



Co-funded by
the European Union



RESTART

Restoring emotional and psychological well-being in and beyond prisons



Picture: Joel Bergner, London, UK 2020: Inside the Isis Prison, Joel worked with incarcerated young men on this mural, expressing their hopes and dreams for a better future, <https://joelartista.com/#jp-carousel-16009>.

Result of the work package 2: RESTART Methodological baseline for educators

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

Creative Commons: Ebook "RESTART Methodological baseline for educators" © 2025 by the RESTART partnership is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.

n° 2024-1-NO01-KA220-ADU-000244906



03

About the RESTART project

What is the CHALLENGE that we address with the RESTART project?

05

DESK RESEARCH Findings

Collection and description of 20 ways for restoring the emotional and psychological well-being of individuals

- Psychosocial Interventions 07
- Evidence-based, competence-focused model 10
- Therapeutic Communities 14
- Mindfulness-Based techniques and integration of Physical Activity 16
- Positive Psychology Interventions (PPIs) 19
- Expressive Arts Therapy 21
- Expressive Therapy 23

28

FOCUS GROUP Findings

Presentation of key Insights collected during interviews
Final conclusions



TABLE OF CONTENT

About the RESTART project

What is the **CHALLENGE** that we address with the RESTART project?

In the current European context, the issue of the health of people living inside prisons is critical and has worsened as a result of the Covid-19 crisis, putting the respect for human rights to the test. According to the WHO (2023), within European prisons the most common condition is mental health distress, however mental health care for inmates is often inadequate due to the high number of requests and **LACK OF AVAILABLE HUMAN RESOURCES AND TOOLS**.



Due to various factors that characterize the prison context, detained individuals present a high degree of mental suffering which is also made explicit in the high number of suicide attempts and self-harm. These phenomena represent the expression of the multiple traumatic events that characterize the detainees' lives, that have a particular impact in the case of people with a migratory background which often represent a majority in most of the prisons. In fact, even before incarceration and throughout the migratory journey, people who migrate are exposed to various events and processes that affect their mental well-being whilst placing them in a condition of "forced criminality". Similarly, the **SOCIAL REINTEGRATION** projects are not always able to meet the demand, thus determining the impossibility of a real process of guaranteeing and rediscovering one's skills and well-being, in addition to the construction of significant relationships and tools that can act as protective factors against a relapse into crime.

For these reasons, the **main goal of the RESTART project** is propose a **HOLISTIC APPROACH to restore the emotional and psychological well-being** of the people who are detained in prisons, in order **to support the START OF A NEW LIFE BEYOND PRISON**, providing prison staff with tools and methodologies to promote the effective well-being and restore the inclusion of inmates in the social context. The (re)gaining of people's autonomy is essential to foster their effective emancipation from the need to receive assistance. Therefore, it becomes crucial to place people at the center of the social inclusion system, who should not be mere passive beneficiaries of the interventions prepared for them, but active players of their own path toward building a new life in the territory.

OBJECTIVES of the Work Package 2 (WHY)

The main objective of WP2 is to support the acquisition/development of skills by prison staff to support the mental health of the inmates. This document will directly contribute to raising awareness of the importance of mental health as a key to respect human rights and dignity of each person, including those who have committed crimes.

Expected results (WHAT)

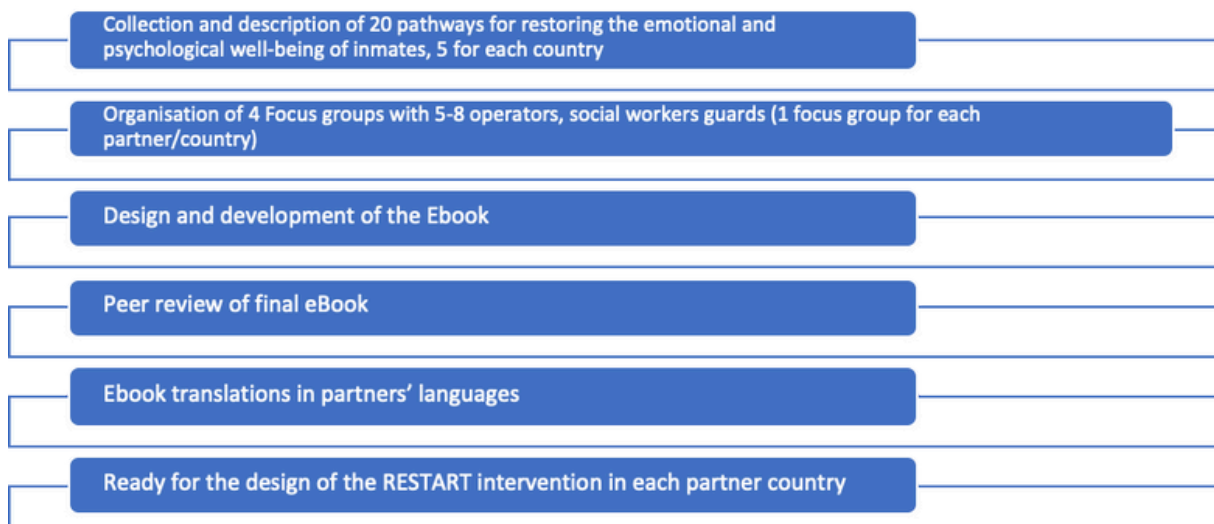
To achieve this goal, the partnership will design and produce an Ebook “RESTART Methodological baseline for educators”, which will contain descriptions of intervention methods for restoring the emotional and psychological well-being of inmates both within and beyond prisons. The Ebook will present different techniques of emotional/psychological care of inmates already adopted in European prisons or strategies that could be applied in prisons, which have proven to be effective in other contexts or targets (e.g. adult migrants).

Stakeholders (for WHOM)

The publication is addressed to educators, psychologists, cultural/linguistic mediators, operators but also prison guards, and will provide both theoretical and practical elements for working on emotional and psychological well-being with people who are living in prisons.

Activities (HOW are we going to reach the objective)

Our work was structured in the following activities:



A woman with dark, curly hair is smiling and looking down at a laptop. She is wearing a dark blue cardigan over a light-colored top and a gold necklace. Her hands are on the laptop keyboard. The background is a blurred office setting with glass partitions.

DESK RESEARCH FINDINGS

Collection and description of
20 ways for restoring the
emotional and psychological
well-being of individuals

Process

How does we work?

The activity started with gathering and analyzing information and resources about existing models and interventions fostering emotional and psychological well-being of vulnerable groups. This research carried out by RESTART project partners reveals a diverse set of pathways which aim at restoring the emotional and psychological well-being of incarcerated individuals. Addressing the mental health needs of incarcerated individuals is crucial for their successful reintegration into society. Effective implementation of each program requires trained staff, consistency, and integration with broader rehabilitation strategies. By addressing trauma, building emotional intelligence, and offering pathways to healing, these interventions play a crucial role in reducing recidivism and supporting reintegration into society. Implementing such approaches requires individualized assessment and adaptation to each person's unique needs, ensuring the most effective path toward emotional and psychological well-being.

Findings

Various approaches have been identified within correctional facilities and outside. In the following pages you will find some of the notable examples, which have been grouped in 7 categories:

- Psychosocial Interventions
- Evidence-based, present-focused counseling model (competence-focused models)
- Therapeutic Communities
- Mindfulness-Based techniques and Integration of Physical Activity
- Positive Psychology Interventions (PPIs)
- Expressive Therapy
- Expressive Arts Therapy





Psychosocial Interventions

Including group therapy and peer support programs, have been employed to address mental health and substance use disorders in prison settings. These interventions aim to improve social skills, provide emotional support, and promote behavioral change.

Psychosocial Interventions

Example: Phototherapy and emotional learning: for a social rehabilitation of young inmates



A European funded project looking at the **use of phototherapy to address the emotional leaning of prisoners**. The project coordinator is University of Roehampton, London, which involves the Research Centre for Therapeutic Education (RCTE) and comprises of one of the largest concentrations of the psychological therapies in the UK, with its associated trainings in counselling, psychotherapy and the arts and play therapies. **The need for emotional learning in prisons is particularly important given prisoners' lower levels of adjustment and self-awareness as well as the evidence to suggest that emotional intelligence may be a factor in criminal behaviour.**

"Phototherapy" is the name for the use of photography and personal snapshots within the framework of formal therapy (or psychotherapy). Within this approach, it is the trained mental health professional who uses these techniques to help clients during counselling or therapy sessions. It is an approach that offers mainly the possibility for inmates to talk about themselves and what is important for them, about the 'self' and the 'other'. It leads to a development of emotional intelligence and uses a person centred approach to the understanding of personality and human relations. **It is based on 4 approaches: 1. Photo Emotional Writing; 2. Digital Story telling; 3. The line of time; 4. (Self) Photo Portrait.**

- **Photo Emotional Writing:** each client can choose a photocard, dedicates it to one (or more) people and specify what the image recalls. The evocative power of the image can stimulate associations, promote self-expression, enable interactions. It is developed with inmates and facilitators, in weekly meetings (for example). At each meeting it is proposed to answer some questions through the choice of images. The answers create, at the end of the course, a book which is then delivered to the clients. Each meeting had a duration of 1 and half hour.

Psychosocial Interventions

Example: Phototherapy and emotional learning: for a social rehabilitation of young inmates



- **Digital Story telling:** Telling an autobiographical story, using fragments of memory, travel, events. Digital Storytelling can encourage expressive processes, education and training, focusing on the person's identity development. It can be composed of for example 4 individual meetings (60 min each) with clients, who are asked to tell their personal history through the choice of some images and through the analysis of some personal and family photographs. At the end of the meetings, an audio-interview is produced, then delivered to them. The work uses the techniques of Rogers counseling, active listening, empathic relationship.
- **The line of time:** It is an observation of one's own personal situation, and planning of arrival point (or change). The inmates use photocards for the introductory part and presentation of participants. Realization of images produced by the clients through the use of cameras.
- **Self Portrait:** 4 sessions of 90 minutes each, for example. Using PhotoCard, to achieve the individual presentation of each participant and the expression of the emotional state of the moment, and facilitate the group work. The work can be to identify the primary emotions (Ekman tables), to realize the personal tables relating to emotions. The work has to reconstruct what is of our parents in each of us, remembering the most frequent expressions of family and creating self/photo-portraits of them.

An academic publication "Evaluating the therapeutic use of photocards in European prisons" is available here:

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Evrinomy-Avdi/publication/300083086_Evaluating_the_therapeutic_use_of_photocards_in_European_prisons/links/5a8d5735aca2722961bfbb28/Evaluating-the-therapeutic-use-of-photocards-in-European-prisons.pdf

Read more: <http://www.roehampton.ac.uk/psychology/>
<https://www.delloewenthal.com/phototherapy-and-therapeutic-photography.html>



Evidence-based, present-focused counseling model (competence-focused model)

Approach that emphasizes building practical skills and personal strengths in the here and now.

Competence-focused models



Example: Seeking Safety



Applied at Sydney's Long Bay Correctional Centre, as a pilot program, it is an **evidence-based, present-focused counseling model** designed to help individuals attain safety from trauma and/or substance use disorders (SUD). Developed by Dr. Lisa M. Najavits at Harvard Medical School. This therapeutic approach **emphasizes coping skills, grounding techniques, and psychoeducation** to address both trauma and addiction concurrently. Unlike traditional trauma therapies that delve into past traumatic events, **Seeking Safety concentrates on current coping strategies and behaviors to establish safety in the present moment**. The model is adaptable, suitable for both group and individual formats, and can be applied across various settings. The Seeking Safety curriculum comprises 25 topics, each focusing on a specific coping skill relevant to both PTSD and SUD. These topics are **categorized into cognitive, behavioral, interpersonal, and case management domains**. Examples include setting boundaries in relationships, coping with triggers, and managing emotions. By focusing on present-day coping mechanisms and fostering a safe therapeutic environment, it **empowers individuals to build resilience and work towards recovery**.

Read more: https://recoverycovepa.com/blog/what-is-the-seeking-safety-treatment-model/?utm_source=chatgpt.com



Example: Reintegration of inmates T86 Method project, Jessheim vgs. – Romerike Prison, Norway



It is a **reintegration program** addressed to inmates who are about to enter the prison. It **consists educational and work-related aspects**. This program focus on building good **social relationships** between inmates and staff, and give inmates the tools and opportunities to have new positive relationships when they **re-enter society**. Providing mental health support during incarceration is essential for successful reintegration, as highlighted by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). Support inmates in their transition back to society by providing education, work-related support, and opportunities to build positive and social relationships. The project aims to help the inmate return to society. Both **by filling gaps in education**, but also by being able to gradually function back in normal surroundings at the end of the sentence.

Competence-focused models



Example: The Path Forward project implemented by Jessheim vgs. – Romerike Prison, Norway



"The path forward" is a course that **focuses on important aspects of life**. By facing life's challenges, many will experience greater control and thus improved mental health. The course **covers areas such as health, finances, family, relationships, work, and education**. There is also an emphasis on **basic skills in language, math, and digital literacy**. Each participant must identify one or more areas in their life that need to be worked on and thus create a way forward in life. Research by Heather Stringer in Monitor on Psychology indicates that **addressing these life challenges can significantly improve mental health for inmates**.

Structure of the content:

1. Assessment: Conduct initial assessments to identify each inmate's needs and challenges in areas such as health, finances, family, relationships, work and education.
2. Goal setting: Work with the inmate to set specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART) goals.
3. Workshops: Organize workshops on basic skills in language, math, and digital literacy.
4. Individual Plans: Assist inmates in creating personalized plans to address their identified challenges.
5. Monitoring and Support: Provide ongoing support and monitor progress through regular check-ins and adjustments to the plans as needed.



Example: S.T.E.Ps project (Supporting Ties in the Education of Prisoners)



The STEPS project aims to facilitate the reintegration of prisoners into society, using innovative methodologies such as **virtual reality and personalised educational activities**. By creating meaningful bonds during imprisonment, the project seeks to prepare prisoners for the transition to freedom. S.T.E.Ps project offers a **novel approach to prisoner education** consisting in an **experiential learning** through virtual reality. It provides inmates with the opportunity to **explore complex social situations in a safe environment**, develop empathy, and reflect on their own behaviors and choices, ultimately supporting their personal growth and successful reintegration into society.

Read more: <https://steps.eepek.gr/>

Competence-focused models



PROTA project: Prisoners Reintegration Opportunities and Training in Artificial Environments for Employment



"The PROTA project is a collaborative initiative (coordinated by Bucharest Rahova Penitentiary) which aims to **support the reintegration** of individuals exiting correctional facilities by providing them with better **opportunities for education and employment**. The project **address the lack of skills** and knowledge that many inmates experience upon release. Without adequate support, they often face rejection, financial difficulties, and social isolation, increasing their chances of returning to crime. PROTA seeks to change this by offering **training, education, and career guidance** while they are still in prison, as well as providing continued support after their release. Through practical training, educational programs, and career counseling, the project **prepares inmates for real-life situations**. It also focuses on improving the knowledge and skills of prison educators and social workers, ensuring they can offer better support to inmates. The program results in improved social skills, and greater self-confidence for former prisoners. By offering second chances and structured support, the project works to lower recidivism rates. Its success is measured by the number of former prisoners who find stable employment, continue their education, or successfully adjust to life outside prison without reoffending.

Read more: <https://protaproject.eu/>



Example: AWARE project: Cross-sectoral awareness building on mental health needs in the criminal justice system and on release



AWARE is an integrated response to non-discrimination and social inclusion of those who suffer from the **double challenge and stigma of both a criminal record and mental health problems**. The AWARE structured training curriculum is aimed at equipping prison staff, probation officers, and civil society organizations with the necessary **skills and knowledge to support the mental health needs of (ex-)prisoners**. The program encompasses various modules that address different aspects of mental health within the criminal justice system.

Read more: <http://www.aware-project.org/>



Therapeutic Communities

The key idea is that the community itself is the method of treatment — residents and staff work together to create a safe, supportive space that encourages personal growth, responsibility, and social learning.

Therapeutic Communities

Example: Intentional Peer Support IPS project, Jessheim vgs. – Romerike Prison, Norway



IPS is about good conversations and the way we meet others. Inmates discover what they know, how we develop new knowledge about ourselves and others through **ways of communicating**. Personal experience is used to explain our own and others' viewpoints, to build and strengthen relationships. **Peer support services have been shown to be effective in supporting inmates' mental health and reducing recidivism**, as discussed by the National Institute of Corrections.

The project is implemented according to a 5-step model:

1. Training: Provide training on effective communication and peer support techniques.
2. Peer Support Groups: Establish peer support groups where inmates can share experiences and support each other.
3. Facilitated Discussions: Organize facilitated discussions to explore different perspectives and build stronger relationships.
4. Ongoing support: Offer ongoing support and supervision to ensure the effectiveness of peer support groups.
5. Feedback and Improvement: Collect feedback from participants and make necessary improvements to the program.

Read more: <https://protaproject.eu/>



Success factors

Success factors are creating security in the group. This is done by clearly explaining the project at the start. Group rules must also be introduced for how we behave with each other. Furthermore, it is important to have a safe and stable mentor who can lead the process.

Challenges

Challenges with the course are that members come and go in the group. This creates uncertainty, and the group has to start over each time.



Example: HMP Grendon in Buckinghamshire



Operates as a therapeutic prison, offering intensive psychotherapeutic interventions for inmates with personality disorders. Inmates voluntarily participate in **group therapy sessions that focus on self-discovery and the development of life management skills**. This approach has been associated with lower reoffending rates among participants.



Mindfulness-Based techniques and integration of Physical Activity

Incorporating exercise into therapeutic interventions has been shown to enhance mental health outcomes, helping individuals develop coping strategies and reduce maladaptive behaviors. Physical activities can improve mood, reduce stress, and contribute to overall psychological well-being.

Mindfulness-Based techniques



Example: Prison Yoga Project (PYP)



The Prison Yoga Project (PYP) is a nonprofit that offers trauma-informed **yoga and mindfulness to incarcerated individuals** worldwide. At Nieuwersluis Prison in the Netherlands, the program helps detainees address trauma, stress, and emotional challenges, while **fostering emotional resilience and well-being**. Trauma-sensitive yoga and mindfulness sessions integrate techniques such as yoga postures, breathing exercises, and guided meditation, all carefully adapted to meet the emotional, physical, and psychological needs of incarcerated individuals, especially those with histories of trauma and emotional distress. The approach focuses on **creating a safe and supportive environment where participants can engage in self-regulation, reduce stress, and build emotional resilience**. Mindfulness practices are used to **foster emotional awareness**, enabling individuals to manage their responses to difficult situations. Weekly group sessions and individual workshops promote emotional healing and support the rehabilitation process. These activities provide tools to **cope with challenges, develop emotional stability, and enhance overall well-being**. The sessions are flexible, offering both collective and personalized care to address participants' unique needs in a compassionate and effective way. By fostering self-awareness and self-compassion, these practices encourage individuals to **reconnect with their own sense of agency and purpose**. Over time, participants may experience **improved mental health, better interpersonal relationships, and an increased capacity to navigate the challenges of daily life**. Ultimately, trauma-sensitive yoga and mindfulness empower incarcerated individuals to **rebuild their lives and cultivate inner strength**, contributing to successful reintegration into society.

Read more: <https://www.prisonyoga.org/>



Mindfulness-Based techniques



Example: YOGA project, Jessheim vgs. – Romerike Prison, Norway



The project took place in Romerike Prison, Kroksrud ward. It involves adult students, selected from the ward in the prison where the most motivated inmates are housed. Most inmates had committed serious crimes and had long sentences. The project took the entire group (15 inmates) to the Nøsen Yoga Center and worked there for a week. The students were very motivated. The desired **outcome of the project was twofold**. The **participants worked professionally** with the culinary profession, but they **also worked with yoga sessions and group activities every day for a week**. The desired effect was that the participants gained experience from a professional kitchen this week, as well as that they worked on their inner lives.



Example: The Prison Phoenix Trust



The Prison Phoenix Trust is a UK-based institution that promotes the practice of yoga and meditation in prisons. It works directly with inmates, **offering tools to restore emotional balance and reduce stress, anxiety and emotional isolation** experienced by inmates, while **promoting skills for emotional self-regulation and improving general wellbeing**.

Read more: www.theppt.org.uk



This was something that brought us some kind of dignity, it brought us our humanity.

“Many people enter prison already carrying past trauma and having had too few opportunities and resources,” Marc Howard, PhD, the founder and director of criminal justice organizations Frederick Douglass Project for Justice and the Georgetown University Prisons and Justice Initiative respectively, said. “And prison is, by design, dehumanizing. Education and arts programs restore a little bit of that feeling of humanity. No single program can undo the physical and psychological violence of prison, but it can help free a person’s mind and restore a sense of self.”



Positive Psychology Interventions (PPIs)

PPIs focus on enhancing positive aspects of mental health, such as resilience, gratitude, and overall life satisfaction. Integrating PPIs into mental healthcare can contribute to sustainable improvements in psychological well-being. Positive psychological interventions (PPIs) aim to enhance resources that enable people to be resilient and flourish. Some examples of evidence-based PPIs are: savoring, gratitude, kindness, optimism, promoting positive relationships, and pursuing meaning (Schueller and Parks, 2014).

[More: The Model for Sustainable Mental Health: Future Directions for Integrating Positive Psychology Into Mental Health Care](#)

Positive Psychology Interventions (PPIs)



Example: The Strengths Model / KRACHTWERK: A Recovery-Oriented Approach to Mental Health Services



“

...we learn that even when people present with obvious vulnerabilities they also have strengths. Their strengths are in their passions, in their skills, in their interests, in their relationships and in their environments. If mental health practitioners look for strengths they will find them” (Patricia Deegan. Excerpt from the foreward to *The Strengths Model: A Recovery-Oriented Approach to Mental Health Services*, Rapp and Goscha 2011)

Strength Model is **a strength-oriented methodology** to support people who have temporarily or long-term loss of control over their existence in their recovery, so that they can participate again, belong, matter and be who they want to be. **The basic principle is that people have the ability to recover and pick up the thread of their lives in the face of misery and adversity.** Power work is applied to various target groups in various work types and sectors, such as in welfare work, in social care and sheltered housing and in forensic care. **Power work** is part of training courses at high schools. The **strengths model is not just a philosophy or perspective**, although it is that. It is rather a set of values and principles, a theory of practice, and explicit and rigorous practice methods that have been developed and refined over the last 30 years. The empirical testing of the strengths model has shown consistent results that are superior to traditional approaches to serving people with severe psychiatric disabilities” (Rapp & Goscha, 2012).

Six principles of Power Work:

- 1. People in disadvantaged situations have the ability to recover, take control of their lives again and change.
- 2. Strength-oriented work requires belief in growth opportunities and strengths of clients and their system.
- 3. The focus is on strengths and resources in the environment and not on shortcomings.
- 4. The client determines the direction and form of the guidance and is in control of his/her recovery process.
- 5. The working relationship is central and is aimed at equality. The basic attitude of the counselor is based on honesty, optimism, trust and openness.
- 6. Society is seen as a resource. Building client support systems is an essential part of Krachtwerk.

Read more in the article: [Impulse research centre, Judith Wolf](#)



Expressive Arts Therapy

This therapeutic approach integrates multiple art forms—such as painting, music, dance, and writing—to facilitate self-expression and healing. Engaging in creative activities allows individuals to explore their emotions non-verbally, leading to increased self-awareness and stress reduction.

Expressive Arts Therapy

Example: MUSIC IN PRISON: GUTS project - Grow Up Today and Support each other



It is a collaborative project based on two **key elements: Music & Storytelling in prisons**. This innovative approach intends to develop a method that can help **reduce reoffending** under young offenders. We want to help them to set targets for their future and hand them **tools to become active citizens**. The basic idea of the project is simple, it fosters the **use of rap music and storytelling as a tool to communicate** with our target group and as a language for them to **formulate their ideas and goals**. Read more: <https://www.gutsproject.eu/>

Find the Storytelling Toolkit: <https://www.gutsproject.eu/storytelling-toolkit/>

The storytelling toolkit was designed with the collaboration of all GUTS project partners to provide a useful tool for all organisations interested in supporting young and adult people from different communities. The toolkit includes several workshops that every organization can use to realise workshops for young people, to develop new skills, building bridges and help them to have a stronger voice in their communities.



Monster Inside



De Rode Antraciet vzw
60 subskrybentów

Subskrybuj

67



Udostępnij



Pobierz



Klip



MONSTER INSIDE- the winner of the GUTS international Rap Festival in Oslo, at Jessheim vgs. A music video from Dendermonde prison in Belgium.



Expressive Therapy

Application of expressive techniques like improvisation and role-playing, drama therapy helps individuals address emotional and behavioral challenges. It fosters self-expression, builds confidence, and enhances problem-solving skills.

Expressive Therapy



Example: Sing Sing movie

It is a **theater program** implemented in prison that results in a theater performance for an audience, followed by a movie over the process.

The director is the instigator and facilitator of the process. He tries to get stories out of the inmates by talking to them and doing physical exercises, based on imagination. Inmates together choose the content and style of the production to be developed. Inmates engage in a process together, learn to be open and vulnerable and help each other in the process.

Sing Sing is a 2023 American drama film directed by Greg Kwedar. Noteworthy about the film is that Colman Domingo (nominated for an Oscar 2025 for his role in the film) and Paul Raci are the only professional actors in the film; the rest of the roles are played by (former) inmates who participated in this theatre program. **This program helps people in prison develop critical life skills through the arts**, modeling an approach to the justice system **based on human dignity rather than punishment**. The goal is to **develop skills to be able to take part in society and reduce recidivism**. It fosters the process of **building life skills, building emotional intelligence, personal transformation, developing strategies to successful reintegration**, read more: <https://rta-arts.org/>,

Success factors

Staff and policymakers often do not believe in this approach, while figures show the opposite. Recidivism is regularly 65-70%, but with participants to this project it declines to 6-10%. This practice shows a real transformation, evidence based.



Example: Rikers Island Drama Club: Incarcerated Youth Find Solace in Improv



Improvisational theater method applied in **Rikers Island**. Expressive or creative therapies, such as drama therapy, are a unique way to deal with problems, express yourself, set goals, and gain confidence. Drama therapy **combines drama and psychotherapy methods** to offer **new ways to express what you are thinking or feeling in order to cope more effectively with behavioral and emotional problems**.

Read an article: [Inside Rikers Island Drama Club: Incarcerated Youth Find Solace in Improv.](#)

Expressive Therapy



Example: Sipario! The Trades of Theater for Social Reintegration

Program implemented by Opera Liquida ForMattArt APS (Prison Milano Opera). This approach **combines theater-based training with vocational skill development**, offering participants the chance to **engage in both creative expression and practical learning**. Through workshops, participants explore performance techniques, role-playing, improvisation, and dramaturgy, **fostering self-expression, emotional resilience, and teamwork**. In addition to artistic training, individuals also gain vocational skills in areas like stage production, lighting, set design, and event management. These skills enhance employability and prepare participants for reintegration into society. A key focus is on **personal growth and emotional healing**. Theater helps participants process past traumas and experiences non-verbally, using movement and space to gain deeper self-understanding. This process builds confidence and resilience. The practice also promotes **community engagement** through public performances, offering participants the opportunity to share their progress and break down social barriers. These performances raise awareness of restorative justice and challenge the stigmas surrounding incarcerated individuals. Through these collective experiences, participants form lasting bonds that extend beyond the stage, creating a supportive network for future endeavors. The program also emphasizes the **importance of empathy, helping participants understand diverse perspectives while honing their ability to work collaboratively**. Ultimately, this unique blend of creativity and skill-building fosters a more inclusive society. This program was delivered to adult incarcerated individuals in Milan and Pavia areas, aiming for their reintegration into society.

Success story

The Sipario! project has been effective in promoting social reintegration by using theater and job training to help inmates develop new skills and emotional resilience. The combination of creative and vocational approaches has fostered personal transformation and supported participants' reintegration into society. The project's effectiveness is due to its **holistic approach** addressing both personal and professional needs.

Expressive Therapy



Example: STORYTELLING: Urban Jungle Book

A model implemented by the Consortium consisting of ISO Records, C&C, PI Dordrecht and Wendy Hoogendijk.

The project was inspired by the book and movie "Jungle Book" and to link to the situation in which many of the inmates grew up. The aim was to make a book with the inmates, the "Urban Jungel Book" and to end the project with a presentation for prison staff, stakeholders and family members of the inmates. In Urban Jungle Book **a variety of approaches was used**. The facilitators worked with **Spoken Word, Rap, Theater, Storytelling, Pilosophy and Poetry**. With the inmates the facilitators looked at the movie Jungle Book and discussed with them if they reconised **universal themes like friendship, family**, and others in the story and if they could link these to their own lifes. After this reflection they worked on these themes in in various **creative processes**. The program helped the inmates to reflect upon their own life and ambitions, but also on society as a whole and on more phylosophic themes as right and wrong and the values in our society. Art based project can be a wonderful tool. Among the art based approaches, working with storytelling techniques is a very powerful tool, it can help to make plans for the future and to reflect on the past.

"According to research in the Journal of Correctional Education, incarcerated people who participated in an art rehabilitation program were more likely to continue to attain further education while in prison. A RAND Corporation meta-analysis published in 2013 found that incarcerated people who engage in education were 43% less likely to reoffend upon release than those who do not participate. These findings underline the significant impact arts education can have on reducing recidivism rates among detainees."

DID YOU KNOW?

Expressive Therapy



Example: Storybook Dads

It is a very interesting variation of **storytelling** and a very interesting way to use storytelling. It started in Dartmoor Prison in 2002, it was a very successful initiative from the start. It now runs in 100 prisons across the UK and it was also adopted by several prisons in Europe. The British army has also adopted the approach for people in the military that serve in peace missions everywhere in the world.

Storybook dads helps over 3,000 prisoners a year to record bedtime stories read by inmates for their children at home. The stories are recorded so the children can listen to them before going to sleep. This is how the program contributes **to maintaining a relationship between the father in prison and his children at home**. By sending a story to their children, the fathers can bring comfort to their children and share the joy of storytelling with them from behind bars. This significantly improves the children's social and learning outcomes. Enabling an imprisoned parent to maintain contact improves their self-esteem and reduces the likelihood of re-offending as well as helping with their child's well-being.

"One of my main fears coming into prison was how to maintain a good relationship with my children. Storybook Dads helps me do that; being able to do this for my kids means so much to me and without this it would be so much harder." Inmate



Example: Project EXULI



It promotes **an integrated approach** born from the synergy between the non-formal education practices of youth work and the Lacanian psychoanalytical field. Both approaches **support resilience**, intended as the ability to effectively deal with the contradictions of the exile condition of young migrants, to give new impetus to their existence and even to reach important goals.

It **calls to action of overcoming a condition of vulnerability**, which in most cases are often related to reiterated and perpetrated trauma, tackles the process of marginalization, so that they end up in a lower and prejudiced status. The project develops an educational strategy based on the pedagogical and psychoanalytical use of trauma narrative through **expressive communication tools**. The project produces "ateliers", a series of expressive laboratory pathways, find it:

<http://www.exuli.eu/node/13/community>.

A blurred background image showing three people in a meeting. A woman with dark hair is on the left, a man with glasses is in the center, and a person with blonde hair is in the foreground, seen from the back. They appear to be in a discussion.

FOCUS GROUPS

Findings from the Focus
groups with operators

Process

How does we work?

The second step of this activity consisted of a qualitative research (focus group) to discuss the topic with a small group of professionals, gather in-depth insights and explore how people feel about existing challenges and reflect on possible solutions.

The discussion was guided by the moderator who asks open-ended questions and facilitates conversation.

The focus group GUIDELINES and semi structured QUESTIONS have been designed by STEPS (Italy) and shared with all partners to facilitate the organization of focus groups.

Inside the RESTART project, 4 focus groups have been carried out with 5-8 prison operators/guards each (1 focus group for each partner/country) addressed to:

- Social workers and educators: the operators, educators, counsellors, etc. who work in the jails, will be members of the partners institutions, but also those belonging to other organisations, possibly in contact and/or in the same network as the partners, will benefit the project results, and will be selected by the partners themselves through the dissemination activities.
- Prisons Guards: according to the experience of partners inside prisons, working directly with guards is essential to the effective success of activities because they can support and involve the inmates.

Findings

The focus groups revealed that working in prisons is both emotionally demanding and deeply rewarding. The tension between institutional rigidity and creative, rehabilitative goals was a constant theme. While the environment poses many challenges, professionals draw strength from the relationships they build and the positive impact they can have on detainees' lives.

Learn more on the next pages.



Summary of Findings

What are the main challenges you face in prison?



For Inmates:

One-way communication and a feeling of having “no power over your own life”. **Overcrowding** is a persistent challenge, leading to difficult living conditions that increase tension and conflict among inmates.

Promotion of learning is a big challenge. **Limited access to meaningful activities and rehabilitation programs** often results in **boredom and a sense of stagnation**.

Many inmates struggle with the psychological impact of isolation from family and society, as well as **uncertainty** about their future, which can exacerbate feelings of anxiety and depression.

For Operators:

Officers face the daily **challenge of maintaining security** and order in an environment that can be unpredictable and sometimes hostile. They must balance enforcing rules with managing **interpersonal conflicts** among inmates, often under conditions of staff shortages and heavy workloads. The **risk of violence or aggression** is a constant concern, increasing their stress and fatigue. Correctional staff often deal with limited resources and bureaucratic constraints that hinder their ability to provide adequate support and services. They may feel trapped between institutional policies and inmates’ needs, leading to moral distress. The emotional burden of working in a difficult environment, witnessing suffering, and sometimes feeling powerless to effect change is significant.

Summary of Findings

What are the sources of discomfort or stress you experience daily?



For inmates, daily discomfort stems from overcrowded cells, **lack of privacy, and noise, which disrupt rest and personal space**. The unpredictability of prison life, including potential conflicts or disciplinary actions, creates ongoing stress. Many inmates also **feel stigmatized and disconnected from the outside world**, which can heighten feelings of loneliness and despair.

For correctional officers, stress arises from the **responsibility of ensuring safety in a volatile environment**, often with insufficient support. Officers frequently work long shifts with minimal breaks, leading to physical and mental fatigue. The need to remain constantly alert for potential threats, combined with limited opportunities for de-escalation or positive interaction, contributes to **burnout**.

For healthcare workers and social staff, stress is linked to the **emotional demands of caring for a vulnerable population under difficult conditions**. They often face frustration due to inadequate facilities, lack of cooperation from inmates or other staff, and **systemic limitations**. The pressure to meet administrative goals while addressing complex individual needs can be **overwhelming**.

Correctional staff often deal with **limited resources** and bureaucratic constraints that hinder their ability to provide adequate support and services. They may feel trapped between **institutional policies** and inmates' needs, leading to moral distress. The emotional burden of working in a difficult environment, witnessing suffering, and sometimes feeling powerless to effect change is significant.

Summary of Findings

Which aspects of the structure or environment do you find most stressful and difficult to manage?



Inmates:

The **physical environment**—often characterized by outdated infrastructure, poor ventilation, and insufficient recreational areas—can feel oppressive. Rigid routines and limited freedom of movement contribute to a sense of confinement and helplessness. The **lack of access to educational or vocational programs** further limits opportunities for personal growth.

Correctional Officers:

Managing security within a rigid and sometimes deteriorated physical structure is challenging. Narrow corridors, overcrowded common areas, and limited surveillance technology can increase risks. The **inflexibility** of institutional routines can make it difficult to respond effectively to emergencies or individual needs.

Correctional Staff:

Structural issues such as insufficient office space, lack of private consultation rooms, and **inadequate resources** for psychological or social interventions hinder effective work. The bureaucratic nature of prison administration can slow decision-making and reduce responsiveness to emerging problems, increasing workplace frustration.

Summary of Findings

How would you define the internal support network in prison?



Inmates:

Support networks among inmates vary, some find solidarity and mutual aid within peer groups, while others experience isolation or distrust. Access to formal support such as psychological counseling or social services is often limited and unevenly distributed. Informal networks based on shared backgrounds or interests can provide emotional relief but may also reinforce negative behaviors.

Officers often rely on teamwork and peer support to cope with job demands. However, a culture of toughness and self-reliance can sometimes discourage seeking help. Formal support mechanisms, such as counseling or stress management programs, are not always easily accessible or actively promoted.

Social workers, psychologists, and healthcare staff may have professional networks within the prison, but collaboration with security personnel can be fragmented. Interdisciplinary communication is essential but can be hindered by hierarchical structures or differing priorities. External partnerships with community organizations are valuable but not always systematically integrated.

Summary of Findings

How do you feel in the prison environment?



Inmates:

Many inmates report feelings of confinement, anxiety, and frustration, alongside occasional moments of hope or resilience when engaging in activities or receiving support. The environment can feel dehumanizing, and some experience despair or hopelessness, especially if they perceive few opportunities for rehabilitation or reintegration. Prison life takes a toll on their mental health.

Officers often experience a mix of vigilance, stress, and responsibility. While committed to their roles, they may face emotional exhaustion and sometimes cynicism due to repeated exposure to difficult situations. Feelings of isolation from the outside world and lack of recognition can also affect morale.

Staff members feel compassion and dedication but also frustration and helplessness in the face of **systemic challenges**.

Summary of Findings

What do you do to feel better?



Inmates:

To improve their well-being, inmates listen to music, read, exercise, meditate, often participate in structured activities such as sports, educational programs, or religious services when available. They maintain contact with family and friends through visits, phone calls, or letters, which they consider essential. Some seek peer support or participate in group therapy.

Correctional Officers:

Officers may rely on camaraderie with colleagues, informal debriefings, or physical exercise to manage stress. However, stigma around mental health can limit their willingness to seek professional support.

Staff Members:

Staff often use professional supervision, peer support groups, or training sessions to cope with emotional demands. Some advocate for systemic changes to improve working conditions and support services.

Final conclusions:

- Both inmates and prison operators face substantial challenges within the prison system. For inmates, overcrowding, lack of educational and rehabilitative opportunities, and the psychological toll of isolation and uncertainty significantly impact their well-being and prospects for reintegration. For operators, the struggle to maintain order amidst staff shortages, resource constraints, and institutional limitations creates a high-stress environment that can lead to emotional fatigue and moral distress.
- Daily sources of stress and discomfort in prisons affect all groups involved—each in distinct yet interconnected ways. Inmates endure physical discomfort from overcrowding and noise, psychological strain from isolation, and constant uncertainty. Correctional officers face high-pressure responsibilities, long hours, and burnout due to the need for constant vigilance. These stressors underscore the need for structural improvements that enhance the well-being of both inmates and prison staff.
- Structural and environmental challenges within the prison system significantly impact inmates, correctional officers, and staff. Inmates struggle with oppressive physical conditions, rigid routines, and limited opportunities for growth. Correctional officers face safety risks due to outdated infrastructure and overcrowding, compounded by inflexible systems that hinder effective responses. Correctional staff encounter limitations in space and resources, making it difficult to deliver essential services. Across all groups, these environmental and structural constraints contribute to heightened stress, reduced effectiveness, and a diminished sense of autonomy, pointing to an urgent need for systemic improvements.

Final conclusions:

- The internal support network in prisons is inconsistent and shaped by both formal and informal systems. Among inmates, peer support can provide comfort, but trust is variable and may sometimes reinforce harmful behaviors. Formal services like counseling are limited and unevenly accessed. Correctional officers depend on peer teamwork but face cultural barriers to seeking help, and formal mental health support is often underutilized. For professional staff, internal networks exist but suffer from weak interdisciplinary collaboration, often hindered by institutional hierarchies. External partnerships offer additional support but lack consistent integration into the prison system.
- Feelings within the prison environment are largely marked by emotional strain. Inmates commonly feel confined, anxious, and frustrated, with mental health often deteriorating due to a lack of hope or rehabilitative opportunities. Correctional officers experience high stress and emotional fatigue, driven by constant vigilance and limited external recognition. Staff members maintain a sense of compassion and commitment but often feel frustrated and powerless against systemic limitations. Overall, the prison environment imposes significant psychological burdens on everyone within it.
- To cope with the challenges of prison life, individuals adopt a range of personal and social strategies. Inmates turn to music, reading, exercise, meditation, and structured programs to find relief, with family contact playing a crucial emotional role. Correctional officers manage stress through peer camaraderie and physical activity, though stigma may deter them from seeking formal support. Staff members utilize professional resources and peer networks, while also pushing for systemic reforms to improve overall conditions. These coping mechanisms highlight both resilience and the need for better institutional support across all groups.



The RESTART Methodological baseline for educators has been developed by RESTART partnership represented by:

- Jessheim, Norway (Coordinator)
- STEPS, Italy (WP Leader)
- APPRODI, Italy
- ClickF1, the Netherlands
- Changes&Chances, the Netherlands
- Form2You, Portugal

More: <https://erasmus-restart.eu/>



Funded by the European Union.
Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.



Co-funded by
the European Union