house, so of course they're going to start taking drugs, re-offending, and we're basically not achieving anything. (Janet, Probation Officer)

Clients were aware of this also:

You need stability. Once you've got that, you can get to your appointments, get this done. Support around drugs and re offending. You need to keep yourself occupied and doing something you really enjoy doing. (Eve, client, 35)

And:

I think if you don't have a secure home you've got nothing keeping you grounded. I was all over the place and staying anywhere. I was staying with the wrong people and getting into the wrong things. I don't have a good family relationship, I don't get on with my dad, so I can't really go to my family for help. (Becky, client, 26)

And a Probation Officer's view again:

I personally believe that [names a worker] has been the reason that a lot of our guys coming out of prison are being given a good chance from the beginning. (Janet, Probation Officer)

9.7 Intensive activity over a short period

Clients spoke of intensive activity on their part, reflecting the support that was both needed and provided, and indicating the intensive, short term nature of the Through The Gates service as a whole:

I've been really busy with my doctors, with Probation, with housing, with appointments. No, seriously, I've had no end of appointments that I've had to attend to. I just don't know how I fit it all in. It's been quite hectic for the last couple of months but it's now starting to quiet down, you know. (Danny, client, 46)

And:

Interviewer: "how do you fill your time?"

Appointments. I'm doing quite a few things at the moment... (Eve, client, 35)

9.8 Need for later support

One client acknowledged very clearly his need for support once the intentionally brief engagement with Through The Gates had ended:

I've never had my own place, so initially I'll need a lot of high level support. I've never had to pay bills before, cook for myself. I love food shopping but it's when you get to the counter and there's someone in front of you, fiddling with their card thing or whatever. Budgeting is definitely something I will need some coaching in. I've no real money sense. (Charles, client, 45)

Such support is not offered by St.Giles, and the detail of its provision is therefore beyond the brief of this evaluation. One Through The Gates worker did however report a particular difficulty with obtaining effective cooperation with floating support services (services providing medium-term assistance with household management and the like), often needed by clients once Through The Gates' intentionally brief service is complete. She reported that one agency sometimes takes months to respond to referrals, leading to the case being kept open far longer than it need be.

Because of this emerging concern about follow-on work, the final two interviewees in external agencies were asked about this directly. For these, it was not a major problem, though the need to chase up some referrals, and the fact that services were better in some geographical areas than others, was acknowledged.

This is an important matter for a short term service such as Through The Gates, but it seems to be a local one found in certain services only, with the problem best resolved by negotiation or, if necessary, recourse to commissioners.

9.9 Client aspirations for training and work

All client interviewees spoke of plans or aspirations for training or employment:

I need a bit more of a settle-in period and because this place is not a permanent thing. I hope to get [permanent housing], but then start to think of some type of employment. (Charles, client, 26)

That interviewee spoke of interests in art and in voluntary work. Another said:

I was supposed to start the NVQ for Advice and Guidance. Because I've been out of work since I was 18... I need to study because I haven't got any relevant qualifications. I was looking forward to doing the NVQ. You can do it in 4 months [but for personal reasons] I didn't follow through on that... It's better for

me to study now on benefits: I'll get everything paid for. I'd like to be a teacher. (Becky, client, 26)

Another said:

When I did Community Service I worked with kids in a football team. I'd like to get into that side of it. Couple of things I want to look at. I want to get me gym instructors licence. There was a couple of courses they done in prison but because I wasn't there long enough... (Andrew, client, 40)

That interviewee was also considering outdoor, probably manual, work, seeing himself as a particularly practical person. And another:

I've been asked if I want to do some mentoring work. All I want to do is speak to addicts and help them get clean. (Eve, client, 35)

Finally:

I've [asked] about doing the NVQ to become a full time employee here. I'm adamant that I want to work for St.Giles because I enjoy the kind of work, helping other people. I don't need to get smashed on drugs or alcohol, I get a buzz from helping other people. (Danny, client, 46)

Indeed, a majority of the (admittedly small number of) clients interviewed seemed at least to be considering using their experiences to help others in one way or another, but this was not universal; neither did it seem naive.

Rather than follow the process from assessment to service completion, forward referral and client future plans, as preceding sections have done, the following sections now address comments on, and interviewee suggestions for, the system as a whole.

9.10 Staff continuity and persistence

One client described how the service smoothly replaced one worker with another when his allocated worker was unexpectedly absent:

I was told that a Through The Gates worker would meet me at the gate. Well, erm, [my worker], he couldn't make it, so another worker met me at the gate, then he brought me to the office and I met [my main worker]. (Danny, client, 46)

Whether such continuity *always* or even usually occurs is of course hard to judge from the available data, but this attitude certainly fits with other evidence of persistence, which was noticeable in several interviews. As an example, one client was impressed by the long hours worked at the point of release, both by Through The Gates staff and by his Probation Officer:

I can't complain. I got a letter saying there was someone gonna meet me at the gates, and I thought, "There's no way- they gonna have to leave at 2 o'clock in the morning". And they *wasn't* there. But they phoned me up when I was coming out of Reception and they said, "Look, no one's there, but we'll see you at the office. And the trains were delayed. I was meant to get in at 4 o'clock and the train pulled in about half-six, seven, and [my worker] was still waiting with my Probation Officer to go to my bed-sit, so he never got home till ten or half-ten that night. (Andrew, client, 40)

Another client reported the service sticking with her through a series of difficulties:

They were really good with being patient with me. I got this place... and then things didn't work out there. The landlady was very strange and things went a bit

pear shaped and she decided she wanted me to move. And then they found me another place... but things went wrong there because of the people downstairs, and also I ended up in another violent relationship with a guy. It's kind of a pattern, yeah. Then I got pregnant and once again they helped me and everything happened in a short space of time. I got this really nice place in, like, a refuge for women and they're really looking after me. And from there I'll be able to get somewhere more permanent. (Becky, client, 26)

It was evident in a staff interview that an understanding of the need for persistence was built into practice:

I've got a client who's been around a few times, and I'm happy to work with him. He's been honest and said, "I just haven't been ready", but [he will try to attend] appointments. But he *will*... relapse into substances, going back inside, then getting referred to us again... Even if it doesn't help him now, even if it's five years away from now, I hope he'll remember what I've said to him. (Holly, Through The Gates support worker)

9.11 Staff negotiation and advocacy skills

All clients mentioned staff ability to negotiate on their behalf. Among others:

Er, they're helping me with pushing the housing to get me more settled, more permanent. (Danny, client, 46)

And:

We went to [my local authority housing department] and... they said, "We got nowhere for you. Come back on Tuesday." I thought, "Are you *saying* that? 'Cause I got a support worker sitting next to me, are you not looking at the reality?" Anyway, they got onto the council and said, "If [our client] isn't a priority, what is?" They followed that up and they were told that what they done was wrong and instantly they got me into a studio flat, in privately rented. (Eve, client, 35)

And:

I didn't have any benefit for the first ten weeks I was out. But [my worker] was very concerned and even got the Crisis Loan people to phone me up out the blue and say, "Can we ask you some questions?" He'd always be on the phone to them and then all of a sudden they'd say, "Can you come and pick up a cheque?" And I'm thinking, "Why don't you listen to the people that haven't been paid?" (Eve, client, 35)

Telephone calls made by Jobcentre Plus is of course routine good practice on their own part as much as to St.Giles's credit, though asking for such a call is naturally commendable.

One interviewee recalled that housing procedures and how to manage them had been carefully explained, overcoming common suspicions that services are personally unfair:

You know the old story. If you [apply for housing] and they tell you, "No", it's the same old thing: "If I was this colour or if I come from that country they'd give me it". But, no, they do it for everyone, but some are more important than others, more urgent. But they [St.Giles Trust] told me about appointment keeping, trying to be there on time and if you ain't gonna make an appointment make sure you phone up. (Andrew, client, 40)

This key ability was noticed by external agencies also. Speaking of the support worker covering her area:

She will meet them, take them to the Housing Department, she will beg and plead to get them something even if it's just temporary, for the weekend. She seems to have powers of persuasion that we do not have. (Janet, Probation Officer)

9.12 Joint work with other agencies

Clients confirmed that Through The Gates worked with the principal agencies required of them on the day of release. For example:

He ran me around to take me to the social security, Probation, the housing, homelessness. Helped me out with some pots and pans. [All this] St.Giles has done for me since I been out of prison. They done no end of work for me, they been brilliant. (Danny, client, 46)

Another spoke of wider contacts, some provided with the help of St.Giles Trust, others provided through statutory services because of her particular needs:

Well, 'cause I've always suffered from depression [my worker] was mentioning counselling, and I thought 'cause I'm pregnant I really need to do it, I need to change things. So I see a counsellor as well. My midwife, I also have. [And] my baby has a social worker, but because of the domestic violence it's like an automatic referral from the police to Social Services. But to be honest, anyone who really wants to help me- I'm fine with that now. (Becky, client, 26)

There was good client evidence that Through The Gates is not restrictive about referral to other agencies where individual needs or preferences require it:

[The St.Giles worker] said it would be better, if you got drugs issues, to go to another, er, she got me on a RAPT course which is a 12-step programme. And from there she got me involved with some other [services]. So really they don't just find you a place to live. They encourage you to go to the other authorities as well. (Andrew, client, 40)

This occurred despite well known, documented difficulties with interagency work,²⁰²¹ some of which came up in interview and are covered in section 9.15.

9.13 Personal and emotional support for clients

All interviewees spoke, in different ways, about how they felt personally supported by staff, enabling them to reflect and move forward. As examples:

I feel really better now, my head feels really cleared. It's just so good to know that I got people looking out for me, taking some of the responsibility off me and stuff. I've never really had to take responsibility for myself and it's quite scary. (Becky, client, 26)

Later in the interview she said:

It's really good, 'cause like I've had emotional support as well. My keyworker, she's a woman, and 'cause like I've been really isolated, it's nice to have someone I can have a little chat to. Sit down, have a cuppa tea, a cigarette and a chat about things in my life. It's been really helpful. (Becky, client, 26)

Another said:

St.Giles have actually given me a wide range of views that I think are very, very helpful, especially for someone like myself that's very eager and determined to put the past behind me, put it into one bag and put it to a good cause. (Eve, client, 35)

And:

Well, they've taught me the importance of things, how important your life is, not just to them but to yourself. (Andrew, client, 40)

A Through The Gates worker said something about how that relationship worked in practice:

It's the relationship building. Because even though you only see the client six or seven times, or sometimes a bit longer... when you're at the HPU sitting there with them from nine in the morning to six at night, you talk, they talk and you kind of get to know them. Like when they jump up and get angry for being there so long, or whether they want to go into more depth about their background, you kind of build a relationship and because you're there to support them, they feel they can trust you. (Holly, Through The Gates support worker)

9.14 Valued presence of former offenders

The presence of former offenders in the staff team was appreciated:

I've met some good people. Some of them I was neighbours with, lived next door to them on the wing, and they're team leaders now. So even ex-cons are doing well for themselves. You're all in the same boat. You're not thinking, "Oh, that geezer over there in the suit, I don't think he likes me" or, "I don't think I'll get it 'cause that woman took a dislike to me". You don't get none of that, you're up front. (Andrew, client, 40)

There was also an appreciation that, while having former offenders in the staff team was a valuable feature, people from more traditional backgrounds were of similar worth:

My understanding is that some of the people here are ex-offenders and I think that's great... It helps because they've been there, they've been that side of it, and they've got a better understanding of how that person feels... But again, I don't believe in labelling people, just because they're middle class or whatever background, that they're not gonna be able to empathise or understand... For me personally speaking, would it have made that much difference? I dunno to be quite honest. I think just a friendly face, and a bit more of a responsible head, sort of thing, was of a great help. (Charles, client, 45)

And from the staff side, responding to a question about how the mixture of ex-offenders and non offenders worked:

What I say is... as long as you can empathise with them, I think anyone can deliver the role. It's how you interact with the client, how you build up trust with them... I don't think you have to be an ex offender to, er, to do this [job], but it [does give] you an insight. Say, for instance, if you do have a difficult client who's got substance misuse issues and you've got an appointment and they give you all the excuses under the sun... you know the jargon... so you can actually say, "Well, hold on a minute, you can't spin that one on me". Do you know what I mean? You can just keep it more real and open with them... (Holly, Through The Gates support worker)

Later in the interview, she gave an example of this working in practice:

To break down the barrier with [a client in difficulty] I had to tell her, "I'm an ex-offender, I can understand what you've been through... being scared", and that worked with her. But with other clients I don't say anything. If I can avoid it, I will, because I just want to be known for myself. (Holly, Through The Gates support worker)

External workers saw advantages with this structure, and few problems. From a Probation Officer, in response to a direct question about having former offenders on the staff team:

I wasn't aware of that. I think that's possibly a very good thing because they've been there, they've been through it, they can empathise. People deserve a chance to move on in their lives. I wouldn't be doing this job if I thought otherwise, so I don't think that's a problem. (Janet, Probation Officer)

And from a voluntary sector worker:

Well, [our services] use peer support in the prison a lot. I have a peer support worker on the tenancy support course I run here. Er, obviously... having them come into prisons to do interviews is a "no, no" because of security issues. But done properly it can be a very positive thing. Sometimes it's kind of good having somebody who's been there and done that helping you. They know all the pitfalls and how it is from their perspective. (Ian, prison-based housing worker)

The security problem with former offenders visiting prisons may well be so where that interviewee is based, but it is not the case for all: there is considerable variation in practice, generally based on relationship-building with prison managers.

The similarity in commentary from these various sources is notable.

9.15 Difficulties with interagency work

Perhaps unsurprisingly, clients were unlikely to be aware of organisational difficulties, and did not mention them; but staff did. Responding to the question, "What's most frustrating or difficult about your job?", one said:

Er. I would say, working with other agencies. (Holly, Through The Gates support worker)

She recalled that at one time, the Probation Service was included in this:

Before, I would say Probation. It was so difficult trying to get information out of Probation, but they actually come up trumps and we work really well with them now. (Holly, Through The Gates support worker)

Later in the interview, she indicated there may have been misunderstanding on both sides:

We have a good relationship with London Probation, who at the beginning were difficult to work with, but I understand more about their role now. (Holly, Through The Gates support worker)

The Probation Officer interviewed was also positive on this issue, and was aware of difficulties elsewhere:

[The worker for my area is] very proactive in contacting me if she has any information... just sharing information. They are very, very friendly which is also

helpful because interagency working can be difficult. People have different agendas, different ideas on how things work. I have to say, Through The Gates and Probation seem to work very well together, there's no conflict of interest because we know how important housing is for these guys. (Janet, Probation Officer)

St. Giles reports that difficulties remain when dealing the complexity of multiple administrative systems:

Because of this type of work, you always need a piece of information or an answer from someone to move forward. And if you can't get hold of that person... [In some agencies, if the worker's off], nobody picks it up. So if you've got a client and someone's working on their housing and they're off... then you've just got a client in limbo. You get all the backlash that the client's going to give you, you can't go forward, you got a caseload of 25 other people you need to prioritise, so sometimes it *is* a bit frustrating when you need to liaise with other people. (Holly, Through The Gates support worker)

The perspective of one external agency and, one suspects, others, is different: St. Giles makes it less necessary for this agency to carry out this work themselves.

They certainly make my life a bit easier. I spend a lot of time phoning around for Probation Officers and people in the council to talk to about my clients and it's very time consuming. Just getting the slightest thing done on one of my cases, having [St. Giles] is a bit of extra help, really, having someone else to get things moving. (Ian, prison-based housing worker)

There is not necessarily anything wrong with this last point, but from the planning perspective, this might be seen as replacement of one service, which presumably managed to function before, albeit with difficulty, with another which now faces similar problems. On the other hand, the scale and structure of the St. Giles service, with teams dedicated to specific borough clusters, is likely to mean that practitioners will have local knowledge and contacts that a more generic prison-based service might not.

9.16 Problems with workload?

A Probation Officer, interestingly, expressed some concern that the service may become overloaded:

We put so much stress on them, we often rely on them quite heavily... They put the whole day in and give such support and give such a decent foundation to somebody's resettlement process. I hope we don't put too much pressure on, so that they can't cope with our referrals. [But] they've never let us down yet. (Janet, Probation Officer)

Although we had been told that staff involvement would be limited to about six weeks, given occasional variation, one client at least, who had been out of prison for three months at the time of interview, seemed only partially aware of time limits, conscious only that involvement would end when permanent housing was obtained, which we would guess, given the limited availability of housing, must in many instances take a considerable time:

I haven't been told it's a time limited service because I still stay with, liaise with... my Through The Gates keyworker. So I still keep in touch and pop in and talk with other staff so I don't think there is a time limit to be honest with you. [My keyworker] has said he will liaise with me until... I have more permanent accommodation. (Danny, client, 46)

These observations, taken together, might indicate a need to reflect on service planning and staff workloads; without doing so, the high quality of service reported elsewhere might not be sustainable.

9.17 Other criticisms and suggestions

All interviewees were asked for criticisms and suggestions. One worker based in a prison noted problems arising from the lack of coverage in some areas:

They only have funding for certain London boroughs, so we have to distinguish between the ones they have funding for and the ones [they do not]... Basically it's knowing about that that's taken us a little bit of time. (Ian, prison-based housing worker, voluntary agency)

This respondent was aware of a broadly similar services from another agency limited to two boroughs, and of a small London-wide service with part-time staff (the Open Road service also provided by St.Giles), but considered these insufficient to resolve this problem.

From a recommissioning point of view, it is clearly desirable to have full coverage in London and, presumably potentially, in some other localities. Whether it makes sense to do this through one agency such as St.Giles Trust, or through several agencies, is a matter for commissioning policy, though as noted in the quotation, the simplicity of a single agency has clear advantages for prison-based workers and perhaps others needing quickly to work out who to refer to.

That same worker also reported that some individuals, or some teams, could be slow to report back about progress, or through inaction require matters to be chased up to be sure progress is made at all:

One of the things I chase a lot is the feedback. I've got one guy who came out two weeks ago and I left a message for the key worker, but they don't automatically feed back to the prison... That could be improved upon. It would make life much easier. Sometimes I may have to... jog them along a little bit to think about telephone interviews or coming to do visits. But it varies considerably. (Ian, prison-based housing worker, voluntary agency).

There may be several reasons for this. Workload, as noted above, may be one problem, and we note (see section 10.1) that there are aspects of administrative paperwork that, without improvement, are likely to make such routine feedback and progress-chasing difficult or prone to error.

Criticism from clients was limited or absent. One client did identify an incident that certainly did not match the principal Through The Gates model described and appreciated elsewhere:

I must admit my first experience of St.Giles wasn't brilliant, to be honest. What happened was, I got out last year... [and] basically... when I got out of the court, I met this chap... he came to meet me outside the courtroom and walked me to the bus stop, I mean fair play to him, it's not his fault, he gave me £10 and that was the last I saw of him. And I was a little bit, well, I thought these guys were supposed to find me somewhere to live. But the thing was, the hospital had managed to get me a B and B, so I was [housed] again, which was very nice, but I thought that was very limited intervention, "Oh, here's the bus stop, here's £10, nice to see you", and gone. Fair enough. (Charles, client, 45)

A manager has credibly since suggested that, given the client stated he had accommodation, he may actually have been talking about a subsistence payment to tide him over until the next appointment, with its purpose not made sufficiently clear to

him. Whatever the problem, that interviewee did go on to say how much he valued being met at the gates on a later occasion (9.4).

One suggestion was, in essence, that St.Giles expand its service into generic homelessness assistance:

When I've been waiting to see [my worker] there have been certain people that have come in off the street, they've had enough, where St.Giles have put them in temporary accommodation... for 48 hours. But I feel if St.Giles could, they would help homeless people that bit more... running them to the "homeless", sitting with them till they got a more positive setting for themselves. Yeah, I'd like to see something like that happen. That would be the only criticism I would have. (Danny, client, 46)

St.Giles did indeed once provide such a service (and still does, for Southwark clients only) before concentrating on prison and other offender services, taking the view that there are many other agencies doing such work. It may be that St.Giles could now make responsibilities and referral channels clearer to the potential clients described by this respondent; but it seems doubtful that there is capacity for St.Giles to expand again into such work in its existing premises.

Another suggestion, for St.Giles or others, is that additional services be provided for homeless gay couples, offender or not:

I suppose, like, we're gay and more support needs to be offered to gay couples. We do get a lot of harassment [describes a couple of incidents where they have been attacked]... (Eve, client, 35)

You know, what would be really good if St.Giles could get one of these derelict buildings to house gay people. Sometimes there's a lot of conflict when gay and heterosexual people live together. (Frances, Eve's partner)

Being gay, taking drugs and committing crimes: that's a lot of stuff to deal with. But if you can get through that, you can get through anything. (Eve, client, 35)

Agencies have been thinking about the issue of homelessness and sexuality in the last few years,^{22, 23} but the interviewees are correct that there are very few specialist resources. It seems doubtful that St.Giles is in the position to engage in housing development as suggested, but we would certainly encourage the development of joint work with agencies such as Stonewall, and to be mindful of helpful guidance such as Gold (2005) in looking closely at need and in providing sensitive support to clients being considered for general accommodation.

9.18 Overall satisfaction

We have included short statements of satisfaction in some of the comments above, and there seems little need to repeat these at length here. Short examples might include:

On the service in general:

So, nothing I can fault them with. (Andrew, client, 40)

I'd like to say, not being a client, but where I've been there all the time... I've been standing back and watching all the help Eve has got from St.Giles... and you don't get this help anywhere else.... (Frances, client Eve's partner)

Whether or not the absence of such help elsewhere is literally true, the statement nevertheless expresses a clearly felt sentiment about the service.

On the approach of individual workers:

He's been great, brilliant. (Danny, client, 46)

And:

[My girlfriend's worker] is really good, he's really caring, you can tell whatever he does, he does it from the heart.... (Frances, client's partner)

....yeah, 'cause he cares, he enjoys doing it. (Eve, 35, client)

And from Probation:

Without exaggerating or being too fluffy, they are absolute life savers. (Janet, Probation Officer)

And:

Through The Gates are fantastic. In particular [names local worker] will meet these people at the gates, she will often have made contact with them beforehand so it's a familiar face, she's got an excellent relationship with these guys. (Janet, Probation Officer)

Finally, the following comment struck us as a particularly clear reflection of the human impact of the service:

My girlfriend's stood by me twenty years. There's a lot I owe her. I've been getting great pleasure just watching the smile on her face 'cause I can walk out the front door now with a smile on her face, not thinking, "She'll hear a siren and say, 'Is that you?'" But she don't do that no more- she trusts me a hundred percent now. (Andrew, client, 40)

10 Inspection

Client files, policy documents, human resource practice and data collection systems were for the most part briefly examined to observe underlying management and administrative practice.

10.1 Client files

Ten randomly selected client files were examined to provide a sample of casework practice:

- **Casenotes** were generally good, for the most part showing clear and up to date narrative of events. One file fell short of this standard, but it was accepted in discussion with a manager that this was atypical.
- **The principal interview form** used to identify needs and plan action appears to have been adapted from a previous St.Giles service in which a wide range of problems might be presented. Given that Through The Gates is intended to respond to a limited number of needs, in some instances very rapidly, it is suggested that the form be amended better to fit this purpose, clearly recording the needs to be met, responsibility for meeting those needs, agencies involved, and (both for casework and data collection purposes) eventual success or otherwise in each case. Forms commonly used in social casework can be provided as models on which to base a revised form if required.
- **Overall**, and subject to the comment above, practice was found to be good.

10.2 Policy documents

We examined a selection of policy documents, but had insufficient time to do this thoroughly and have some hesitation about making a confident statement on this. With that reservation, we might observe:

- **Induction pack for St.Giles Trust Prison Staff.** This guidance, developed in 2007 when St.Giles was increasing its interest in prison services, and modified for current use, is of good quality.
- **An information sharing protocol** drawn up by London Probation and in regular use by St.Giles Trust was noted to be of excellent quality.
- **Other management and policy documents** are in place (sample Health and Safety, Disciplinary Policy and Risk Management documents were observed), but some are due for revision and should be subject to a rolling programme of replacement and updating.

10.3 Human Resources practice

We did not look at this in detail, but were interested in a comment in one staff interview (Gavin, St.Giles manager) that two staff, perhaps unsurprisingly given the number of former offenders employed, had again got into trouble, one through a current relapse in drug use and one by being arrested for an offence preceding their employment with Through The Gates. Later discussion with a senior manager indicated that procedures and practices are in place for handling events such as this which might reasonably be expected from time to time:

- Managers are made aware, in confidence, of staff former offences, enabling them to rapidly observe and respond to relapse behaviour should it occur.
- In the case of the person who relapsed into drug use, this was managed humanely and appropriately. Rather than use standard employment practice such as suspension or dismissal, the worker concerned was given extended leave pending expected recovery.

Our one reservation is that, although a standard disciplinary procedure is in place, the response to such agency-specific problems is not yet formulated as written policy, but we understand this is in preparation, and will be built on experience with this new and developing service.

10.4 Data collection systems

We were satisfied with the quality of quantitative data provided, and have reported on this in sections 6, 5 and 7 with some confidence. Aspects of the present system, however, made some of this data slow to analyse, and careful cross-checking was necessary to ensure figures properly represent the service. We would make the following summary observations and suggestions for the present data system:

- **Current practice.** This is frankly unusual, with each team assembling data into small individual databases, submitted to a central office monthly. Data from these is then manually transferred to a central database, the fields of which differ in some instances from the small local databases and are therefore subject to interpretation by the data manager. As noted above, we are satisfied, after careful cross-checking, that such interpretation has been consistent and valid, but it is clearly subject to error if such close attention is lost. Importantly, the system cannot be subjected to data audit (checking the database against original paper records) in the normal way.
- **Preferred practice** is to use a common database, with practitioners either entering data directly or completing a data collection form for later entry by a data administrator, in each instance under the supervision of a manager familiar with the cases under consideration.

And:

- **Evaluation Strategy.** We noted that such a document, setting out the purpose and practice of evaluation and, particularly importantly, carefully defining each of the variables and values that casework practitioners and managers are expected to collect, was absent at the start of the project. We understood this was partly due to the speed with which the service had to be set up, which is acceptable in the short term. A draft Strategy was produced part of the way through this evaluation, but was discontinued once it was understood that more than one database, with differing fields, was in use. If data quality is to remain high, we urge the completion of this document, in particular ensuring that variable and value definitions are passed to caseworkers generating the data, once the database system is reviewed.
- **Baseline data.** We further note that an evaluation strategy ought, wherever possible, to identify potential baseline data from the start. While the setting of targets, the principal focus of the project before evaluators were appointed, is of evident value, we must stress that a more rounded and thorough evaluation might have been achieved if this had been considered early on. As with other technical points we have made, this may be a matter that can easily be addressed should further evaluations be planned.
- **Failure to date actions.** Some presumably important service aims, such as making referrals to specialist services within three working days (2.2, i, above) could not be measured because the dates of such actions were not recorded.
- **We noted some failings in data security,** but understand this is now rectified.

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