**Storytelling and Drama in Scottish Prisons Presentation**

**Introduction**

* Who I am, my role, Bethany Christian Trust and Homelessness Prevention
  + Range of services: Support prison leavers back into community, community recovery programmes, young people’s counselling, community meals and initiatives, etc… plus the work that I do, Creative Expressions Coordinator
  + Open brief to develop creative projects for communities and individuals at risk of homelessness… focused on prisoners and people in recovery
  + Over a quarter of prisoners do not know where they are going to sleep that night on the day of their release… can only register as homeless when they return to their local authority
  + View to develop confidence and skills, self-reflection, forward planning, diversionary activity, positive relationships and role models
* Drama vs. Storytelling
  + I run two types of process: Devised participatory theatre and collective story-making … but will use terms interchangeably
  + Most literature about drama in prisons
  + Creation process always narrative led
* Break down of presentation
  + General overview of working in prisons
  + Share a workshop plan which includes a story written with prisoners
  + Questions
* There is a handout… not exhaustive… no PowerPoint… please take notes or I can email the notes I am reading from afterwards.
* May touch on distressing themes – however, hope to keep in light touch overall!

**Opening Discussion**

* Who has worked in or visited a prison before?
* General interest or specifically planning to pursue this kind of work?
* For those who haven’t worked in prisons, what are some words or phrases that you might associate with prisons? What do you imagine it would be like?
* Those who have, would you want to add or take-away anything from this list?

**Gaining Access**

* Buildings hidden in plain sight.
* Those who have worked in prisons, do you know how the project you worked on came about?
* Key factors:
  + Networks
  + Reputation
  + Know where your project/practice will fit and who to contact…
* My own story…
  + Graduate Job: Geese Theatre – not ready for it
  + 2009-2015: Despite some professional success as theatre maker, generally the wildness year… struggle and suffering!
  + 2016: Breakdown and rebuild… met chaplain from HMP Shotts who invite me to work with her guys… now had more of a sense of affinity and shared experience (although still very different!)
  + 2016-2019: Annual Autumn Shotts Project
  + 2020: Insiders – online devised project during pandemic
  + Post-Pandemic: Insiders Tours eleven of Scotland’s male adult prisons
  + Now: Addiewell, Glenochil, Perth, collabs with Edinburgh uni, IFit/Beacon Arts Centre, EIF, etc… feels like it is bedding in!
  + A lot of determination, passion, self-awareness…

**Scotland’s Prison System**

* Seventeen Prisons and Secure Units across the country
* Each is quite different in terms of culture and the category of prisoners it holds…
  + Mostly central belt area
  + Two up North: Grampian and Inverness
  + One down South: Dumfries
  + Sixteen state run and one private
  + Barlinnie: largest and very Victorian
  + Low Moss/Grampian – Ultra-modern, feel like headquarters of a bank!
  + Inverness: tiny… but still a prison!
  + Stirling (women), Polmont (Young offenders and women)
  + Bella and Lillias Centre… new community facing, family orientated women’s units
  + Castle Huntly… Open prison, so men go out to work/on day release…
    - To highlight but a few…
* Departments and partner organisations you may work with:
  + Family Contact Officer, Story Book Dads, Families Outside
  + Education: franchised out to Fife College
    - Most formal route…
  + Chaplaincy: Faith Connection
  + Health Care: NHS runs, not the prison service
  + Various Others: Life Skills, Social Hub, Link Centre, Library, Radio Station, Recovery Hubs/Cafes, etc
  + Senior Managers: Governors, Deputy Governors, Offender Outcomes Managers, Prisoner Activities Coordinator
* Funding:
  + Prisons are unlikely to pay you for your input. You will probably require external funding or have to work voluntarily…

**Prisoners**

* Scotland’s Current Prison population as of 5th April: 8040
* Highest Population per capita in Western Europe
* Categories:
  + Male (96%) and Female (4%)
    - There is a general belief amongst theatre practitioners working within the criminal justice system that women offenders are more resistant, volatile and less predictable group to work with than men. An honest look at my experience of working with both male and female offenders support this belief’ (Jenny Hughes, 1998) Why is this…?
  + Young Offender (YO) and Adult (Over 21)
  + Pre-sentence (Remand… can be for up to two years due to court backlogs) and Sentenced
  + Open or Closed Conditions
  + Mainstream and Protection
  + Long Term (Over four years) and Short Term (under four years)… STP’s might include ‘revolving door’ offenders, but often an individual who is first time in for an offence is completely overwhelmed by the situation…. LTP, more settled.
  + Offence Related Protections and Non-Offence Related Protection
    - NORP – Vulnerable for some reason: learning difficulty, prison/police officer prior to sentence, informant, price on their head, etc…
    - ORP – Sex Offenders
    - Typically thought to be easiest to engage, but sometime big attainment gaps
  + Various others: National Induction Unit (early phase LTP’s), Mental Health Hall
* On a deeper level:
  + 25% of prisoners are care experienced, 50% youth offenders (homeforgood.org) compared to 0.8% of general population
  + One in four prisoners in Britain are believed to have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)… five to 10 times higher than its prevalence of 2% to 4% in the general population. (theguardian.co.uk)
  + 53% of women and 27% of men have disclosed childhood experiences of emotional, physical or sexual abuse (crestresearch.ac.uk)
  + Estimated 64% of male sentenced prisoners and 50% of female prisoners have a personality disorder. This compares with 5% of the general population. (nice.org.co.uk)
  + Estimated that over 90% of prisoners have at least one of the following psychiatric disorders: psychosis, anxiety or depression, personality disorder, alcohol misuse, drug dependence. (nice.org.co.uk)
* Vast trauma, deep vulnerability… but you’ll also meet many people who are humble, reflective, mutually supportive, charismatic, funny, etc, etc…
* Don’t ask what they’re in for, and many people prefer not to know… although its not a closed secret and they may tell you, or staff may tell you, or you might be aware of who they are due to their profile… can certainly be sobering…

**Recruitment and prison management**

* Important factors:
  + Clear sense of identity within the prison
    - Much easier to recruit inmates who are already engaged in the department you are working with
  + One member of staff in charge –
    - Clear point of contact
    - Passion and belief in what you are doing
    - They will be taking on a huge amount of work
    - Talk sensibly about the project (not, ‘You’ll be star/We’ll have to call you Keanu’ more ‘It’ll be something different/The facilitators will be very supportive’)
  + Quiet room, away from halls
  + Will you be alone with the participants?
    - How are staff accessible?
    - Where are the alarms (should have one on your person)?
  + Are the participants in a stable place – not going to be released or put on a mandatory course midway through, not in the middle of an appeal…
  + Support needs? Literacy levels?
  + Be adaptable… devised project over eight half days and six full days, but expect at least two days to be cancelled or curtailed.
  + Power of a good (‘Gucci’) biscuit to get people through the door… but you need to be able to develop that to make em stay!

**Arrival and Security:**

* Justice and Arts Scotland Guide for more details (also chaplaincy volunteer agreement very good)
  + At least a week beforehand:
    - Names, address, birthdates of all attendees.
    - Full props list, earlier if to included electronic or controlled items, as you will need special permission (which may not be given).
  + Photo ID
  + No electronic items… just as little as possible
  + Airport security – can be very busy at shift changes/visitor times… just do what you see others doing.
  + You may be offered ‘Personal Protection Training’
  + Participants may be medicated/under-the-influence, also be aware that sessions may be used for passing drugs… keep in contact with staff about these things
  + Manipulation is a far greater risk… don’t be drawn into doing favours for people, know when to end a conversation with a bland statement.
  + Take it seriously!
    - ‘Drama workers are seen [by prison staff] as difficult and demanding, with no understanding of why security it important.’ (Sally Stamp, 1998)

**Process and Performances**

* Know yourself; know who you are, know what has worked for you and share it, be authentic!
  + Balance of:
    - Participants finding their voice (‘no one ever asks us what we think’)
    - Introducing some framework for hope
      * Faith-based, political, feminist, social engagement, therapeutic, artistic…
    - Challenging problematic attitudes
      * Misogyny, minimisation, victim blaming… Be aware of what you are endorsing!
* My own personal process
  + Devised Theatre
    - Draw men out using slightly competitive games initially
    - Switch to fun and accessible improv
    - Generate story and script
    - Rehearse and perform
  + Storymaking:
    - Credible stories
    - Easy storymaking games (storycubes)
    - Generate Story
* Influences:
  + Geese Theatre
  + Paulo Freire/Carl Rodger:
    - Not trying to teach, just create structure to explore ideas and experiences
    - Awareness of my power as facilitator
  + Psychology of storytelling: Jung and Bettelheim
  + Working at The Village – One-to-multiple step removed stories (participants calibrate closeness)
  + John McGrath (confluence more than influence)
    - Music
    - Humour
    - Directness of message
    - Local relevance
    - Sentiment
    - Variety – rapid changes of tone
    - [Cool – something slight aspirational in the characters]
* Try to avoid group-work tropes, i.e. over use of flipchart paper!
* Didn’t say this in the talk… but not sure if this is an effect of the environment, lifestyle or a defence mechanism, but it’s often surprising how little participants will remember from one session to the next… constantly remind them what we have done, what we are doing and where we are going next…

**Example Game: Paper Not Floor [Cut for time]**

* *A large square of paper is placed on the floor. Group members are asked to carry out a very simple instruction: I want everyone to be in contact with the paper and not the floor. Initially, everyone stands on the paper. With each round the size of the paper is reduced. Usually the group continue to try and stand on the piece of paper despite it no longer being possible. Eventually, someone will suggest they pick the paper up and jump. They may also tear the paper up and jump one at a time.*
  + Analyse in term of skills:
    - Team work
    - Listening
    - Thinking outside the box, etc…
  + Analyse as metaphor
    - Have you ever had a solution to a problem that you keep using long about the solution has become the problem (alcohol, drugs, violence, quitting, etc)
    - How does it feel to find a new solution… how does that change how you think about problems [ie. each time the size of the paper is reduced, it is a new problem that needs to be approached as such]

**Resistance and challenging behaviour**

* I don’t tend to do a contract at the start:
  + Guy’s lives run by rules, can be off putting to open with rule making. By the time they are onside and might be open to that kind of conversation, the moment has generally passed
  + Very familiar with groupwork, normally just state that general prison rules apply and will be enforced
  + But, as I said, the important thing is that you have a genuine belief in what you are offering, so this may be something very important for you and your process…
* Geese Masks
  + Stonewall – Silence, boredom – often a situational reaction rather than a persona
  + Mr Cool – self-conscious, won’t get involved, very worried about reputation (mainstream inmates fear nothing more than being laughed at)
  + Good Guy – Morally charges bad behaviour, performance of change but no depth (chaplaincy can be used as prop for ‘good guy’ persona, as can the performance of apology)
  + Target – plays the victim, manipulative need for sympathy
  + Fisty – Aggression, threats of violence, kicking off
  + Joker – humour, but with a nasty edge at someone’s expense
  + Blabbermouth – goes on and on with little self-awareness/knows better that you/controlling (Offence related protection)
  + All covers for vulnerability, inadequacy, unpleasant feelings of guilt and responsibility, etc
* Solutions
  + Is there something in the set up that isn’t working?
    - ie. sitting in circle… people feel too exposed, resulting in stonewalling…
  + Have I mis-pitched my approach?
  + Can you and staff manage this individual?
  + Is this person ready for group work?

**The Difference It Makes**

* Evaluation processes have highlighted:
  + Increased confidence
  + Positive effects on mental health
  + Development of pro-social relationships
  + New skills and learning
  + Fun, entertainment and good feeling
  + Improved self-image
  + Desistance from substance misuse
* Benefits to physical health
* Potential pathway to further roles and responsibilities (mentoring, becoming a ‘listener’ [in prison version of Samaritans])
* Many individual stories beyond the stats though…
* The arts are a mechanism of change whilst also inviting criticism of the systems that surround us…

**Jack and Stacey Workshop**

* Opening question: What you all about then… what keeps you busy, occupies your time?
  + Sensible question to ask in the first ten minutes of knowing someone
  + Let’s everyone speak and know they will be heard (ask follow-up or summarise)
  + Shifts casual discussion to facilitated conversation
* Follow-up question: What makes a good story
  + What do you think people might say?
  + Draw awareness to story’s being everyday things, nothing weird about what we are doing…
* Hand out ‘Hero’s Journey’
  + Assess group dynamic – ‘Jack’s Fantastic Adventure’ or just use the Matrix as an example…
* Have you seen this elsewhere? How does it connect to real life?
* Jack and Stacey
  + Missing music – what the music adds…
  + Mildly Christian message
  + Short summary of content
* Follow-up questions:
  + What did you make of Stacey? What did she want for Jack?
  + Do you think they’ll get back together? Would that be a good or bad thing?
  + What is Jack finding in going along to a church? Where is he in his faith?
  + How do you stand-up for a positive change you make in your life?
  + What would you hope happens next?

**Comments and Questions**