

# ANALYTICAL SUMMARY

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## EVALUATION OF SPARK INSIDE'S HERO'S JOURNEY VIOLENCE REDUCTION COACHING PROGRAMME PILOT

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Between October 2014 and March 2015 twenty Hero's Journey life coaching programmes consisting of three workshops were delivered to 133 prisoners in HMP Wandsworth and HMP Wormwood Scrubs by the London-based charity Spark Inside. The aim of the programme was to challenge perceptions and behaviours surrounding violence and, hence, to reduce violent and negative behaviours among participants. To achieve this, the programme sought to stimulate participants' thinking as it impacts on life choices and behaviour. Those that completed two or more workshops (n=93) were offered follow-up one-to-one life coaching in prison, of which, one-third chose to accept. In order to assess the impact of this participation, the records of all 177 participants were searched in the Prison NOMIS system for instances of adjudications for violence inside the prison both six months prior to the workshops and six months after. In addition, information was collected on reoffending on 103 participants from the sample six months after release.

### Key findings

- Of 177 prisoners invited to participate in the Hero's Journey Violence Reduction Workshops and Life Coaching Pilot Study, 133 (75%) attended at least one workshop session.
- The full programme of two or three workshop sessions was completed by 93 prisoners (70%) of the participant sample.
- Additionally, 31 of those who attended two or more sessions went on to engage with the one-to-one coaching sessions (33%).
- Of the entire sample (177), 14 (8%) prisoners had an adjudication prior to the HJVR programme, 28 (16%) prisoners had adjudications after the programme. Programme completers were found to be less likely to have an adjudication, although this difference was not statistically significant.
- The prevalence of adjudications for violence decreased as the prisoners' involvement in the workshops and coaching increased; 16% of the non-participant group received an adjudication for a violent offence in the next six months compared to 11% of those who attended two or three workshop sessions. This association was not found to be statistically significant.
- The prevalence of reoffending post-release decreased as involvement in the programme increased; 15 per cent of those in the non-participant group reoffended within a six-month period, compared to 10 per cent of those attending at two or three workshops. This association was not found to be statistically significant.

## Introduction

The pathways into criminal and violent behaviour are numerous, especially for young males in urban areas where youth “gangs” feature prominently as part of street culture (Harding, 2014). Once entrenched in these lifestyles, pathways out are not always as obvious.

The Hero’s Journey Violence Reduction (HJVR) is a coaching-based intervention, developed by the organisation Spark Inside, to help individuals better understand their life paths and the consequences of choices they make. Adapted from Joseph Campbell’s work on international mythology and folklore, the Hero’s Journey focuses explicitly on challenging habitual patterns of thought associated with violence and introducing alternative self-narratives related to desistance from crime (see e.g., Liem & Richardson, 2014; Maruna, 2001).

Utilising a range of life coaching techniques, including cognitive behavioural coaching, recovery coaching, and neuro-linguistic programming, the Hero’s Journey invites participants to explore their personal journey of transformation, including the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead, and to develop a plan for how to navigate their way forward. The coach facilitators encourage self-efficacy and stimulation of participants’ thoughts so they can find their own answers to the questions raised during the workshop.

Spark Inside was funded by NOMS to deliver the Hero’s Journey life coaching programme consisting of three workshops, which were provided in two Category B local men’s prisons in London -- HMP Wormwood Scrubs and HMP Wandsworth -- between October 2014 and March 2015. The prisons have relatively high levels of institutional violence (compared to the national average), and house large numbers of young males waiting trial or transfer to more permanent prison placements. The programme was targeted at 18 to 25 year olds within the first 90 days of the entry to the prison as these two characteristics are strong indicators for becoming involved in custodial violence. However, in later workshops the criteria for participation were

expanded to be more inclusive, using the sole indicator of age.

Each workshop session lasted approximately two hours, had up to eight participants, and was led by two Spark Inside coach facilitators.

Spark Inside also offered optional one-to-one coaching to workshop participants who attended two or more workshop sessions. Each one-to-one session was approximately one hour long, and the number of sessions per client varies depending on the client’s need. Sessions were held weekly or biweekly in prison. The one-to-one coaching sessions follow on from the concepts presented in the workshops. During sessions, clients explored topics relating to personal development (e.g., values, visioning, goal-setting, options and choices), building cognitive ability, consequential thinking and motivation to change.

According to one of the testimonies of prisoner participants collected by Spark Inside:

The one-to-one coaching is a conversation with you, about you, and how to help you. Nowhere else in prison are there people there for you, to talk about you, and help you understand yourself better (male, 25 yrs old).

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the association of participation in the Hero’s Journey life coaching programme with subsequent involvement in violent or criminal behaviours. It was hypothesized that involvement in the programme would be negatively related to adjudications for violence and reoffending upon release.

## Approach

This evaluation utilises a quasi-experimental (pre- and post-), post-hoc analysis. The authors were not involved in the design of the study or the implementation of the intervention.

## Sample

The sample for this study included 177 male prisoners who initially agreed to participate in the Hero’s Journey life coaching programme (83 at

HMP Wormwood Scrubs and 94 at HMP Wandsworth). The workshops were intended specifically for young adult males aged 18 to 25 as this age population, as a whole, is particularly violent. Therefore, participants were recruited initially on the basis of their age, entry date into the prison, and previous offending; though, latterly, age was the predominant indicator used. Participants were recruited by prison staff and prisoner wing representatives at the facilities, and through word-of-mouth.<sup>1</sup> The majority of participants were aged between 18 and 25 (93%), with a minority over 26 years old (7%). The participants' average age was 22 years old (at the time of the first workshop). The sample was ethnically diverse. The largest ethnic groups were; Black British – African (23%), White – British (16%), Black British - Caribbean (16%) and White - Other (14%). The rest of the sample came from 13 other ethnic backgrounds. One hundred and eight (61%) were currently serving a sentence for a violent offence.

Of 177 prisoners in the total sample, 133 (75%) attended at least one workshop session and 58 (33%) attended all three of the workshop sessions. Reasons for non-attendance included transfer, release and changes to the daily prison regime. Those who completed the intervention were defined as those who attended a minimum of two workshops. Of those who attended at least two sessions, 31 (33%) went on to engage with the one-to-one coaching sessions afterwards. One-to-one coaching took place both inside prison on a weekly or biweekly basis.

## Study Design

The aim of this research was to determine whether the provision of the Hero's Journey life coaching programme was successful in reducing violent behaviour among the participants. In order to assess this, measures of participation in violent behaviours inside the prison were collected for all 177 sample members via the Prison NOMIS System both six months prior to the workshops and

six months after the workshops. Proven adjudications for violence were used as the proxy for violent behaviour. In addition, reoffending, defined as reconviction, was tracked for those individuals released from prison in the six months following the workshops. Of the total sample (177), 103 were released whilst 74 were not released and 1 had missing data. Initially, statistical comparisons were made on each of these measures between those who participated in the workshops (n=133) and those who did not (n=44). Analysis was used to examine characteristics of non-participants against participants to ensure their comparability. Further analyses assessed differences between workshop participants based on how many sessions they attended and whether or not they received one-on-one coaching. A chi-square test was used to examine if there was a statistical association between the degree to which prisoners participated in the programme and their adjudications for violence and reoffending upon release. A t-test was used to see if the average number of adjudications differed significantly pre- and post- workshop for the participant sample.

Further multivariate analyses were conducted to examine the relationships between participation in the workshops and one-to-one coaching sessions, and later violence and reoffending. These were modelled using the random effects generalised least squares (GLS) regression XTREG routine or logistic regression XTLOGIT routine in Stata version 12.1 statistical software for Windows. Estimates are based on robust standard errors, which take into account the non-independence of the data.

These quantitative measures were supplemented by qualitative testimony from programme completers collected by programme staff.

## Results

Open-ended exit interviews suggested high levels of satisfaction with the programme. Participants extolled the benefits of the intervention and described a link between participation and changes in their orientations toward desistance from crime and aggression:

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<sup>1</sup> The authors of this report were not involved in the recruitment process nor the initial research design for this study.

I was thinking about everything I talked about with my coach and I know you've proper woke me up this time. Violence isn't me. It's who I am around (male, 22 yrs old).

Before I was like a headless chicken, but the course helps you analyse your life and understand where your head needs to be – focused, determined and getting the most out of your time here (male, 23 yrs old).

The quantitative analysis likewise suggested that individuals with higher levels of engagement with the programme received fewer adjudications for violence and had lower rates of reoffending. However, neither of these relationships reached conventional levels of statistical significance.

### Adjudications for violence

In the six-month period after the workshop, 24 (14%) of the entire sample received an adjudication for violence. Among the full participant sample (n=133) the mean number of adjudications for violence had actually increased by 0.16 in the six months post-workshop compared to the six months pre-workshop. A paired samples t-test revealed that this difference was statistically significant;  $t=-2.36$  (133),  $p=0.020$ .

The prevalence of adjudications for violence decreased as the prisoners' involvement in the workshops and coaching increased. It was highest for non-participants (16%) and those attending one workshop only (18%), compared to those attending two or three workshops (11%). However, a chi-square test revealed that there was no statistically significant association between workshop participation and receiving an adjudication for violence,  $\chi^2(5)=2.5$ ,  $p=ns$ . See Table 1.

Multivariate models were utilised to further examine the relationship between depth of programme participation and adjudications for violence. These confirmed that the programme had the most substantial impact on participants who engaged fully with the workshops and the one-to-one coaching. There was a weakly significant relationship between full participation in the

programme (attending all three workshops and coaching sessions) and reductions in adjudications. Our model suggested that individuals who fully participated in the programme had on average 0.16 fewer adjudications for violence ( $p=0.064$ ), controlling for previous adjudications for violence.

A final analysis compared programme non-participants with those who attended at least two workshops.<sup>2</sup> A logistic regression analysis suggested that those who complete the programme (attend two or more workshops) were less likely to reoffend (Odds Ratio = 0.66;  $p=ns$ ) compared to those who did not attend, controlling for the number of days spent in the prison post-workshop, their age and the prison.

### Reoffending

Reoffending data was collected via Prison NOMIS for 103 prisoners who had been released from prison after the programme. Of those, 13 prisoners in the entire sample (13%) were convicted of a new offence after being released from prison. The prevalence of reoffending seemed to decrease as involvement in the programme increased, however, increased for those attending one workshop; 4 (15%) of non-participants reoffended and 4 (17%) of those attending one workshop reoffended, whilst 5 (10%) of those attending two or three workshops were convicted of a new offence. However, a chi-square test revealed that there was no statistically significant association between workshop participation and reoffending,  $\chi^2(5)=3.2$ ,  $p=ns$ . See Table 2.

The relationship between engagement with the programme and reoffending was examined again with regression models which controlled for the amount of time each participant had spent in the community post-release. The result of the analyses suggested that those who fully engaged with both coaching and workshops were at lower risk of reoffending (Odds Ratio = 0.68) but this was not statistically significant. The number of those who

<sup>2</sup> This analysis excluded prisoners who had been older than 25 at the time of referral to the programme and those who had only attended one workshop.

were reconvicted was too small to permit further multivariate analyses.

## Conclusions

The roots of violent behaviour are complex and multi-faceted. Once entrenched, the tendency to resort to violence as a means of personal coping, establishing power or resolving problems is difficult to break. It is therefore unrealistic to expect that participation in a single workshop will make a substantial difference in disrupting such patterns of behaviour, and indeed this is borne out in the findings from this small-scale evaluation.

On the other hand, the findings are much more promising in regards to those individuals who followed through with all three parts of the intervention and took part in the one-to-one coaching provided by Spark Inside. Although, it is important to note that these relationships did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. This continued engagement with a higher “dosage” intervention corresponded with decreases in rates of institutional violence. These findings were also produced within a context which is experiencing a large increase in adjudications.<sup>3</sup>

Although these differences were not statistically significant, there are a number of factors that could explain this. First, this is a very small sample with only about a third of those prisoners who initially attended a Hero’s Journey workshop participating in the subsequent one-to-one coaching. Second, the selection of participants for the project was less than optimal. The sample neither represents those prisoners with the highest risk scores, nor is it a fully random or representative sample of prisoners. Third, the dependent variables utilised (reports of violent activity inside the prisons on P-NOMIS and re-conviction) are both imperfect measures of actual behaviour. For instance, P-NOMIS data on prisoner behaviour rely upon subjective reports from prison staff and reflect institutional differences as well as variations in actual behaviour. As such,

considerable caution should be used in interpreting the statistical findings.

Moreover, there are several ways of understanding the pattern between participation intensity (or “dosage”) and the measured outcomes in this study. On the one hand, these may be the result of selection effects. These workshops were voluntary and, as with every such programme (see e.g., Beyko & Wong, 2005), attrition rates were considerable between the first and last workshop. As considerable research suggests that the predictors of programme attrition are largely the same as the predictors of recidivism (Jewell & Wormith, 2010), it is possible that the individuals who were motivated to complete the three-part workshop sequence and sign up for personal coaching were precisely the individuals who were most likely to refrain from future criminal or violent acts in any case (see e.g., Lang & Belenko, 2000; Pahrar, et al., 2008). The evaluation design controlled for previous infractions in the six months prior to programme completion, but this interpretation could not be ruled out.

On the other hand, motivation is not a static characteristic (McMurrin & Ward, 2004), and the Hero’s Journey workshops and coaching were specifically aimed at challenging individuals’ self-understandings and strengthening their resolve to desist. As such, it is certainly possible that the more coaching one engages in, the stronger one’s motivation to change becomes. We have no intermediate data of changes in cognition to support or challenge this interpretation. However, previous research suggests a strong correlation between treatment “dosage” (or intensity) and success in rehabilitative interventions leading researchers to conclude that “every session counts” (Kroner & Takahashi, 2012).

Further research is necessary before strong conclusions can be drawn about the benefits of the Hero’s Journey coaching intervention on improving the lives of prisoners and former prisoners. However, these findings would suggest that to have the highest chance of making an impact, this intervention should be sustained over several sessions and ideally complemented with one-to-one

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<sup>3</sup> See [http://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/dec/14/prison-disciplinary-hearings-soar-england-wales-howard-league?CMP=share\\_btn\\_link](http://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/dec/14/prison-disciplinary-hearings-soar-england-wales-howard-league?CMP=share_btn_link)



coaching. Although the current study did not find that participating in the programme led to a statistically significant drop in later adjudications for violence or in reconvictions, it is hoped that future studies would unitise larger samples and improved study design.

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**Table 1:** Adjudications by workshop participation for sample post workshop (n=177)

Workshop/coaching participation	Adjudications for Violence		
	Yes	No	Total
	N (%)	N (%)	N
Non-participants	7 (15.9)	37 (84.1)	44
Attended one workshop only	7 (17.5)	33 (82.5)	40
Attended two or three workshops	10 (10.8)	83 (89.2)	93
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>177</b>

Note:  $\chi^2(5) = 2.5, p = ns.$

**Table 2:** Reoffending by workshop participation for sample post workshop (n=103)

Workshop/coaching participation	Reoffending Post-Release		
	Yes	No	Total
	N (%)	N (%)	N
Non-participants	4 (14.8)	24 (88.9)	27
Attended one workshop only	4 (16.7)	20 (83.3)	24
Attended two or three workshops	5 (9.6)	47 (90.4)	52
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>103</b>

Note:  $\chi^2(5) = 3.2, p = ns.$